

# VOICE OF CHILDREN PROJECT

## Interviews with the students

VOICE OF CHILDREN and TRAS work together to provide education in the hill villages around Nainital and Almora, north India. One of the programs helps children who have had to drop out of school for a variety of reasons - poverty, distance, family need. AMAN, one of the two local NGOs which make up Voice of Children, has had good results in encouraging parents to allow their children to complete their education. The following are stories of dropout children now in school in their own word during the interviews in AMAN Project Area:

### **Asha Arya; 19 years old, village Pathura**

In class 6, I was failing and I dropped out. No one else could help me, my older sister was married. My father has been dead 10 or 11 years; my mother is ill, and cannot do the housework. In class I failed and no one cared that I failed. I had labourer work to earn money for the family, for 3 or 4 years (child labour). 4years ago I first met with AMAN Staff member Manju



When I talked with Manju, she saw me and heard my problems. She said I will support you; you can continue your study past upper primary. Two years ago I began to fight for my education. But no school would give me admission; school authorities said my age is too old and would not be appropriate for the school. So with AMAN's help I fought and was able to get admitted to school. I passed class 8 and 9 without going into school, with help and self-study. Then I went to school (AMAN helped me to submit the private form needed) and I passed class 10 and 11. I have passed class 12 last month, in May 2014. I would like to become a police officer and will go on to train as officer. I always want to fight against any discrimination, and I hope to do that as a police officer. I want to say thanks to AMAN because I feel that after my father's death, only one good thing happened: getting admission into the school. Since then, my life has been better. Now I am continuing my education; and now my mother has a source of earning by making the midday meal at the school.

**Prema Arya, lives Rankhila villages, 18 yrs.**

I passed class 9 last year, and dropped out this year. I will submit my private form for class 10 hopefully in August with help from AMAN, because I am now doing self-study for class 10. I dropped out because of family problems; my elder sister married and there was no one to help with housework/field work. In hilly areas, women have lots of work, hard work; when a sister marries, the whole work falls on the next sister. Mother says help me to work; feed the cattle. I want to get my education and I would like to be a teacher.



**Nilu, girl about 15 years old**



I lived in Delhi with my parents as a little child; my father was a labourer, my mother was a maid. Then my father died. My elder brother is also missing; no one knows where he is. After that I came to live with my grandparents in the village. I could not read, because I had not been in school. AMAN helped me and I was able to start school in class 5, appropriate for my age. AMAN helps with providing my school dress and books and supplies for school. I started in class 5 and I'm now in class 8. "I like to read and study; I want to improve my future."

**Amina, Rankhila village, 17 yrs old**

In my family there are 6 sisters and 1 brother. I am the 4<sup>th</sup> child. My father is ill. We have 100 sq. metres of bare land [family is poor]. My first sister is not educated; she is married; my 2<sup>nd</sup> sister passed class 8 and married.

I dropped out in class 10—I failed my first term exam. That was in 2009. My mother had been saying I should leave school even before that; I had no support. But, after that, AMAN helped me through bridge course and I passed. I started school again in class 10 and am now in class 12. AMAN is supporting my study.

My wish is to be a teacher and help my family. I have only one chance because my elder sister (the 3<sup>rd</sup> sister) is not yet married; if my 3<sup>rd</sup> sister marries, then the pressure will fall on me to marry. My uncle is helping me with my current expenses. I hope I can get outside help for further learning, e.g. to go to Delhi or other big city. I have hope for a good life.



**Gita Arya, 17 years old**



I have 4 sisters and 2 brothers. I dropped out because no one cared if I went to school or not. I had no support at home to go to school, so I left school in class 8. My elder sister Mina also left school with me. After that I came to see AMAN Volunteer. She directly contacted the school and got me admission into class 8 again. Because my family's financial situation is not good, AMAN helps with school supplies. I have passed in class 12. My family have 20 sq. metres of land (father is a marginal farmer). My mother is a housewife, which means a lot of work: field work, care of animals, gathering fuel, etc. I want to be a teacher.

**Kavita, 13 years old, class 10**



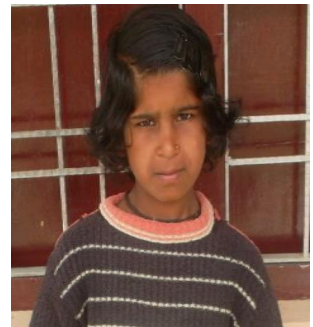
I have 2 brothers and 3 sisters. Rahul, my brother, (10 years old, now in class 5) was in a private school, but is now in a government school, like me. AMAN helps my family with learning materials and other costs of schooling. Earlier my father could earn money, but he had an accident and now cannot work. My family has 200 sq. metres of farming land, and 1 cow. It is because of financial problems that we need AMAN's help for schooling.

**Pinky, 12 years old, class 6; and brother Arjun, 14 years old, class 10**

Both Pinky and Arjun are not drop outs but they could not go to school without support for books, school dress (only available from the government up to class 8) and with other supports. AMAN helped 2 of their older siblings earlier. Their father is an alcoholic and the family situation is not good.

There are 10 in my family: one older brother and older sister are married, but there are still 4 brothers and 2 sisters at home. We have 200 sq. metres of farming land, 5 goats, 1 cow and 2 bulls.

We use the library and the after school tuition centre run by AMAN. Without AMAN's support, we would have to leave school. Pinky said "I want to be a teacher because a teacher gives education and I also want to give education. I won't beat any student of mine." Arjun said, "I want to be a doctor because I want to help the people in the village."



**Sisters: Shakina (21 years old) and Shaheen (17 years old) and Samina (19 years old)**



Samina is also a volunteer at AMAN. The interview was with Shakina and Shaheen, with Shakina talking most of the time. They come from a minority community with many religious restrictions. There are many children who do not read in their community. In our family there are 6 brothers and 5 sisters. 2 brothers and 3 sisters are married. Our family has 1000 sq metres of field, just bare land, and 1 buffalo and 3 goats. In class 5, we both (Shakina and Shaheen) dropped out. We had the wish to study but our family is not supportive. We contacted AMAN, and she helped us both.

Our school is 3 to 4 km away from the village, with a 4 km dense forest in between. Tigers are seen regularly in this forest. Social workers of AMAN regularly come to walk students to school. Also, our family did not want us to study because they felt we were too old already. But after 3 or 4 counselling sessions with Manju and AMAN workers, they agreed to let us go to school.

Next, the local authority of the primary school, the CRC, created a problem. They also thought our age was inappropriate for the school. With AMAN's help we approached the district magistrate to get into class 9. We were successful in getting an order to be able to take an exam to get into school. Just now, this March, we have started in class 9.



In response to a question about why at age 20 she wants to go to school, Shakina said, "At least I have explored my world by education; I can go anywhere, talk to anyone, I can explain my emotions and thoughts and my children will not be uneducated. I don't have a dream of something I want to be; I have little small needs that by education I can fulfil."

We both feel great to pass our class 8 with AMAN's help and we will do 9 also. Since there are many children not reading in our community, we can help them if their families will allow it. Now, 2 other girls from the village are also reading along with us. At first, one girl was restricted at home, and forbidden to take the exam; then community worker of AMAN counselled the family and got permission. One of these 2 is going to get married. Samina is now Pass the Class 12<sup>th</sup> and will be the first --as far as they know, the first in the village to ever to pass the class 12. Samina said, "I think I can make change in the village; I can fight. Villagers are very poor so they can't spend on education; they need support. "

**Shabnam, 17 yrs old, village Srinagar**

I stopped going to school after class 5, because my father said no, I don't need to go. Then I worked with the family, doing fieldwork and housework. I have 2 brothers and 1 sister. I am a middle child. What happened that caused me to go back to school was AMAN team members going into the village and starting a centre there. I joined the centre and prepared for the class 8 exam. For over 2 years I prepared in the centre; I went from class 5 to class 8. Then I finally passed class 8 and got admission into the school. I also passed class 10 and am now in class 11. [she has determination!] . "My childhood dream is I will be a teacher" and I will improve my family. Now that I am back in school my father says "you read and read and read, I will do anything for your education." This is a big change in my family. My siblings go to school now, too.



**Kavita, 16 yrs. Srinagar village**

This is the village that is 7-9 km away from the school, and to go there requires walking through a dense forests that is home to tigers.

I stopped going to school class 5. Nobody could go to school with me and school is very far, 7-9 km. There are 6 children in my family and I am the 2<sup>nd</sup> child; I have 4 brothers and 2 sisters. Like Shabnam, I prepared in the AMAN centre and entered school in class 8. I am now in class 10. I want to stay in school until class 12. After that, I would like to train to be a police officer.

**Guddi, 13 yrs old, Nakuta village**

I have no father or mother. I have 2 brothers and 3 sisters, and 2 of my sisters are married; my eldest brother works in Nainital. I'm the youngest. With my brother and sister, I live with my aunty (father's elder brother's wife). I didn't go to school after my mother died. After AMAN helped me, I was able to go. AMAN helped with financial support and also with help getting to school. My sisters and brothers are not going to school. My brother is a dropout; he tried going to school for a while, but dropped out again. I am now in class 7. I like to go to school, because in school I read and write and get good habits and meet with many friends. I dream in the future of being a teacher.

