

**“CHILD  
NOT  
BRIDE”**

**“SAY  
NO  
TO  
CHILD MARRIAGE”**



# Editorial



## GIRL STUDENTS, NOT CHILD BRIDES!

**E**very year, 15 million girls are married as children. Each of these girls has a story to tell. This issue of our Newsletter has four such stories, from the hundreds Don Bosco has helped to escape from child marriage.

Child marriages continue to take place in India, despite the law forbidding it. One of the best methods we have found to fight against this practice is to conscientize the children themselves. We have set up hundreds of 'Children's Parliaments' in villages, human rights clubs and child rights clubs in schools run by us, by other private organizations and by the Government itself.

The children, more than anyone else, are more aware of what is happening to their own classmates, companions and friends. We give them awareness about their rights, the laws of the country on child labour, child marriage, etc. They learn democratic ways of discussing these issues and taking appropriate action to rectify a bad situation.

Read about it all in the comic strip at the centre-fold of this issue of the Newsletter.

There is strong evidence that educated girls grow to be agents of positive change for their families, communities and societies as a whole. As an African proverb has it, if you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family (nation). BOSCONET believes that we can have more of these agents of change for the better, if we could reach quality education to more girls.

The negative consequences of child marriages cannot be exaggerated. Under-age mothers do not grow to their full potential. They give birth to unhealthy children. They do not know how to care properly for their children, as they are children themselves!

There are various reasons why child marriages take place.

In some communities this is a tradition since generations. Some parents fear that their daughters may get sexually harassed or even raped. The Times of India, 25 February 2016, quotes a survey of children in six States that showed that 52% of girls are harassed in school, or on their way to and back from school. Others think that teenager girls may themselves

choose their partners, who may be unsuitable for them. Still others worry that if their daughters get a good education, they will demand better husbands, which would mean giving them a larger 'dowry' which they cannot afford.

Formal education of girls is the best means to delay marriage till a suitable age both for boys and girls. Some parents are reluctant to educate their daughters. The education of boys is seen as an investment and the education of girls as a 'waste' or at best, an unnecessary luxury.

Don Bosco believes that boys and girls should be given equal opportunities for studies. Well educated, intelligent girls can contribute to society at every level and in any field. We sponsor hundreds of girls for their education. It is YOU who make that possible for us. Thank you! Let us have all our girls in schools and colleges, and we will have a different India in the near future. We need girl students, not child brides!

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## STORY OF CHIQUITA

I am Chiquita, from a poor family in Andhra Pradesh. My father died last April. My mother is mentally unstable. I have an elder brother who has not attended school.

I lost my four fingers at the age of two. Since my mother was mentally unstable, my aunty took care of me. I dreamed of becoming a teacher when I grew up. But chances of becoming a teacher grew very slim when my aunty asked me to get married after my 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

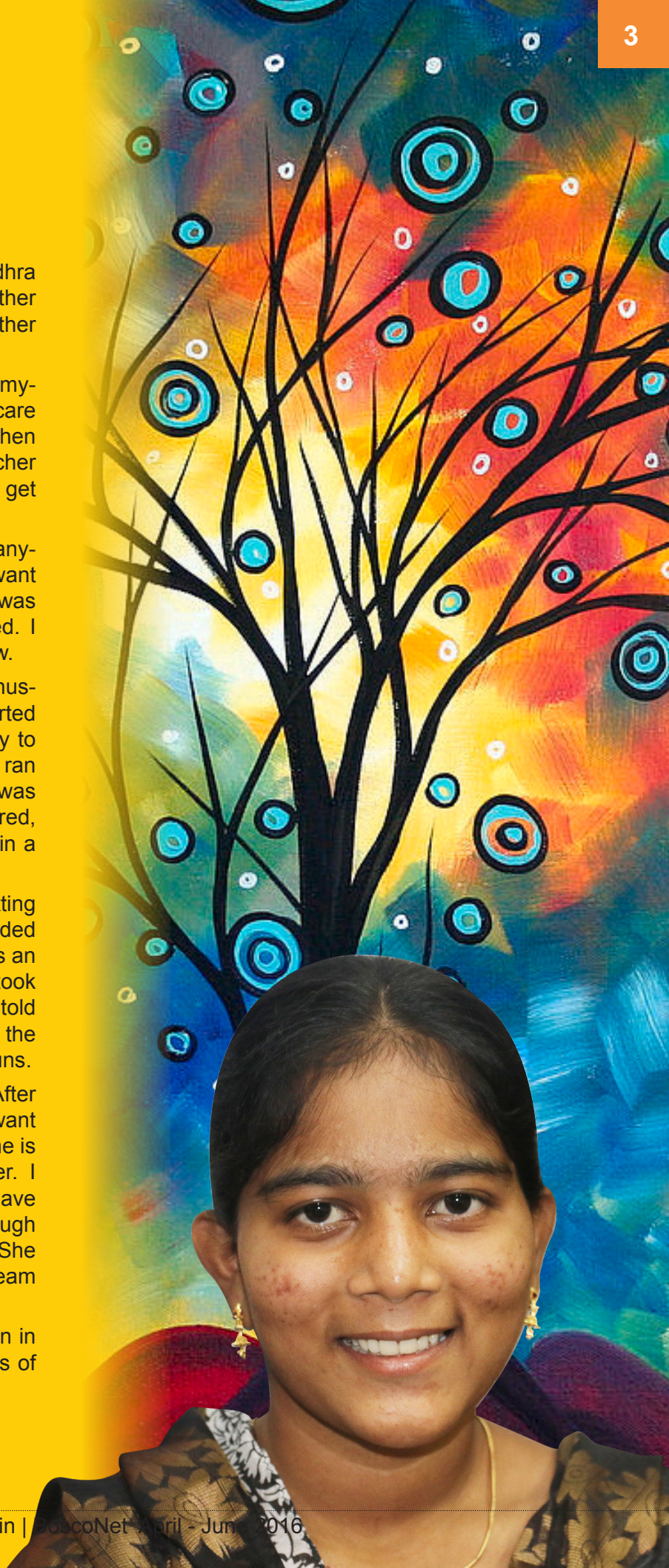
My mother was helpless and she did not say anything. I was only 15 years old and I did not want to get married. I wanted to tell my aunty, but I was scared and could not express what I wanted. I was forced to marry a boy I did not even know.

Even after my marriage I did not go to my husband's house for one month. His family started calling me. My aunty forcefully sent me away to his house. It was unbearable for me and I ran away the next morning, not knowing where I was heading. I reached Gandewada, tired, scared, and lost. I was too scared to even cry. I sat in a tea stall nearby for one and half hours.

The owner of the stall asked me why I was sitting there for so long. I told her my story. She handed me an address and told me to go there. It was an NGO called Daddy's home. From there they took me to the CWC (Child Welfare Committee). I told them my story and my desire to study. So, the CWC took me to the home run by Catholic nuns.

Now I am studying Accounting in grade XI. After this course I will look for a job in a bank. I want to work and look after my mother, because she is alone and there is no one else to look after her. I remember there was a time when we did not have food to eat. I do not want my mother to go through that again. My mother suffered a lot in life. She should never suffer again. That is my sole dream right now.

It is very sad that there is no value for women in our society. We are like puppets in the hands of men. This needs to change.





STORY OF

# KANCHAN KUMARI SAO



I passed the tenth grade examinations and that started off a war! My grandparents and uncles wanted me to marry immediately. My uncle said his own daughter was all of 15. As she was younger to me, I had to marry first as per the sacred customs of our tribe. But my father put his foot down. He said I would study up to grade twelve, or at least till I was 18. And so here I am, all of 18 plus, still studying, and so happy! I am Kanchan Kumari Sao. I am in the third year of the diploma course to become a Civil Engineering Technician. That is a long way for an Adivasi tribal girl, daughter of an illiterate father from a remote village in the jungles of Jharkhand. When I was three years old, daddy migrated with us to Calcutta.



Till then he had worked only in rice fields and gathered forest products. In the city he started as a coolie on a construction site. But, he did have ambition. He wanted his children to study. He worked hard, earned, learned and kept growing.

My brother and I did our studies in a Hindi medium school. My mother came to know that Don Bosco School, Liluah, caters to children from the middle class. They pay fees. But, towards evening, anyone can go there and have classes in English medium, though for fewer hours than in a regular school. And it is FREE!

My brother was admitted to the regular course in Don Bosco. He is now in grade ten. After grade four, I too tried the English medium; but

knowing only Hindi, I could not catch up with my classmates who had started in English right from kindergarten. So I went back to my old school.

After my tenth grade my other family members wanted to marry me off; but my father wanted me to study. The next question was: what would I study?

Our neighbor was a teacher in DBSRI (Don Bosco Self-Employment Research Institute) at Mirpara. He suggested a vocational course there. "What is the use of Kanchan doing grade twelve, unless she goes on to college after that? What job can she get with a grade twelve certificate?"

We studied the list of courses in DBSRI. Daddy had always been my hero. He worked in construc-

tion. I wanted to do the Civil Engineering Technician course. He could help me, maybe not with the theory, but with the practice. Mommy wanted me to do tailoring.

We consulted Brother Matthew, the director of DBSRI. He looked at the grades I had scored, enquired about my likes and dislikes, studied my family background and advised me to do engineering.

"Tailors are dime a dozen," he said. "The construction industry will continue to grow at a rapid pace since the Indian economy is booming. You can easily become a construction supervisor."

He told us the story of Preeti Gupta, also an immigrant to Calcutta from Bihar, who did the same course after her grade ten. First she worked for a company.







*Preety Gupta*

Today she owns her own enterprise, with projects in 3 States. One of them is a sixteen-floor apartment building. She personally supervised it “from the first soil scoop of its foundation to the last stroke of the paint brush,” as she herself said.

The die was cast. I enrolled for Civil Engineering Technician, a three year diploma course. Brother Matthew is so kind; he allows me to pay lower fees as my father is poor!

Unfortunately, I befriended the wrong girl in my class. We got into mischief, and bunked classes. At the end of the first year I failed my examinations. Daddy told me I could decide whether to repeat the first year or to drop my studies if they were too tough.

I resolved to change. I withdrew from the naughtier students.

Strangely, as my grades improved, my close friend of old was envious of my growing success. I passed in my second attempt. I did not look back again. Now I sit mostly alone in class.

DBSERI gives us self confidence, besides our construction skills. We begin to feel that we can do quality work, and even start, build and run a company of our own. There are lessons on the management of a small enterprise. Co-curricular activities build up our personality. Girls receive equal respect as boys. I am so grateful to Don Bosco and Brother Matthew.

I am in the final year now. I am watching DBSERI's “Nariprise.” Nari, in Hindi, means women. The word Nariprise is our own creation. It stands for “Women's Enterprise.”

Brother Matthew had encouraged a lot of girls to get into this preserve of males. He came up with this idea of Nariprise. Twelve of the 24 female graduates accepted Brother's challenge. They registered themselves with the Government as six small companies.







Brother had a friend, a contractor. He asked him to subcontract the construction of toilets and kitchens to these girls. The contractor was afraid to take the risk with a bunch of green-horns, just out of school, all of them GIRLS! The girls offered him their skills, for free, for ten toilets and kitchens. He could continue with them only if they met his standards.

They did it! The first toilets and kitchens were on schedule, and they won contracts for the rest of the building and, later, for two more buildings.

Nariprise is very small right now. We shall soon be larger and better. We have confidence in our skills, our hard work and our leader. He loves us. One day we shall break free from him. That is precisely what he expects from us.

I have many dreams. The first of them is to build a house of my own.

My second dream is the means to the first: a construction company of my own. I will start very small, but I will make it grow. I will earn and also give employment to others, particularly women.

I have a dream also for the girls in my village. I refused to get married at fifteen. Nevertheless, my uncle married off his daughter, younger to me, before she was even 18. Girls in my village, or anywhere else, should not marry so young.

There is a school in my village now; but it has very poor standards. Most children, especially girls, do not go to school. Parents fear two things about educating girls. One is that when they are away from home, they may be raped and even killed. The other is that they may marry unsuitable boys. But, not educating girls is not the solution.

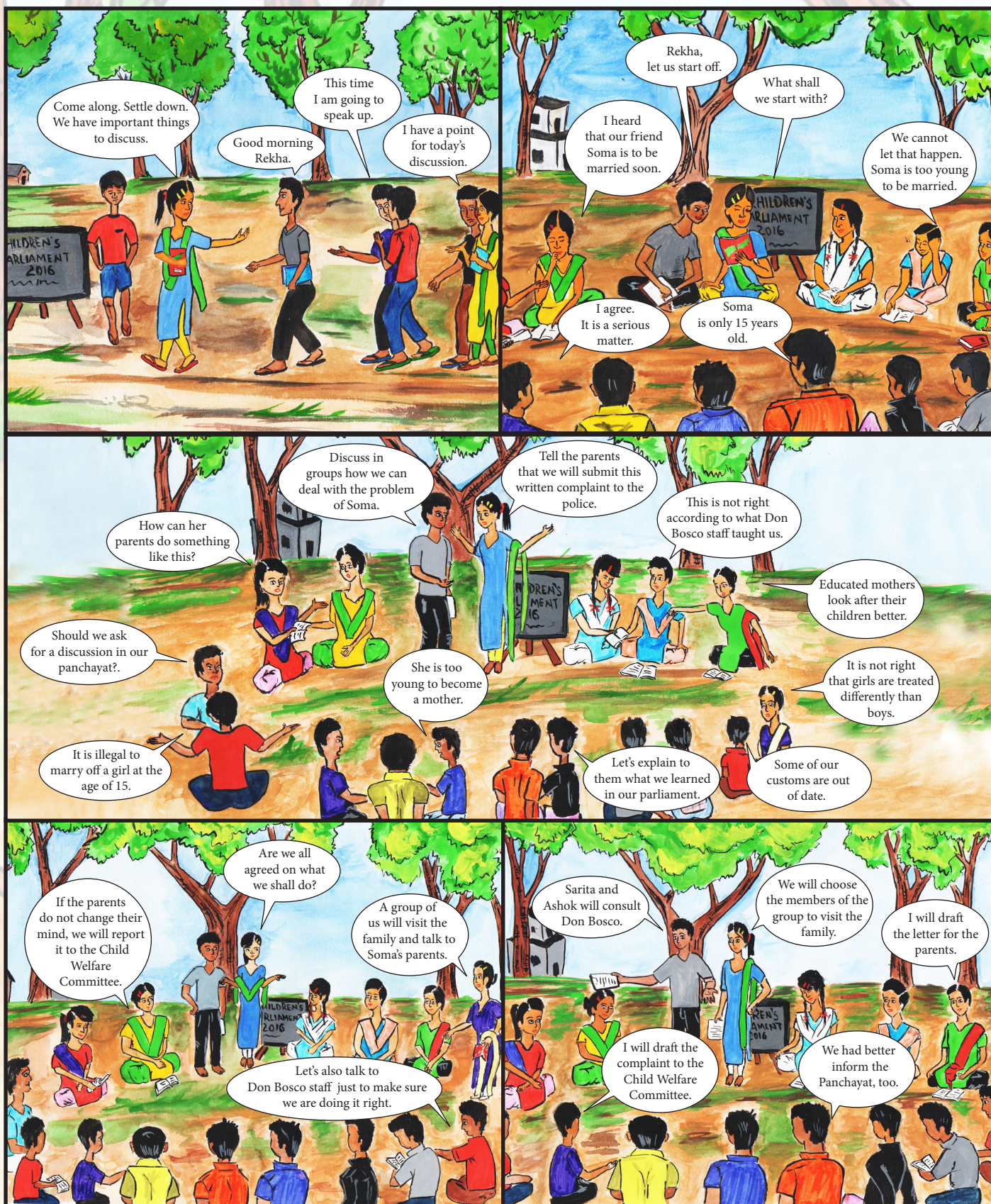
I will one day influence my people, so that all boys and girls get equal opportunities to study, and to do so as long as they want to study. That day I will feel that I have fulfilled my dreams.



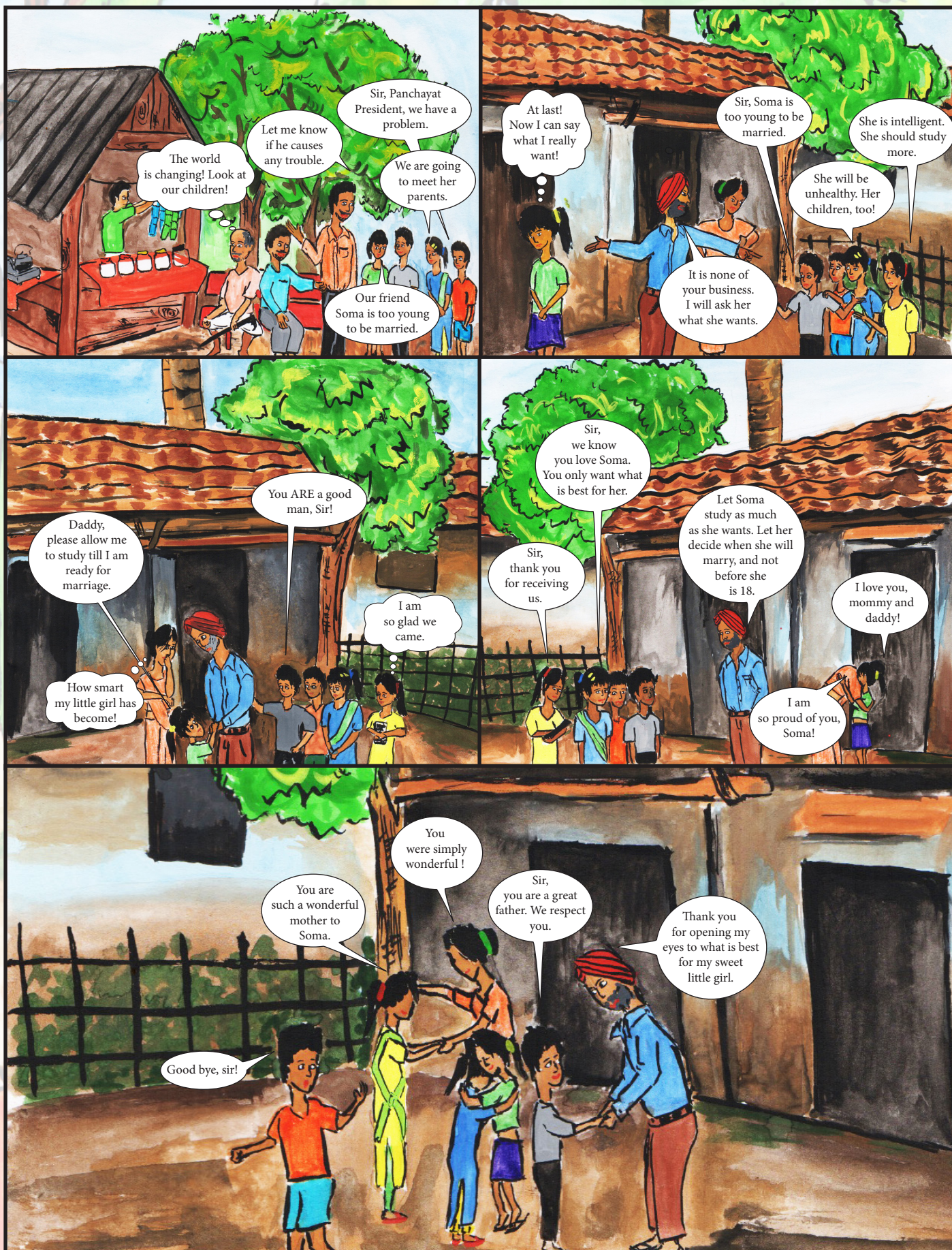


# PREVENTION OF CHILD MARRIAGE THROUGH CHILDREN'S PARLIAMENT

Sketch & Colour : Yaomashun Zimik | Illustration : Angel Zimik | Script : Fr. MC George








I AM A GIRL CHILD DON'T MAKE ME A CHILD MOTHER.



# DEEPIKA SAMKURU

STORY OF  
(Name changed)



I was born Deepika and happily, I am still Deepika. Early in my life, my family wanted to change my name. I mean, they wanted me to get married when I was still a minor.

I understand my family's problem. I am the youngest of eight children. My father abandoned us when I was very small. My mother worked as a coolie (a daily-wage labourer) in the fields. The Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco became my angels of mercy. They gave me free food, lodging and education. When I returned home after grade ten, my family did not want to spend money on food or studies for me. They also feared that if I were better qualified, I would want a better husband, which would mean giving a higher dowry.

A man and his family were brought to see if he could marry me. I refused to marry him. I pleaded with my mother, weeping for hours. The rest of the family threatened to stop taking care of her too, if she sided with me.

For good measure, they also gave me a good thrashing.

One day I ran away to Vijayawada, to Navajeevan Bala Bhavan which could be roughly translated as Don Bosco's Home for Giving a New Life to Children. Its director, Fr. Koshy Thomas, was the second agent of mercy for me. He took me to the Government's District Child Welfare Committee. The Committee summoned my mother, brothers and even my father. That was the first time my father and mother were seeing each other after he had left us. They did not say a word to each other.

My family promised that I could continue my



studies. But back home, the entire family started abusing me. My sisters asked: "What is your problem? All your sisters married young. Most of your friends did too." Actually it is very sad because one of my sisters, still in her 20's, has a son and she is already a widow. In India it is so difficult for widows, no matter how young, to remarry or even to survive.

Not only that. The daughter of another sister of mine is already married and she has a child. So my sister is a grandmother at the age of 30 and I am a grand aunt at the age of 22!

They thrashed me and hit my head against the wall till I was bleeding.

They cursed me as being a bad omen and a shame on the family. They even wanted to kill me. This is called "honour-killing" in our country. My mother was as helpless as me, because she was just a woman, abandoned by her own husband.

After another boy was brought to marry me, I ran away again to Fr. Koshy. He is a true angel of mercy. He admitted me to a course in Computer Science and Engineering (CSE). Not a single member of my family ever came to see me or even inquire about me. They considered me dead. In spite of all they had done to me, I longed to see them, especially my mother.



*Family of Deepika's niece*



I studied well. I am proud to say that I was the topper in my class.

My father then came to take me to his house. He promised to allow me to study. Once I reached home, he beat me and threatened to kill me if I went back to Don Bosco. I really believed his threat, because I still have the image of my mother bleeding from her head, when my



father hit her with an axe. So I went back to my mother and brothers.

The old ritual began all over again: a steady stream of boys came to take a look at me. I felt like a cow on sale in the market place. It is sad that a female in India has no status of her own. She is only the daughter, the wife or the mother of a male. I was tortured, beaten, cursed, placed under house arrest. I wished I were a street dog which was freer than I was. I cursed my misfortune of being a girl. I prayed. I cried. I thought of suicide.

Finally, my grandmother helped me to go back once more to Don Bosco Navajeevan. Fr. Koshy, the most merciful man I have ever met, welcomed me. He put me back into college. I am now in my second year of B. Tech. (Bachelor of Technology). I work part time, to look after my own needs.

I had several reasons for refusing to get married. I wanted to study. I was too young to be a wife and a mother. I would have to live with the entire family of the boy, a boy and a family that I did not know at all. Above all, I was being

FORCED to get married, not just advised or requested. I did not feel respected.

The reason I want to study is very simple. I want to do something more with my life, than what I saw most people do. Education will give me a better life. It will enable me to extend to other girls the mercy I experienced from the Salesian Sisters and Fathers. I will study, find a job, and earn well. I will then be able to help girls like me. I do not want any girl to suffer as I did.

## 'Girls First' scheme in Bihar bears fruits

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: A "resilience" program for 3,500 marginalised adolescent girls in rural Bihar has led to far-reaching results in not just retaining children in school but stopping early marriage and improving their psychosocial health. The "Girls First" program implemented by Corstone India Foundation with the support of David and Lucile Packard Foundation is a first of its kind project integrating evidence based practices from the fields of positive psychology, social-emotional rearing, restorative justice and emotional intelligence. The program has now been scaled up to 30,000 boys and girls in 250 schools in partnership with the Bihar Education Project Council.

According to studies emotional resilience increased by 33%, health knowledge by 99%, attitudes about gender equality by 18% while clean

water behaviour by 96% between 2013-2014 when the program was conducted. Says class X student Saba Reyaz, "My parents fixed my marriage when I was just 13. I was so hesitant and scared, I won't have said anything to them had I not been part of this program. But having taken some sessions, I was able to slowly convince my parents not to do so (go ahead with the wedding)." Corstone executive director Steve Leventhal said, "Our analysis reveals that girls are stopping early marriage, advocating for their education, and standing up to harassment using a combination of many skills learnt in Girls First." Dr Zoya Ali Rizvi from the health ministry said that despite there being 25 crore adolescents in India, mental health and emotional well-being was a highly untapped area in the nation and there was need to work with partners in the field.

## N | Empowering Women

# Dramatic decline in under-age marriages of girls, says survey

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New Delhi: Signaling a strong wave of women empowerment, indicators for female health, literacy, financial means and age of marriage over the past decade show positive upswings, the findings of the fourth national family health survey (NFHS-4) 2015-16 reveal. Findings of the survey depict a dramatic decline in under age marriages with women found to be marrying late even though the trend for men seems to be the reverse.

For instance, in Bihar, less than 40% of women in the age group of 20-24 years were married before 18 years of age. This is compared to 60.3% of women in the same age group marrying before 18 years according to the third round of survey conducted in 2005-06. Similarly, Haryana has witnessed a sharp improvement with less than 19% of women marrying before reaching 18 years now, as compared to almost 40% during the previous survey.

But results of the survey co-

## FAIR GROWTH

Literacy rate (% of women who are literate in 15-49 age group)

(NFHS-4 (2015-16) NFHS-3 (2005-06))

	NFHS-4 (2015-16)	NFHS-3 (2005-06)
Bihar	49.6	37
Goa	89	83.6
Haryana	75.4	60.4
Karnataka	71.7	59.7
Madhya Pradesh	59.4	44.4
Tamil Nadu	79.4	69.4
Uttarakhand	76.5	64.7
West Bengal	71	58.8

(% of women in 20-24 age group who are married before 18 yrs)

	NFHS-4 (2015-16)	NFHS-3 (2005-06)
Bihar	39.1	60.3
Goa	9.8	11.7
Haryana	18.5	39.8
Karnataka	23.2	41.2
Madhya Pradesh	30	53
Tamil Nadu	15.7	21.5
Uttarakhand	139	22.6
West Bengal	40.7	53.3

Source: National Family Health Survey-4, 2015-16

vering 13 states and two union territories show men are getting married at an early age now. In Goa, for instance, 10.6% of the men in the age group of 25-29 years married before 21 years, as against 19% earlier.

The latest survey shows a marked improvement in literacy rate of women. In around 11 out of 13 states, literacy rate of women have gone up over the past decade. While Goa tops the

list with 89% literate women in the age group of 15-49 years, Sikkim is a close competitor with 86.6%. In Bihar, the female literacy rate jumped from 37% in the 2005-06 survey to 49.6%. The literacy percentage increased in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

For the full report, log on to [www.timesofindia.com](http://www.timesofindia.com)





## STORY OF

## RUPA KHATUN

I am Rupa Khatun, 18 years, from Bangladesh and studying in class XII. My mother died when I was very young; I got separated from my sister and my brother. I have no idea about them now.

I vaguely remember how my father, after drinking, used to beat my mother. He would always take my mother's money. He thinks women are born to serve the men. Instead of sending us to school, he would go to drink and waste money. I never liked my father; I hated him.

After the death of my mother he did not have money to drink. So, one day he took me to a place and left me there with some men. My father did not come back to take me home. I was so scared. I was just 7 years old then. That very night I ran away from those men. I reached one place; I do not remember the name of the place now. I met one lady there who helped me go to the police station, and took me to Don Bosco Ashalayam. Since then I live here. I have nowhere to go and I have nobody now. Don Bosco is my family. Don Bosco is my home.

I will become a teacher and I will teach children what is good and bad. I will tell them about the significance of education. I will tell them how women were treated before, how my mother was treated, how I was treated. I will tell them the bitter truth of my story. I will be their example.





# FR. V.M. THOMAS SDB, HONoured FOR HIS CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS EDUCATION AND TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL CHANGE.



**O**n 20th January 2016, the Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi gave away the ERDF (Education Research and Development Foundation) Excellence Awards 2015, to 18 eminent citizens of Assam, who played major roles in various fields and contributed immensely to the development of society.

Father V.M. Thomas SDB, the cur-

rent Provincial of the Don Bosco Guwahati Province, as well as Chancellor of the Assam Don Bosco University, was one of the ERDF award recipients.

The award was presented to Father V.M. Thomas in acknowledgement of his contributions to Youth Development and Education in the North East region of India, for over 40 years.

The citation reads: "The award is presented for his outstanding contribution in building educational institutions and for motivating the youth for positive social transformation."

Chief Minister Shri Tarun Gogoi, presenting award said, "The awards are the appreciation of the hard work and dedication to the State and the Nation as a whole."



**The ministry of Women & Child Development, Govt. Of India has appointed Fr. Koshy Thomas a member of the committee for drafting the model rules of the Juvenile Justice Act 2015.**





## OUR DEEP CONDOLENCES

Our beloved friend and former Lok Sabha Speaker P.A Sangma passed away on March 4, 2016 after a cardiac arrest.

He was a student of Don Bosco and a very close friend of our Director.

May his soul rest in peace.

You may read more about how Don Bosco contributed to his education in our newsletter of October-December 2012.

## NOTICE

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