

# Dalit Empowerment



## English-medium Education – the Key to Dalit Freedom

From birth, Dalit children are condemned to the same lifelong oppression as the generations preceding them. By a very young age, these children are indoctrinated with the belief that they lack dignity and value and that their prospects are limited to exploitation and poverty. In order to escape this slave mentality, experience social equality, and find alternate employment opportunities, Dalit children need access to English-medium education.

Without an English-based education, Dalit children can never advance to higher-level English schools or gain entrance to a central government university. All the central government-run higher educational institutions use English as their medium of instruction and admit students only through English language entrance exams.

The dilemma facing the Dalit school children is the result of the government's policy of requiring all educational curriculums taught in primary and public schools to be in the regional languages. This makes it virtually impossible for Dalit children to advance in English education. (Primary and Secondary English-medium education is only available to the privileged classes in expensive English-medium institutions.)

In multi-lingual India, English is the common language which spans across the entire country. Further in the new Indian economy, globalisation and information technology are communicated through the medium of English. Dalits need to be equipped in English so they can at least find employment in English speaking Multi-national corporations or the civil service and perhaps one day compete in a global economy.

### **Good Shepherd Schools**

In an effort to reach and meet the needs of the Dalits and other oppressed minorities, OM India began starting English-medium schools specifically for Dalit and underprivileged children throughout India. Also known as the Good Shepherd School (GSS), the schools were created with the aim of achieving holistic community transformation. Working in partnership with local governments, businesses and concerned parties, OM India has been able to provide good quality English-medium education, healthcare, vocational training and micro-financing to empower sustainable livelihood. Through these schools, the church has been able to take root in the surrounding villages and community.

The first of the GSS opened in 1998, with the full project gaining momentum in 2001. The initial goal was to begin schools starting at the primary level and extending up to the secondary level across the nation in 100 centres. This goal was achieved in 2010. To date, there are more than 110 schools across the country with over 26,000 students. The aim is to increase it further to reach one million poor children across India.

The GSS' reputation has grown over the years. The schools have taken part in regional competitions with local government schools and the GSS students have done well both academically as well as in sports. At each competition, they are challenging cultural stereotypes and proving that Dalit children can learn and compete alongside children of all castes. These students have bestowed a rare sense of pride on their communities. Notably, the GSS is accredited by local governments, thus giving students the certificates necessary to advance to higher education.

For instance, just after a few years of a GSS being present in Papaiaphet, Andhra Pradesh, a poverty stricken village home to the poorest of poor Dalit Bahujan farmers, members of high and low caste were eating meals together and attending weddings under the same tent. The school has reached such lofty heights that in 2012, the Indian Space Research Organisation selected 80 talented students from the school and gave them 6 months of coaching to sit for the ISAT-2012 entrance test for higher studies. Clearly, education is bringing freedom to Dalit children across India. Families who have been trapped in the same desperate socioeconomic position for generations are watching their children thrive as they learn, dream and experience equality. This is a freedom they never dreamed of.

### **The Legacy of Mission Schools**

The GSS offers the children teaching in character, social values and spiritual principles based on a biblical worldview and the teachings of Jesus. The children begin each day with prayer, songs, and memory versus. A firm foundation is built in these children's lives as they learn that they have been created by a God who loves them and who gives guidance and help to them in their daily lives.

In similar fashion, mission schools have left a significant and lasting legacy for us in Singapore. We have been blessed by the early missionaries who came to our shores since the 19<sup>th</sup> century to establish schools and churches of various denominations. Over the years, these schools developed into remarkable institutions of learning. Many who passed through the school gates not only received a good education, but were transformed by the power of the Gospel. Our children today continue to enjoy the fruits of their early labour and dedication.

As PMC nears our 81<sup>st</sup> Anniversary, could this be a Kairos moment? Having freely received, will we not also freely give by extending our tent to empower the next generation of Dalit children, giving them hope for the future?

**“and I will bless you....so that you will be a blessing” Genesis 12:2**

*Gulab and Sumitra live in Rajasthan state in northern India. They live in a cramped hut lacking amenities, with a single kerosene lamp to illuminate their homes. As their family is trapped in poverty, the children contribute to the household income by helping their parents collect stones in the nearby mines. Their story reflects that of many Dalit families.*

*Gulab and Sumitra now have the opportunity to receive an education at Hezamel Good Shepherd School. They attend school regularly despite having to walk 4km each way in order to do so.*

*Gulab has begun teaching his older brother and sister English. Every night he sits in the family home beside the kerosene lamp and studies. His hard work is paying off. Recently he earned the top rank in class. The school manager reports that if all students worked as hard as Gulab, they would make not only the school but the entire village proud. Gulab's father was in tears upon hearing the news of his son's achievement. The family's daily survival is a heavy burden but they find joy and relief in knowing that their children will have opportunities they could never have.*



***“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.” (Matthew 10:8)***

## PMC enlarges mission fields after Year of Missions 2012

One of the key outcomes of PMC's Year of Missions was a challenge for us to step out in faith and "**extent our tent**" beyond our existing partner mission fields. Through the feedback of mission trippers and the guidance of our church leaders, we realised that God has blessed us to be His blessing to the marginalised, indigenous poor in Asia. We also sensed that God was leading us to take a closer look at India which has the highest number of poor in the world today! (40% of India's total population.)

Since August 2009, we have commissioned 5 mission teams to see and discern what God is doing in India. Our partner, **OM India**, who had for many years worked with the Dalits, helped us witness firsthand the poverty, injustice and hopelessness facing the Dalits. Our compassion was stirred and we knew deep in our hearts that God's heart is breaking for the "Untouchables" in India.

### As God's catalyst of change!

As we prayed and sought the Lord, we discovered that we can play a part and be God's **catalyst of change** for spiritual breakthrough and community transformation in India. Our partner, OM India is an established outfit of Operation Mobilisation (the organisation that operates the MV Logos Hope). OM India has good governance and a well-established infrastructure in their local operations. Their leaders, of whom some are Dalits themselves, are inspiring and visionary. They believed an English-medium education is the key to break the poverty cycle of the Dalits.

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In the past 10 years, OM India has built more than 110 Good Shepherd Schools throughout India and has transformed these poor communities with English-medium education for the children, healthcare, clean water, and microfinance to empower sustainable livelihood. Through these efforts, OM India has been able to reach the Dalits with the gospel of Jesus Christ with exponential success. Today, thousands of Dalit believers are worshipping in Good Shepherd Churches in their villages!



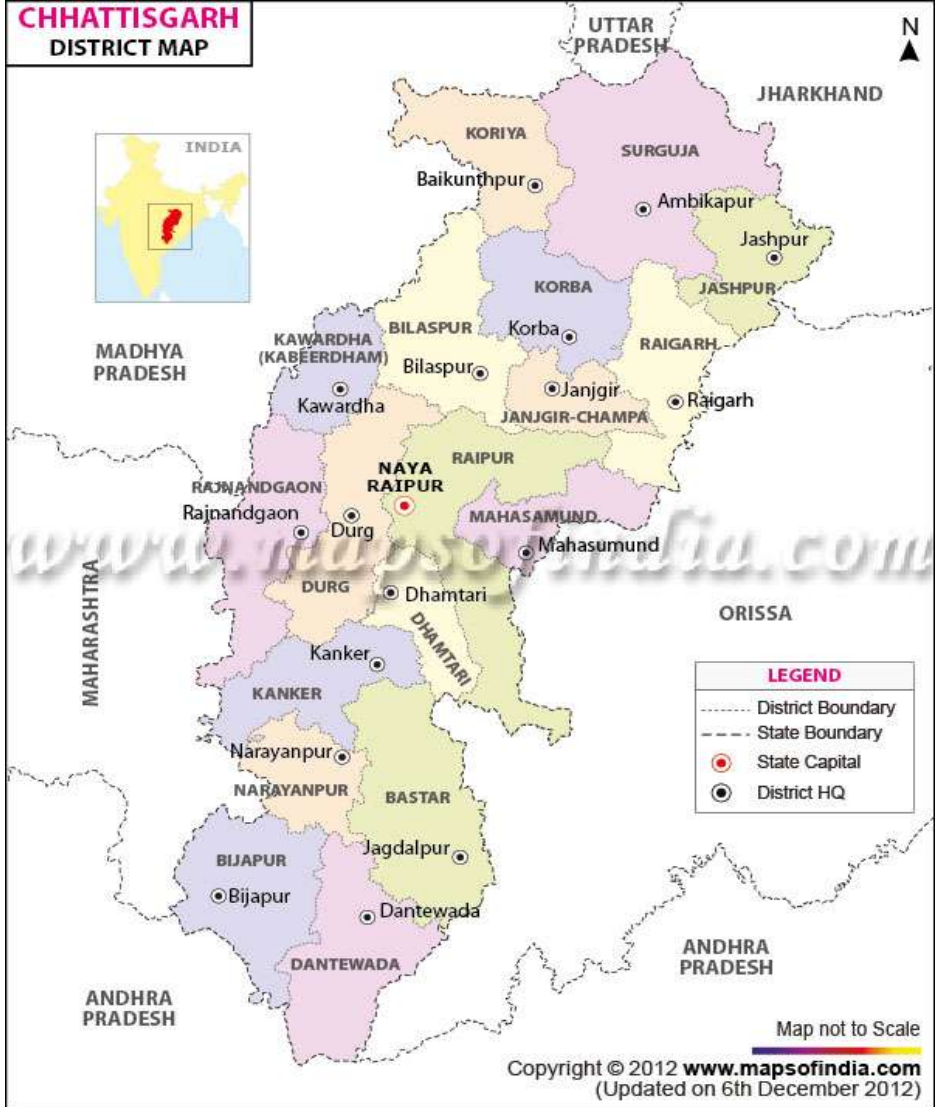
**OM India has built more than 110 Good Shepherd Schools throughout India**

### **Our commitment to build a school at Nawapara, Chhattisgarh:**

In response to the Dalit's heart cry, PMC leaders have approved to embark on a Dalit Empowerment Project (DEP) in partnership with OM India to build a Good Shepherd School in Nawapara, two-hour drive or 60 km from Raipur, the capital of Chhattisgarh (Central NE India).

Raipur has a population of about half a million, mainly Hindus living in 256 villages and in extremely neglected slums. The infrastructure is sadly underdeveloped and the majority who live in the outskirts of Raipur (including Nawapara) are poor, uneducated Dalits and tribals. The church in Raipur is very small and faces persecution. But growth is taking place through the showing of evangelistic films, personal evangelism and holistic ministry.

## CHHATTISGARH DISTRICT MAP



### Factsheet on Nawapara:

**Location:** Nawapara – 60 km East of Raipur

**Population:** 3,000 in 10 villages (extended population 100,000)

**Language:** Hindi, Chhattisgarhi, English

**Nearest city:** Raipur, State of Chhattisgarh

**Existing school:** No elementary school (only one government high school)