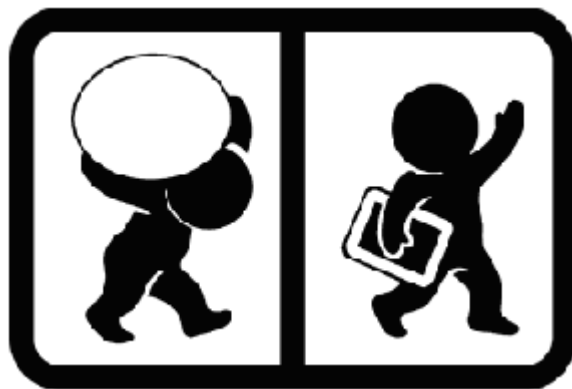


**The M.V. Foundation's Role in  
Kothapally and Ravulapally Villages:  
An Impact Assessment**



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**Documentation for the M.V. Foundation**  
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## *Introduction*

The M. Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MVF) has changed dramatically from its early days as a research institution to an organization that is more pro-actively working toward social transformation. Its agenda is to ensure that no child works and that all children go to school, which it strives to achieve through the implementation of its five non-negotiables. Working in over 6000 villages in Andhra Pradesh and guiding programs in several other states, MVF's model of development is transferable and highly successful.

Since 1991 the M.V. Foundation has been present in Ranga Reddy District with some of its longest running projects occurring in Shankerpally Mandal. Its age-based strategy has facilitated impressive results in eliminating child labour and universalizing education, successfully bringing about change in much of this mandal. While the organization's mandate is to eliminate child labour and universalize education, the 'side effects' of this struggle have also been significant, resulting in dramatic social transformations.

MVF's approach toward social change has meant significant and sustainable development. In a brief two-month internship I was able to conduct a survey of two villages in Shankerpally Mandal, Kothapally and Ravulapally. The following document is a result of interviews, case studies, MVF data records and observation, compiled during my stay in these two villages. In it I hope to convey what, as an outsider, I was able to observe in terms of MVF's impact on the village's schools and greater community. Kothapally and Ravulapally have been part of the MVF initiative for almost fifteen years, the organization's success is apparent through this long-term, yet evolving relationship.

MVF's work and impact is multifold. While it motivates families to send their formally working children to school and generates an awareness of the importance of doing so, there are further social transformations occurring. The most apparent offshoots of its work have been the development of an awareness of rights, responsibilities and newly formed relationships within these communities. MVF's role in these communities has gone beyond motivating children to go to school. In fact, the organization has educated

entire communities on their rights, leading to an understanding of individual, parental and community responsibility, which in turn has formed new working relationships. The face of rural Andhra Pradesh is changing as MVF challenges deeply rooted social norms. Before addressing these observations, however, the stories of both Kothapally and Ravulapally villages must be told.

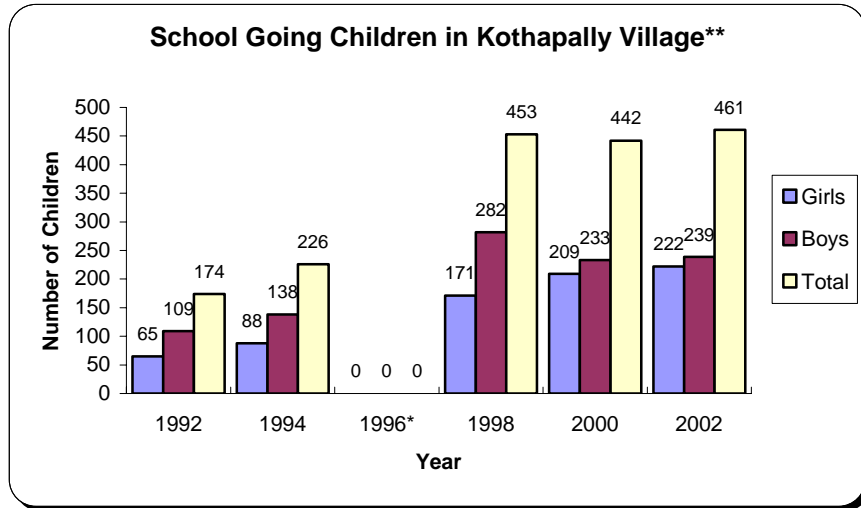
### **Case Studies**

MVF is present in 13 districts in Andhra Pradesh covering 137 mandals. Shankerpally Mandal, in Ranga Reddy district, has been a part of the MVF project since the beginning. In 1992 at the time of the first general survey there were 5155 school going children and 5610 non-school going children in the mandal. After years of mobilization and dedication, Shankerpally now has 13 143 school going children with 326 children out of school. As MVF has been a part of these communities for well over a decade, significant change can be observed, thus making the villages of Kothapally and Ravulapally in Shankerpally Mandal the focus of this study.

#### **Kothapally Village**

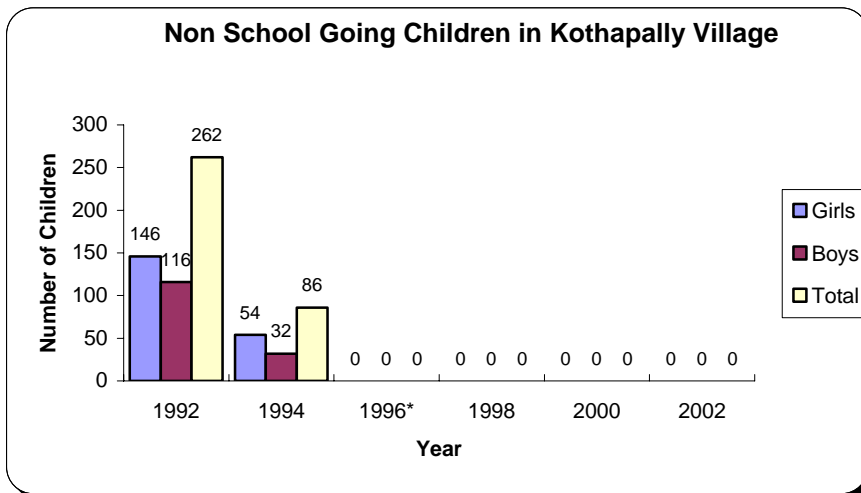
##### *History*

Kothapally is a village with a population of 1666, according to the last Indian census, and was one of the first villages that MVF entered in 1991. The organization began its work by interacting with the children of the village and working to motivate them to study. At the time of MVF's first survey in 1992, Kothapally had 19 bonded child labourers (i.e. children bound by contract to work off an advance which had been negotiated) and 140 child labourers. Only 76 students attended the primary school (5-8 years old), 124 children of the same age were non-school going and of the small fraction attending classes, only 36% were girls.



\*\*Resources: see last page.

\* 1996 data not available.



\* 1996 data not available.

MVF's presence in the community initially received a hostile reaction. As an outside organization it faced a lack of trust and understanding. MVF worked diligently to motivate the child labourers and convince them that their proper place was in school. Motivation camps were set up where MVF volunteers met with labourers and Dalit children to convey the importance of an education and the developmental harm of working. As the convincing of parents and landlords was much more difficult, children would on occasion run away from home with the help of MVF volunteers to one of the organization's camps. Attendance to these camps was a main objective of the

organization and worked to further the cause because once children returned home for a holiday from the camps, they would act as peer motivators. Through sharing their camp experiences of learning, caring teachers and proper food, the children were able to convince their peers to enroll in camp. Child to child motivation was in Kothapally, and continues to be elsewhere, a highly effective tool of inspiration for child workers.

By 1995 Kothapally was able to claim that the village was free of children forced into bonded labour. This title was formally announced by the district collector and was quickly followed by the declaration that the community was also child labour free in 1996. After these accomplishments Kothapally was deemed a model village, the community takes pride in both its past accomplishments and current projects.

### *Physical Infrastructure*

The Kothapally Primary School has been in existence since 1978. When first built it consisted of a single room which housed standards I through V. In 1983 the government added a second building that consisted of two more classrooms and an office, however, the school continued to only teach up until V standard. The school remained as such for twenty years.

In 1998 the government recognized the need for more infrastructure at the Kothapally school. A third building was constructed consisting of two new classrooms. However, much of the facility was left unfinished. This same year saw the beginning of a further expansion that would not be completed until 1999. And by 2001 the plans had been set into motion for the development of a high school in the village.

The unfinished building that the government had built but left without doors, windows, furniture or fencing surrounding it, was unusable until the community rallied together to finish the job. The SEC petitioned MVF for support in finishing the project. MVF donated Rs 25000, the MPC gave Rs 13000 and the Youth Club was able to gather Rs 20000 from the community. This fundraising was able to fence the schoolyard, purchase furniture and add doors and windows. A local tractor owner also lent support in the form

of 20 loads of sand, which was increased by the SEC's purchase of another 30, all of which were used to level the schoolyard so that the children had an area to play.

Until the expansions in 1998 the school remained a Primary School. It was that year in which standard VI was added. The building, which was to house the Upper Primary classes, was built by MVF and the DPEP (District Primary Education Program). The three rooms were constructed with 70% of the funding coming from the government (DPEP) and 30% from the community, including individual donations from a local politician and the chairman of the SEC, Ram Laxmiah. By 1999 the VII standard was introduced, completing the availability of a full primary school education within the village.

Kothapally School: Class Expansion	
Year	Standard
1991-1992	5
1992-1993	5
1993-1994	5
1994-1995	5
1995-1996	5
1996-1997	5
1997-1998	5
1998-1999	6
1999-2000	7
2000-2001	7
2001-2002	8
2002-2003	9
2003-2004	10

### *Community Processes*

MVF was able to garner the support of a very influential member of Kothapally Village. Narasimha Reddy was the Gram Panchayat President from 1981 until 1995 and has currently held the position since 2001. The Gram Panchayat has maintained a positive and supportive relationship with MVF and continues to play an important role today in the insurance of student attendance. Monthly meetings are facilitated by the Gram Panchayat President in which the SEC and parents discuss school progress, teacher and student attendance and food quality of the midday meals. Currently, Narasimha is

planning to approach a furniture manufacturer with a request for some much needed desks for the school. Clearly, though much progress has been made, there still remain issues to be dealt with by the community in their children's interests.

A community group, which has been highly involved in the fight for the universalization of education in Kothapally, is the Sai Youth Club. Established in 1994 this association is made up of the 20-35 year olds in the village. Prior to 1994 the group did not formally meet nor did it have any specific agenda. With MVF's encouragement, however, the Club took up the cause of child labour. MVF's work in Kothapally generated awareness about the harm that child labourers suffer both physically and developmentally. With this newfound purpose the Sai Youth Club worked to release the village's child and bonded labourers. In fact, when first formed one of the Club's members was employing a child labourer in bondage. To set an example and initiate the movement he released the child and erased the Rs 2000 debt.

When MVF first entered the community the youth of the area were especially hostile with little direction and motivation in their lives. These young people struggled to interact with others, unable to assert themselves let alone their rights in bureaucratic institutions. This issue of alienation from public services and institutions plagues rural India. By breaking down the fear and barriers of unfamiliarity, MVF has helped not only the youth but also an entire community gain understanding and access to what is rightfully theirs. Once MVF became a source of encouragement and training, the youth evolved into an important and highly active community group.

One of the initiatives, which the youth attribute to MVF's influence in the village, is a highly successful watershed project. This development project initiated by the community began in 1999 and was introduced to Kothapally because of its reputation of community support and cooperation and the village's characteristic of being child labour free. MVF's influence has contributed to village development in areas other than child labour, leading to sustainable and essential improvements.

Every achievement made by the community has been a struggle. Endless petitioning and letter writing campaigns have been initiated and continue to be used, requesting more materials, additional classrooms and more teachers. After the declaration in Kothapally of the village being child labour free, the parents demanded an adequate number of teachers for their children. Their petitions outlined that it was the government's responsibility to provide teachers in a village that could boast 100% school attendance.

These requests were not met, however, for over a year. In the meantime parents recognized the harm incurred by their children when taught in an inadequate learning environment. Throughout 1995-1996 the community ran its own school. Without a single government teacher, the village provided two of its own volunteers while MVF supplied 4 others.

*Sunita*

Sunita was an irregular student. Though she attended classes periodically she eventually dropped out and helped look after her siblings or spent idle hours with her friends. In 1994 MVF recruited her to attend one of its camps where she successfully completed the short-term bridge course. In 1995 Sunita was enrolled in V standard in Shankerpally where she lived in the government's Social Welfare Hostel. There she was able to complete high school and prepare for the Intermediate level. In Chevella, at the government junior college, Sunita performed well in her X plus 1 and 2 classes, providing her with the opportunity to continue her studies. Presently, she is studying for her BA from Vikarabad, having just completed her first year.

*Current Situation*

MVF's role over the past decade has changed and molded to the needs of the individual communities in which it works. In Kothapally this has meant shifting from a role as the main community motivator to currently acting as simply a supportive resource. This shift has not only brought about changes in the levels of school going and non-school going children but has also very significantly changed the village community. Furthermore, it is testament to the sustainability and success of MVF's model of development, currently being replicated by other Indian and Nepalese NGOs.



The past fourteen years in Kothapally have meant hard work and major struggle for MVF and the village community. These past experiences, however, have resulted in a currently minimal role for the organization. Because MVF strives to mobilize communities, its efforts create a sense of ownership and responsibility that lead to sustainability by the community and minimize MVF's role. Kothapally is one such village in which MVF's role has changed; it's the community itself that now sustains and initiates further development.

One of the most apparent areas where MVF's impact can be seen is in the community schools. There are several areas where one can observe the improvements and accomplishments of MVF and the Kothapally community that go well beyond the enrollment records. The government schools of rural Andhra Pradesh suffer from under funding, understaffing and inconsistency. MVF has proven, however, that government institutions must respond to heavy pressure and legitimate demands from its citizens regarding these issues. More than ten years ago rural government schools were poorly attended by both students and teachers. Little attention was paid to the lack of school going children in villages like Kothapally and even less was actually done to change things.

MVF's presence has changed these dynamics dramatically and improvements can be seen in areas of school attendance, movement of children and the quality of learning. Firstly, regularity in student attendance has become more seriously tracked. Furthermore, it is no longer strictly the MVF village volunteer's responsibility. Now the teachers and headmaster, with the support and awareness of community members, follow up with dropouts and act as family motivators.

Two years ago MVF volunteers realized that attendance tracking needed to be more structured than the bulk number gathering that had been done in the past. Previously, though class numbers may have fluctuated, MVF was unable to identify specifically how many children had dropped out and how many had joined within the year. Volunteers depended on the information that other children would provide as to which child had

resumed working and required special motivation. Presently, however, MVF volunteers keep very thorough records on school attendance. While they are visiting the schools multiple times a week to check in on students and teachers, formal class attendance is taken bimonthly and recorded. At the end of every month the MVF volunteer meets with teachers to compare attendance records with the school's number of working days. In this process it becomes clear which students require special motivation and which families will be visited by the community regarding a child's school attendance.

The role of MVF in the regularity of student attendance has also changed in terms of what is done with this information. Previously, the MVF volunteer would gain knowledge of a drop out child and go visit the family to motivate and bring the child back to class. Now MVF plays a more technical role. By regularly gathering attendance information and meeting with school authorities, the volunteer now relays this information to community members, the youth, Gram Panchayat or SEC, who then take on the responsibility to visit the child and its family. Currently, MVF's role is more a facilitating one, allowing the community to generate dialogue and initiate their own action.

The movement of children through the school system, from primary to high school or beyond, has also evolved so that teachers now play an encouraging and supportive role to their students. This has changed dramatically in Kothapally, especially since the class upgradations. In rural schools children would often stop their studies at the level that the local school taught up to. Parents were concerned with the safety of children, especially girls, who were required to travel to a neighbouring town to continue their education.

Though all children are encouraged to continue their studies beyond X standard, special coaching is offered to those who express interest and special aptitude. So far, three students who have attended the Kothapally school since the primary level have gone on to study and gained admission in X plus 1. Teachers are no longer viewed as disinterested and foreign outsiders. Now the community looks to them to provide information, advice and encouragement to help students continue with their studies.

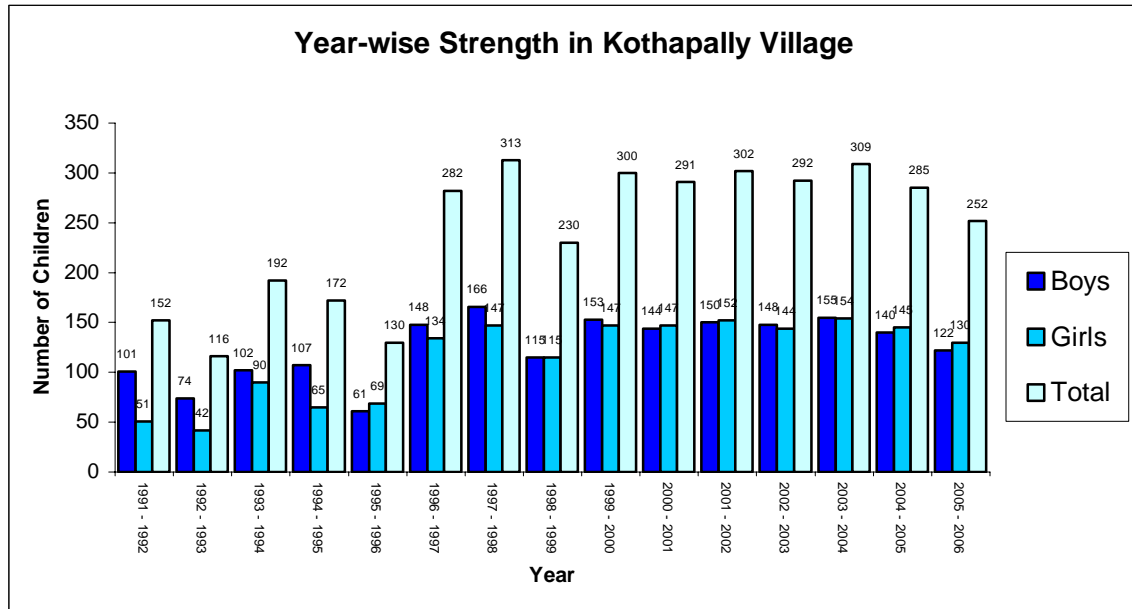
Teachers have become members of the community, respected and esteemed and equal contributors to the children's future.

The movement of children is encouraged and ensured through the attendance-tracking program and further instituted through the motivational focus placed on the primary and foundational years. In conjunction with MVF, teachers have developed innovative programs which both improve and ensure the learning levels of students. In the Kothapally primary school a *Learning Guarantee* is employed which has helped to democratize the school system, involving parents and the SEC in reviewing student progress.

This innovation pays special attention to students who are studying at a lower level than their classmates. In the government schools there is currently no program of detention for 'slow' learners. Instead, children who may not be performing at their grade level are passed into the next class where they continue to receive special attention. The Learning Guarantee program is thus utilized in many schools as it divides the classes into 'A, B or C' groups according to learning levels. For the first 60 days of the school session the children are taught at these levels in an attempt to catch the lower, B and C groups, up to the standard grade level. During this time the students' progress is reviewed periodically so as to advance them appropriately. After those initial 60 days, the entire class is taught at the government grade level with continued support and attention given to struggling students.

This and other activities have proven helpful in maintaining student attendance and creating hospitable learning environments. For instance, field trips and educational excursions offer students the opportunity to apply what they are learning. As Kothapally is a rural community, the teachers often utilize the surroundings to offer hands on application when studying issues of environment and nature. Finally, regulations on exam taking have also been altered. In the past children were given a certain time limit in which to take their exit exams. Now, however, students are encouraged to take their

exams only when they are ready and rewriting is suggested for those who struggle the first time around.



*From 1996 to 2001 Kothapally experienced the height of MVF’s mobilization process. During these years school enrollment was at its peak as all children including those older, out-of school youth, swelled enrollment levels. After this initial push for school-going children, enrollment numbers leveled out as seen in the current numbers.*

**Conclusion**

MVF’s impact in Kothapally can be seen well beyond the village’s child labour free status and its nearly universal primary school attendance records. As early as 1994 81% of the community’s children were attending primary classes. The most recent survey suggests that in fact all children ages 5-8 attend the school while over 95% of children who finish the upper primary classes go on to attend the VIII standard at the high school.

Furthermore, the organization’s work has reached beyond the children of this village. The abolition of child labour became a community concern. Not only did it require immediate attention from the children, parents and landlords, it also required support from groups like the youth and Gram Panchayat. Moreover, MVF’s work to free the child labourers has also empowered the community. No longer are the youth of Kothapally angry, incapable of interacting with authorities and idle. Now they have a

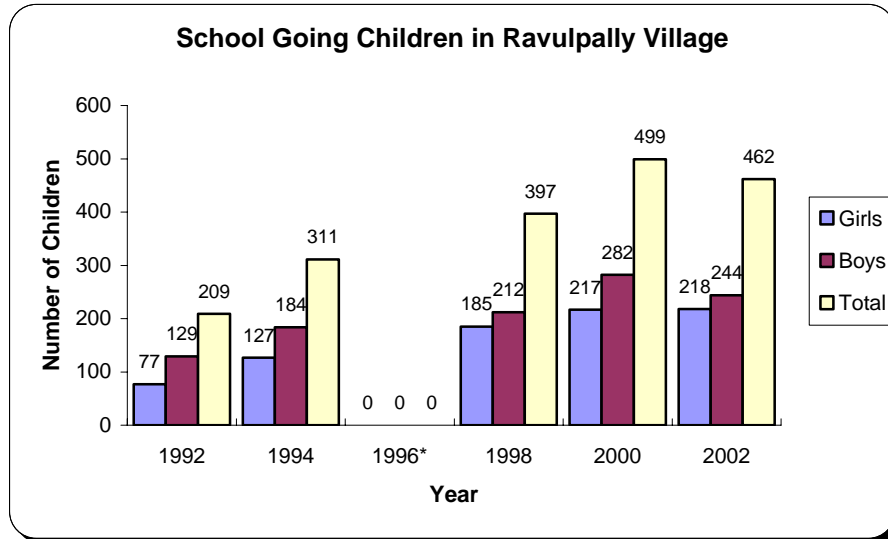
purpose, are respected in the community and empowered as advocates and champions. Parents too are aware of their children's rights now, capable of fighting for more teachers and quality midday meals. Although this newfound empowerment and self-respect has spread throughout the village, most importantly Kothapally has undergone an entire attitude change. Now, when a child is born, there is no question of whether or not it will attend school, it will; if not by the parents' own decision then by the pressure of a community well aware that a child's place is the classroom.

### **Ravulapally Village**

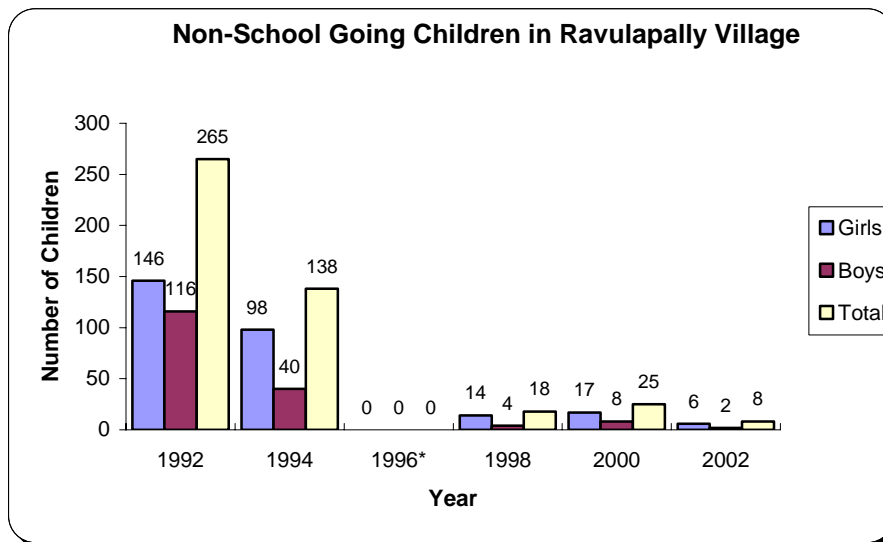
#### *History*

MVF entered the Ravulapally community in 1992. It began its work and interaction in the evenings, as that is when people gather in their free time. The village however, suspected the group to be members of the naxalite movement and requested that they explain themselves during daylight hours. This resulted in the MVF volunteers who had gone to Ravulapally to be locked up overnight. After much convincing over an extended period of time, MVF's interests became known, understood and eventually a community cause.

In 1992 when MVF conducted its first survey there were 25 bonded child labourers and 200 child labourers in Ravulapally. Initially MVF used motivation camps to interact with the children and met with community members to convey the message that a child's place is in the classroom. In Ravulapally as in Kothapally and many other villages, the initial reaction to MVF and its volunteers was violent. Parents misunderstood the message of the movement and resented the volunteers' stance on child labour. Volunteers were thus subjected to abuse and mistreatment during much of the initial interactions.



\* 1996 data not available.



\* 1996 data not available.

### *Physical Infrastructure*

Until 1991 Ravulapally had only one school building with a single room, one teacher, classes I-III and 130 students. At this point of overcrowding the village elders decided that a second teacher was very much needed. They developed a scheme that required all ration cardholders in the community to donate Rs 5 in order to employ a second teacher. This system was successful and in fact became a fundraising approach adopted throughout the state. A second building was erected in 1995 that housed the expansion to

V standard. And in 1996 there was a further addition made of three rooms on the second floor, which currently house the high school.

The 1996 addition, which houses the high school, was possible through a partnership involving MVF and the Round Table Organization of India. Each organization donated 50% of the funding for the second story expansion. The sanctioning of this construction, however, was difficult to achieve until the district collector finally helped the SEC chairman secure approval. The reason the collector was eager to help was because of the ration card scheme that had been so successful in fundraising within the village. The program impressed him and his help resulted in the building of the high school facility.

A large reward granted to Ravulapally in 1998 helped to furnish the school. The community had successfully grown an excess of paddy resulting in a government award of Rs 25000. Instead of keeping any of it the village decided to hand it over to MVF to allocate within the school. To this generous donation MVF added Rs 75000 and bought some much needed desks and benches. Even today the community has provided the furnishing and supplies in Ravulapally's school with little or no help from the government.

Ravulapally School: Class Expansion	
Year	Standard
1991-1992	6
1992-1993	6
1993-1994	6
1994-1995	7
1995-1996	7
1996-1997	7
1997-1998	7
1998-1999	7
1999-2000	7
2000-2001	7
2001-2002	8
2002-2003	9
2003-2004	10

### *Community Processes*

The strides made in the Ravulapally school have been immense. Originally the VII standard exit exam was not held in the village and children were required to travel to Shankerpally in order to write it. As many of the students were girls, parents were wary of sending their children so far away. The village petitioned that the exam become available in Ravulapally and the government responded with the requirement of Rs 50 from each student writing. The community was able to mobilize the funds and the examination began being administered in the village. Another example of the community's successful fundraising occurred when the village demanded that the X standard be offered in Ravulapally. The government again requested that the community mobilize funding which they did, 10% from the village with the government subsidizing the rest. This 2003 upgrade meant that the children no longer needed to travel outside of Ravulapally in order to finish their education, something which had never before been possible.

Since MVF has been in Ravulapally much has been improved upon in both the school and the daily lives of the children. But MVF has not been the only group working in this cause. The Youth Club of Ravulapally has been meeting officially since 1996. These young people initially worked in the community cleaning up, weeding the schoolyard and public spaces. In 1996 the headmaster of the school requested the group's cooperation and partnership in the effort to eliminate child labour. Along with the encouragement of MVF, the Youth Club began actively participating in motivating children through street theater, visiting homes where child labourers lived and organizing cultural programs.

In 1998 the youth and MVF opened a study center that was available from 9-11 o'clock every morning to children who were still working. Here the children would be motivated and introduced to learning. Eventually after attending the center most children went on to attend the bridge course camps offered by MVF. Encouragement was offered through activities that children had never participated in before, like picnics at Golconda Fort and organized games during holidays. The youth presence in these initiatives was



instrumental and their efforts continue today as the group has developed a sense of responsibility and pride in its role within the community.

The principle advocate for much of the development in the Ravulapally school has been the current headmaster, C.H. Sudarshan. Since 1997 he has been working diligently to improve the quality of education and ensure that no child is left working. What had previously been the work of MVF and the youth, is now conducted increasingly by the school staff. The headmaster and teachers now address dropout follow-ups and irregular attendance issues. Often before classes start in the morning members of the school will visit the homes of absent children. These rounds also offer an opportunity for the staff to find children from 0-5 years old who are eligible to attend the local anganwadi, or daycare. If the convincing of parents to send their dropped out children back to the classroom seems futile it is often negotiated that the child attend classes two days a week and continue working the other four. This tactic is often most successful as the child will eventually begin attending classes more often than working, leading to full time school attendance.

#### *Current Situation*

The current situation in Ravulapally resembles that of Kothapally. The MVF volunteer in this community follows the same attendance regime and the children receive the same sort of support and encouragement to continue their studies as their counterparts in Kothapally village. Here, not only do the teachers, youth and SEC address drop out issues, but the respective Gram Panchayat board members are also directly responsible for any child in their jurisdiction not attending class. This attendance regime has been institutionalized and is followed closely by all those involved. This process has helped to create an environment in which children attend school until X standard completion.

The movement of students not only from class to class but also from the Ravulapally village school to other specialized ones, is also well monitored. Drop out children and those with irregular attendance are often encouraged to move out to a Residential Welfare School in a neighbouring town. If a child is missing classes the teachers will assess

whether they feel the absenteeism will be constant. If believed to be a perpetual problem teachers will recommend that the student go to a hostel, providing a space free of parental and other pressures. Teachers, the headmaster and MVF volunteers will visit the parents; make this recommendation and lobby for this option. If parents remain uncooperative, the threat of law and police intervention is sometimes effective. Under the current headmaster, 10 students from Ravulapally have moved on to study at a residential school.

*T. Jyothi*

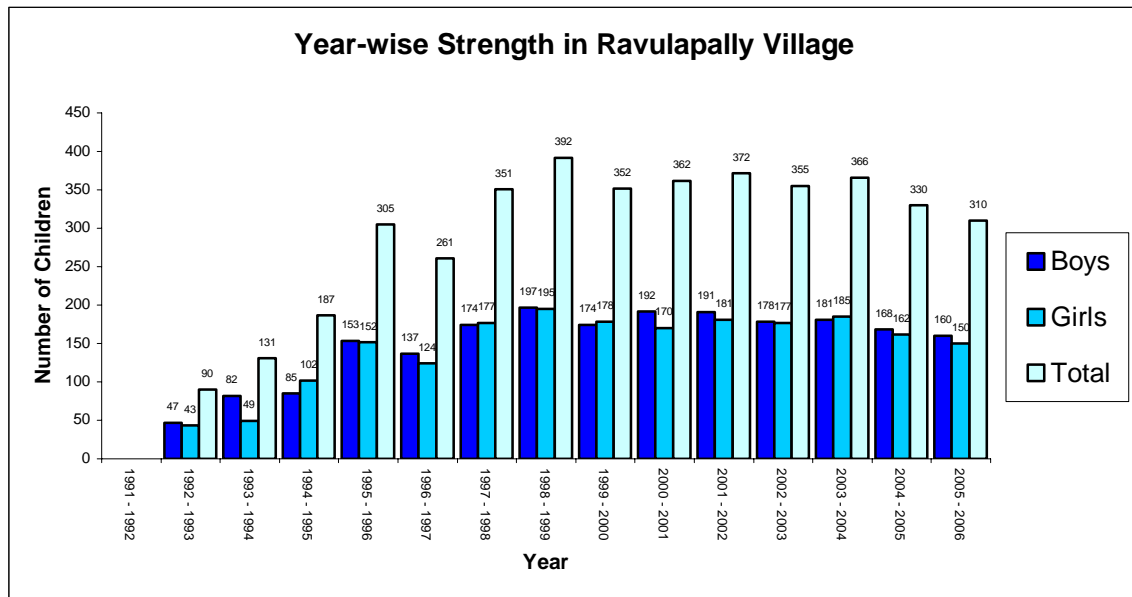
Jyothi was a promising student but after graduating from X standard in Ravulapally she was unable to continue her studies. Her younger brother brought her situation to the attention of the headmaster who then approached Jyothi with questions of her future. She told him that the family was unable to financially support her in school but the headmaster refused to see such a bright student miss an opportunity to succeed further.

After much discussion, Jyothi's parents agreed to the headmaster's proposal that if they let her go, he would help with some of the financial burden. With the parents' positive attitude the headmaster acted quickly so they could not change their minds and began negotiations with the college the very same day.

The institution's tuition is Rs 5500, however, the headmaster convinced the college to admit Jyothi for Rs 2500, payable in three installments. The negotiation set out that if the institution were to grant her admission, the headmaster promised that not only would the school benefit from such a bright pupil and gain approval for being so benevolent but he also promised to recommend the school to his future students. The school approved the proposal and Jyothi is currently studying in her Intermediate First Year in Mathematics Engineering.

Another unique innovation, which has been developed at this school, further illustrates the level of commitment that the current headmaster and his staff have for their students. Every year the top student of the school is rewarded for their hard work and achievement. At a special ceremony the student is awarded a prize of Rs 1001 and clothing. This money is placed in a joint account shared by the student and principal and may only be used for school related costs. This initiative not only rewards a student's accomplishments but also encourages the continuation of their studies and most importantly motivates fellow students to strive for a similar goal.

The current headmaster has worked incredibly hard at creating the learning environment that now exists in Ravulapally's school. His and the community's efforts have successfully established a new norm within the past eight years. In a village where every member has for generations worked as agricultural labourers, there now exists a higher level of learning which sees children graduate from X standard and enter into X plus 1. For the first time, Ravulapally now has members who hold government jobs, positions that have not before existed within the community population.



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### Conclusion

MVF officially left Ravulapally in 2003. Until that time it had eight volunteers working in the community. The village has developed in such a way so as to sustain the changes initiated by MVF on its own. The organization now only acts in a supportive role. In 1992 only 50% of the children ages 9-14 were attending school. By the time MVF had left the community in 2003, 94% of children in the same age group were attending school, 47% of the school going children being girls. In addition to staffing issues the school remains two classrooms short, leaving two classes to be instructed on the

verandas. There is still progress to be made; however, the accomplishments provide the community with a sense of empowerment and responsibility that fuel its motivation to continue the work.

With the success of the school and their children's education, the parents of Ravulapally have not only formed a trust with MVF and the school authorities but they have also developed interest and a sense of duty in the functioning of the school. This along with a shift in attitude with concern to child labour, has been the Ravulapally legacy thus far. Indirectly, however, several other factors have changed within the community. The village has seen a decrease in child marriages and an increase in household income. Because the children are sent to school the parents must now work, as adults they earn higher wages bringing in more money than their children could. Most importantly, with MVF's departure, Ravulapally continues its work with a sense of ownership and responsibility.

*Buchamma*

Buchamma was orphaned at a young age and spent most of her childhood with her extended family. She studied up to VII standard when her studies were disrupted because her uncles decided she needed to be married off; she was only fourteen years old. A family problem had developed, dividing the members and requiring one uncle to take Buchamma in. Unable to look after her individually, the uncles decided that the best option was to marry her off and remove the responsibility from any one member of the family. When Buchamma learned of this plan, however, she took it upon herself to write letters and inform both MVF and her teachers that she wanted to continue her studies and not get married.

MVF initially visited the family in hopes of convincing them otherwise. The volunteer returned several times with teachers but still the family could not be convinced. In fact, Buchamma's uncles were so determined to marry her off they petitioned the Gram Panchayat for its approval over the marriage. A large meeting was held involving all parties and an entire day was devoted to negotiating this young girl's future.

The eventual decision of the Gram Panchayat was that Buchamma's wedding could go forward but it would be the last of the child marriages in Ravulapally. Buchamma's plight however, only got more complicated.

After only a month of marriage her husband died. She was required to return to her uncles but was not welcomed. Instead, she was deemed back luck as all the people who had been close to her had died. This young girl was in such a delicate state that the MVF volunteer feared that she may attempt suicide and realized that if she was not admitted back into the school this possibility would be even more acute.

By this time the community groups were on her side. The Gram Panchayat, youth and MVF visited her family and though it took hours of negotiating, they finally agreed to let her return to the classroom. Though having graduated from X standard, financial issues have kept her uncles from allowing her to continue to junior college and Buchamma has little to occupy her time.

### **The M.V. Foundation's Impact**

The social transformation that has occurred in villages like Kothapally and Ravulapally due to MVF's presence has been dramatic. And as this organization expands its work according to community demand, in areas such as health, it continues to make a positive impact. The sustainability of this development lies in the depth of the transformation. While MVF's mandate is to take all children out of work and into school, the organization recognizes that these children are a part of a community and their situation is not an isolated one.

In the organization's effort to educate working children on their rights as underage individuals, it was also necessary to generate awareness about the community's rights. Though initially motivating parents to send their children to dysfunctional schools where teachers did not show up and barely taught, MVF understood that without a demand for improvement in the form of student attendance, the government would not respond to any requests. Through its tactics of motivation MVF has been able to educate rural communities on their rights as parents, children and a marginalized group. Previously, villagers may have appeared powerless, unable to effectively assert their rights and persistently ignored. Now, however, in communities throughout Andhra Pradesh demands are effectively being made and listened to and the rights of rural children are being protected by parents and communities. Furthermore, development in other areas is

also being achieved as the rural communities strive to claim what they now recognize as rightfully theirs.

In the communities where MVF works, there has been a revolutionization of social norms. It is this fundamental change that has facilitated further development. As communities like Kothapally and Ravulapally realize their potential agency and power, new social norms are established and institutionalized. Through this transformative experience not only can we observe high rates of school going children but we can also identify dramatic improvements in the learning quality and infrastructure of schools. When a new understanding is established within a community, the people mobilize. No longer can the government hide behind the issue of supply and demand. In Kothapally and Ravulapally, the communities have made such demands, seen slow but progressive improvements and continue to assert their rights as citizens. MVF has impacted on these communities directly, shifting social norms and facilitating the evolution of effective demand.

With this general awareness of rights, new responsibilities are being taken on. The protection of exploited children is no longer solely in the interest of MVF. The social norms, which have evolved through this transformative experience, are understood by the majority of community members in Kothapally and Ravulapally. Parents understand their parental responsibility, landlords theirs, the teachers and headmaster and other community groups have come to know what role they too must play. Getting all children into school and universalizing education is a monumental task but in these two villages this goal is high on the agenda. This newfound responsibility has also led to newly developed relationships.

Previously, much of the issue surrounding inadequate school facilities and poor attendance had to do with the blame game which plays itself out in highly bureaucratized institutions. Because the teachers were not showing up, parents used this as a reason to not send their children to school and with no children attending classes teachers claimed there was no reason for them to show up. MVF recognizes that teachers are lowest on the

school's institutional hierarchy while parents and rural communities are at the bottom of the Indian social hierarchy. Because these two groups find themselves in similar power-struggles MVF has encouraged the development of a relationship to form between these two marginalized groups. The organization's thinking is that if the weakest parties within these hierarchies band together, it becomes possible to expose the structural problems that in fact are being covered up by the persistent blaming. These structural issues are what cause the problems experienced on the ground, in the form of understaffing and lack of materials. The negative relationship that for decades has plagued the school system in rural Andhra Pradesh, has allowed for the problems that occur higher up in the institution to go unchecked. Clearly, MVF's work is dealing with deeply ingrained issues but it is very effectively uncovering and rectifying them.

The idea of newly formed relationships can also be seen in the family unit within these villages. For the first time parents are taking pride in their children and not seeing them as strictly income earners or mouths to feed. These children are first generation learners whose progress is a point of pride for their entire community. This change in family dynamics is quite promising and heartwarming. Parents are working harder to ensure their children attend school and in order to provide them with necessary uniforms and supplies. The issue of poverty cannot be used as an excuse for child labour and the parents of Kothapally and Ravulapally are testament to this. These families represent the poor throughout the state. Though daily living is a struggle, poor parents are more than willing to take this on in the name of their children's future. This is a newly enhanced role for many parents as this sort of 'parenting' did not necessarily exist before but it is this that will ensure these children remain in school and encourage future generations to do the same.

MVF has managed to generate impact that goes well beyond its mandate. While focusing on bringing children out of work and into school, the organization has in fact empowered the communities in which it operates. The newly found assertion of rights, adopted responsibility and formed relationships is what makes up the total social transformation that has occurred in Kothapally and Ravulapally. The villages in which MVF works and

has worked have been subject to a highly sustainable and transferable model. Shankerpally Mandal has had some of the most successful projects that serve to illustrate what the M.V. Foundation and its community partnerships are capable of accomplishing.



## **Resources**

All data used in this paper has been collected by the M.V. Foundation. Access to government records is difficult, if and when records exist. Furthermore, the government tends to underestimate raw numbers, according to MVF, as seen by a comparative survey on 'Children Out of School' conducted by both MVF and the DPEP (District Primary Education Program of Andhra Pradesh) in 2002.

The study shows that, in Ranga Reddy District, the DPEP claimed that the number of children (age 5-14) out of school was 9310. MVF's own research in the district, however, shows that 14 164 children were non-school going. More specifically, in Shankerpally according to DPEP records from that same year, 96 children were out of school where as MVF claims that the actual figure was 353.

## **Resources in Shankerpally**

### Kothapally

- Neelakantan – MVF Organizer
- M. Ram Laxmiah – former SEC Chairman
- Narasimha Reddy – current Gram Panchayat President
- M. Srinivas – former Sai Youth Club leader and MVF Volunteer
- T. Mukunda Rao – Kothapally Primary School teacher
- Sri Kanth - Kothapally Primary School teacher
- B. Maneaiah – Kothapally Primary School teacher
- Sri Lakshmi – Headmaster of Kothapally High School

### Ravulapally

- Jahangeer – former SEC Chairman
- Sathyanarayana – former SEC Chairman
- K. Narsimulu – current SEC member
- K. Buchaiah – current SEC member
- K. Naranana – former Gram Panchayat President, current ZPTC member
- C.H.Sudarshan – Headmaster of Ravulapally School

- Fatima – MVF Organizer
- Prameela – MVF Organizer
- Satyanarayana – Mandal Organizer

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