



SHREYAS BALGRAM
SOS

A loving home for every child



Shreyas Foundation

SHREYAS BALGRAM SOS NEWSLETTER

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INSIDE:
How YOUR contributions have been
helping transform lives



THANK YOU DONORS FOR HELPING US RAISE FOUR GENERATIONS OF CHILDREN!



Shreyas Balgram SOS was founded by my grandmother Leenaben Sarabhai in 1962. The seed was sown in her mind when Shreyas Foundation, the first experimental school founded by her in 1947 on the tenets of Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Madam Montessori, shifted from a smaller premises to the present 28 acre wooded campus in 1961 at Ambawadi in Ahmedabad. She was motivated by a deep urge to provide equal opportunities to children from varied socio-economic backgrounds and to the lost, parentless and destitute children, in need of a family and the security of a home.

Shreyas Balgram SOS began operations in 1964 with self-sufficient cottages, each with a mother and nine to ten children. Leenaben visited many centres in India and abroad to study about best practices of upbringing of children. In 1968 the Foundation stone of the present Shreyas Balgram SOS campus was laid by the then Prime Minister of India, Smt. Indira Gandhi. This was the first SOS Balgram in India and the second in Asia.

While the children are not all biologically related, at Balgram, they are family. Children arrive at the SOS Children's Village on the Shreyas campus when their parents are no longer able to care for them or if they are orphaned. As they grow up in one of the five houses and attend classes at Shreyas, they learn important life skills—everything from cooking to computers-in a loving, caring environment. My grandmother was completely devoted to the well being of children till she was in her 90s.

After her health deteriorated I took charge of Shreyas Balgram SOS in _____. I was immediately overwhelmed by the transformation my grandmother's efforts had brought in the lives of several children. I also realized that supporting the children only till they turn 18 was not enough and introduced a policy whereby they live at Balgram and are supported till they attain complete financial independence. Thus, we also started supporting children who are pursuing their graduation including taking care of hostel expenses if they are studying in a different city.

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At least four generations of children have grown at Balgram and are doing very well in life. I thank all the sponsors who have generously donated and helped us transform lives for more than four decades now. During times of rapid socio-economic changes a large number of young children remain "at risk" of neglect and abuse. The data and information presented daily in the media is alarming. We at Balgram SOS continue to express concern on such matters and have been striving to offer positive and remedial actions.

In the following pages you will read accounts of some lives that have been transformed at Balgram; there is heart wrenching story of how an elder brother (all of 5) was separated from his younger sisters (3 & 4) and their reunion at Balgram, there is an inspiring tale of Vivek who grew up at Balgram and today works as an engineer with ONGC, the biggest public sector company of India. I am happy to share with you that two Balgram children, Nimisha and Reshma (who, I am very glad that, have started working but still live at Balgram) have been part of the editorial team of this newsletter.

Abhay Mangaldas
Managing Trustee - Shreyas Foundation



THE STORY OF RADHEY, NISHA AND CHANDNI

Read how the three little separated siblings finally got united and found a loving home at Balgram

Radhey, Chandni and Nisha are three siblings who have gone through a lot at a tender age. Radhey is 8 years old, Nisha 7 and Chandni is just 6. Till the mid 2013 they lived with their parents in slums in Ahmedabad. Ikabhai, their father, suffered from tuberculosis. Their mother left the family when Radhey was just 5. Nisha and Chandni were just 4 and 3 respectively. The father was not in a condition to take care of the children and the children were left desolate.

Luckily, the neighbours called Child Helpline and the two little girls were taken to Mahipatram Ashram, a childcare home for girls. The siblings were thus separated. This was very painful for little children who could not comprehend what was going on. Harsher things lay in store for Radhey. He was taken to a correction home since no other childcare centre could accommodate him.

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‘They are very happy together. Initially they were very scared and none of them uttered even a single a word but they communicate well with other children and play together. They are genuinely happy. I am glad that their ordeal is finally over.’

It was indeed a tragic irony that an innocent child of just 4 was sent to correction home rather than somewhere where his woes could be taken care of. Mayankbhai, the correction home in-charge knew that Radhey was not at the right place and feared his being badly influenced by elder children who stayed there because of juvenile offences they had committed. He called Balgram and shared details about Radhey, Chandni and Nisha.



Some urgent calls were made and Radhey was brought to Balgram on 29th October 2013. His sisters soon followed him to Balgram on 8th November. Radhey, the eldest of the three, does not remember where exactly in Ahmedabad they lived with his father and mother. What matters to him is that all the three live together in Saurabh Parivar at Balgram. Chandni, the youngest of the three, says softly, ‘I like the fact that I can live with my brother and sister here. Now noone will take him away from us.’

The three siblings live at Saurabh Parivar at Balgram. Kiranben, mother says, ‘They are very happy together. Initially they were very scared and none of them uttered even a single a word but they communicate well with other children and play together. They are genuinely happy. I am glad that their ordeal is finally over.’ Radhey is doing well in studies. He also takes active part in swimming, yoga and football and likes football particularly. Nisha and Chandni too are showing promise.

Like Radhey, Nisha and Chandni there are hundreds of thousands of desolate children in India who have lost their families in similar circumstances. Fortunately, these three have found a home for themselves and a family they can call their own. The happiness and hope we see in their eyes shows that everything can be done the support of donors like you. Future promises a lot of Radhey, Nisha and Chandni.



BEING ORPHANED VERY YOUNG SONAL AND SHARMISHTHA WERE LONELY AND SCARED

Read how contributions from friends like you have helped transform their lives



Sonal and Sharmishtha are two sisters who lost their parents when they were very young; Sonal was 5 and Sharmishtha was just 2. They belong to Vadodara, about 100 km from Ahmedabad. Sonal was born in 1991 and Sharmishtha in 1994. They were brought to Balgram in 1996. Sharmishtha was too young to realize her situation; even Sonal does not remember about her being brought here. She says, 'I don't remember where I lived before I came to Balgram. My parents are actually just two names for me, I don't remember how they looked or how they were in person.'

What both the sisters know for sure is that Balgram has transformed their lives and helped them grow into confident young women. Sonal studied till 7th standard at Shreyas (since Shreyas did not operate classes beyond 7th then). From 8th to 12th she studied and stayed in hostel at Lok Vidyalaya Valukad near Palitana, about 200 km from Ahmedabad. Lok Vidyalaya is amongst the distinguished rural institutions of Gujarat modeled on Mahatma Gandhi's Nai Talim concept.

Balgram was always her home when she studied at Valukad and she always spent her holidays here. After finishing 12th she studied nursing at Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh in south India, about 850 km from Ahmedabad. Balgram has always served the role of her family and all the expenses were borne by contributions of friends like you to

Balgram. She is working at a reputed hospital in Ahmedabad. Sonal married Hardik Patel early this year and they live in Ahmedabad.

Sharmishtha was a delicate young child of just 2 when she came to Balgram. She has always been good at sports; she tried studying BA after finishing 12th at Shreyas but quit it for a course in Physical Education. Sharmishtha has won many medals in swimming and athletics at school and a course in related field was always her calling. She says, 'I always loved sports and games and I am very lucky that I have grown at Balgram and studied at Shreyas where best of sports infrastructure facilities are available.'

'Can you ever imagine an orphan getting an opportunity to go to USA on a students exchange program? This has been possible only because we were lucky to be brought to Balgram.'

Highlight of Sharmishtha's life at Balgram was her 15 days visit to USA in 2012 as a part of a students exchange program. Her elder sister says, 'Can you ever imagine an orphan getting an opportunity like this? This has been possible only because we were lucky to be brought to Balgram.' Today, Sharmishtha is pursuing 2nd year in Bachelors in Physical Education at Rajpipla. She plans to do a masters degree and dreams of becoming a sports instructor in a college in future.

Thousands of children like Sonal and Sharmishtha are there in this world, who need your support and benevolence. The hope we observe in their eyes can be achieved through your generous support!



'I AM A SUCCESSFUL PROFESSIONAL TODAY WORKING WITH ONE OF THE BEST AND LARGEST COMPANIES OF INDIA. THANK YOU BALGRAM'

Read Vivek's account on how contributions from donors like you helped make Vivek's life a success story

I was born on 10th June 1983 in Ahmedabad. My brother and I lived with my parents till I was 3 years old when we lost our mother. My family thought it best that we be raised at Balgram and thus in 1986 we came to Balgram. I was lucky that at Balgram I got an opportunity to study at Shreyas, a school founded by a visionary like Leenaben on the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Madam Montessori. Shreyas is one of the best schools in Ahmedabad that aims towards all round development of children and besides studies here I got an opportunity to participate in various activities like art, crafts, dance, drama, games.

In those days Shreyas operated classes till 7th and thus after completing my 7th Leenaben enrolled me at Lok Vidyalaya in Valukad and then at Gujarat Vinay Mandir, two educational institutes found on the philosophy Mahatma Gandhi. I stayed in hostel there but Balgram always remained my home and I returned here in holidays. I did an Electrician's Certificate Course at ITI (Industrial Training Institute) after my 12th.

The quality of always striving for more that I had learnt at Balgram always remained with me and propelled me to reach out for higher goals. Thus, I joined a Diploma course in Electrical Engineering along with my job.

I left Balgram in 2003 but the qualities of independence, honesty, hard work and sincerity that I had imbibed here always stayed with me. I did my apprenticeship at Torrent Power Limited, one of the most reputed power distribution company. Post that I worked with well known companies like Reliance Industries, Ultratech Cement, Gujarat Ambuja



Exports etc. The quality of always striving for more that I had learnt at Balgram always remained with me and propelled me to reach out for higher goals. Thus, I joined a course a Diploma course in Electrical Engineering along with my job.

After I finished my diploma I got an opportunity to join ONGC (the biggest public sector company of India) in 2010 as an engineer. I strongly believe that this happened not only because of my experience in other big organizations but also because of the confidence and quality of persistence that I had acquired at Balgram. My life has completely transformed now; I married two years back. My wife works as a physiotherapist.

We were blessed with a daughter 1 year back and she is the sunshine of our eyes. We recently bought a house of our own. I will always be grateful to Balgram and to Leenaben for making my life what it is today. One of the biggest moments of my life was I was felicitated last year on Shreyas Foundation Day. I heartily wish that all my brothers and sisters living at Balgram today also get opportunities to progress in life like me. I am indeed lucky to have been a part of Balgram.



SAVITABEN – A MOTHER’S STORY

“At Balgram I found my lost family...”



The story of Savitaben’s life is a mirror image of the life of a number of children she has raised at Balgram through the course of last 30 years. Like the desolate children that came to Balgram and found a home they could call their own, she too got her lost family here. Savitaben hails from a small village near Valsad in south Gujarat, about 350 km from Ahmedabad. She was 19 when she got married in 1980. Her husband worked as a schoolteacher in a nearby village. The couple bore two daughters, Harsha and Varsha and all was well in her life till 1985 when her husband abandoned her for another woman. Harsha was 5 years old and Varsha was 4. The couple divorced in 1986 with Harsha and Varsha staying with their mother. Fortunately, her in-laws stood by her but the family was poor and needed someone to work in the absence of her husband who had set up a new home with the woman he had abandoned his wife for. It was then that a chance meeting with a neighbour who knew someone who worked at Balgram as a mother proved to be a ray of hope in Savitaben’s life. Fortunately for her, there was a need for a mother at Balgram. A meeting with Leenaben, the founder of Shreyas Balgram SOS, resulted in her being recruited as a mother. Harsha and Varsha, her little girls stayed with her in-laws. Savitaben recalls, ‘For me the biggest pain was that I had to leave my two small girls behind. But as I became a mother at Balgram this vacuum in my life was filled; there were 8 children who were like my own children. At Balgram I got back my lost family’. Through the course of last 30 years she has raised many desolate children whose lives have changed. They call her

regularly. ‘The elder children at my home have Whatsapp and many of the children who were part of my home wish me in the group on my birthday’, says Savitaben. She smiles widely as she says, ‘They also put pictures of flowers and cakes that I like especially.’ Her day starts at 6.30 at Balgram as she wakes up the children and prepares their breakfast. The elder children help in this and also in getting the smaller children ready. All children at Balgram are siblings who care for each other. When asked about some children she especially remembers Savitaben talks about Suketu and Manjari who came to Balgram when they were just a few days old and Himanshu who came when he was just 3 years old. She says, ‘Leenaben was very protective about these little children and would check on them everyday. I specially remember how good painting Himanshu used to do. No wonder, he is an art teacher today.’ Tears swell her eyes as she further reveals that Leenaben used to give her 80 rupees per month for her daughters besides her salary.

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She further says, ‘After Leenaben’s demise, Abhaybhai took charge and he is very involved with Balgram. He knows all the little details about children and visits us regularly.’ Savitaben smiles widely as Nimisha, the eldest in the home, enters and says, ‘Aav bes beta. Jamiye thodi vaar ma ha (Sit daughter, lets eat in sometime ok). She further says that she is very happy and proud of the children’s progress in life and also reveals that her daughters Harsha and Varsha are both married now and are doing very well. She concludes by saying, ‘I think god had decided my destiny after my husband left me to gain much more than I had lost.’



“THE PROCESS OF MAKING A CHARITABLE DONATION REALLY IS THAT WE CARE, NOT ONLY ABOUT THE WELL BEING OF OUR OWN FAMILY, BUT ABOUT THE WELL-BEING OF MANY FAMILIES THAT ARE IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE.”

Read what motivates Mr. Ankur & Mrs. Birva Gosaliya, long standing donors to continue contributing

The Gosaliya couple, Ankur and Birva, are IT professionals based in UAE. Originally from Ahmedabad, they got married in 2007 and have been in UAE for a little more than a decade now. Both work with Webmasters LLC, one of the most reputed IT companies of UAE, as Senior Consultants. They were very keen on adopting a child even before they married and in fact they started sponsoring Shreya in 2007, a year before they got married. Shreya attended their marriage in 2008.

In 2007 during our holidays in Ahmedabad, we decided to adopt a child. After a lot of research, we zeroed on Shreyas Balgram which offered the perfect donation opportunity we were looking for. We met Madam Leenaben and decided to adopt a girl child at Balgram.

The process of making a charitable donation really is that we care, not only about the well being of our own family, but about the well-being of many families that are in need of assistance. Knowing that we sacrificed something such as time or finance in order to help others in need can give you a sense of purpose in life. Being able to help a child secure good education & living is a huge motivation.

Shreya was 5 years old when we met her for the first time. It has been a wonderful journey from that very moment. Being able to see her progress not only in education but also in swimming, horse riding & football is very encouraging. We are very glad that we are part of Shreya and Shreyas Balgram.



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At Balgram you give children a mother, a home, a family, a community. During all our visits we were amazed to see the love in the eyes of all the children.

Seeing the growth of Shreya over a period of time we are very touched and impressed by the love, caring and guidance she has been getting from everyone at Shreyas Balgram SOS. In future we aim to become more involved with Balgram by donating our time and skills as well.



CONTRIBUTE

Give a child a second opportunity to have a family!

Pay via NEFT / RTGS / Cheque / SWIFT (Offline Payment)

Deposit money directly to our account

Account Holder Name **Shreyas Balgram SOS**

IFSC Code **BKID 0002019**

Bank **Bank of India, Sharda Mandir Road Branch,
Ahmedabad, India**

Account No. **2019 1010 0002 061**

Contribute towards general expenses of Balgram **Any amount**

Education

Contribute the annual fees of one Balgram child **Rs. 27,000/-**

Contribute the annual expenses for a Balgram child **Rs. 71,000/-**

(food, clothing and other requirements)

Contribute the annual expenses of one Balgram home **Rs. 6,18,000/-**
(one foster mother and up to nine children)

Reference:

<http://www.shreyasfoundation.in/contribute.html>