CHAPTER III

INDIAN SOCIETY AND UNACCOMPANIED LEARNERS

“Never Underrate A Street Boy!”

Genereux Philip-TCT Awardee 2012 (NY)

3.0 INDIAN SOCIETAL SET UP- AN OVERVIEW

Indian societal bonds are very strong and firm. There is a bond of union beginning from the smallest unit of the society to the biggest of them all. There is a proper structure that the world notices, vividly, from the Indian Society. This structure is fundamental and individual to any member in Indian Family set up. This bond of union among its members of the family is visible starting from the great, grandparents to the smallest child.

Family is the most basic unit of any society. It comprises the father, mother and the children. Generally in India the father is responsible and becomes the care taker of the family. He is the bread winner of the family too. The traditional idea is that the father normally manages all the affairs of the smallest unit of the society. It is note worthy to know about the equal role played by the mother, which is definitely a significant one. Traditionally the figure of the Indian mother is projected as the lady responsible for all the house-hold chores and duties. Children are under the care of the parents till they are of certain age, say about 18 and above. This is the adult age by which they are considered to stand on their own.

There is significant change of attitude and thinking among the family members, be they in the youth stage or in the elderly stage. Modern thinking is that both the father and mother have equal responsibilities towards the upbringing of the family. They both must
share the responsibilities of the family, or must they take equal responsibility for the upbringing of their children.

Children in their turn must be obedient to their parents. They are looked after by the parents till they are of that particular age. Often the direct responsibilities of the parents end once they are settled in married life. This is only a general rule. There can be exceptions to this.

This takes us to the area of our concern. Children in the families are under the direct care of the parents. But it is noticed that there are many children who are not cared by their parents. Reasons for this lack of concern and irresponsibility from the part of the parents are innumerable. They could be poverty, unemployment, lack of love in the family etc. Whatever be the reasons, the fact is that many are not cared for by their parents. In such circumstances where do they turn to for survival? It is to nowhere except to the world around them-to the streets. So far they have been accompanied by their parents but now they are the unaccompanied ones of the society. Hence they form one category of the unaccompanied children. Since they have never seen the portals of a school, they are called the Unaccompanied Learners of the society.

3.1 DEMOGRAPHIC CONDITION IN INDIA

Understanding the situation of Unaccompanied Learners statistically will give a vivid picture of their numerical presence. The realization of the presence of so large a number of Unaccompanied Learners in our society and more especially in our country will be an eye opener and significant reason for taking up this research. They need to be brought out of such unfortunate situations and realities of our society and minimize their numerical presence to the rock bottom. Thus, this research will facilitate the rehabilitation of a group of such learners who were otherwise unprivileged. This
statistics is for the period from 2012 June to 2013 May. This statistical information is from the annual report of the NGO named **Bosco**: Home link in Bangalore.

**Total No. of New Children: 5654**  
Boys: 4979  
Girls: 675

**Table 3.1: District wise Analysis of Street Children of Karnataka State, India**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>District Wise Children</th>
<th>Male</th>
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<td>08</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Gulbarga</td>
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<td>07</td>
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<td>163</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>569</strong></td>
<td><strong>4138</strong></td>
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Graph 3.1: Graphical Representation of District wise Analysis of Street Children of Karnataka State, India

The Diagram explains about the inflow of Children within Karnataka. A break up of the number of children who landed on the Karnataka state onto its various districts is represented through this diagram. This diagram indicates the fact that 40% (1437) of them were from Bangalore District itself, 6% (257) of them from Raichur, 5% (209) of them from Tumkur. All the other Districts quantity falls below 5%. There are certain areas of the State like North Karnataka comprising of Districts like Bidar, Bagalkot, Bijapur, Gulbarga, and Raichur with its typical features coupled with poverty and easy accessibility to travel by train makes it easier for the children to land up the platforms of Bangalore City.
Table 3.2: State Wise Report Analysis of Street Children in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
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<th>Female</th>
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<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
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<td>168</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Karnataka</td>
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<td>569</td>
<td>4138</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Bihar</td>
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<td>Jammu Kashmir</td>
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**Graph 3.2: Graphical Representation of Males and Females**

**Street Children in India**
The state of Karnataka top 72% (4138) among the States of India. It is followed by the two other neighbouring Southern States namely Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. 10% (536) of the Children rescued were from the state Andhra Pradesh while 3% (168) of them were from Tamil Nadu. Bangalore City railway station receives children from other states as well. Bihar has 4% (223). Most of these children from Bihar or other North Indian States come in search of jobs or are brought for jobs by the middle man and are noticed by the railway staff and are rescued before they are being picked up by hotel brokers or middle man.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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### 3.2 GROWING NEEDS OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION

It is significant to mention at this juncture the growing needs of the younger generation. The needs in general are the same for all groups of people. In order to categorise the different needs of people, recourse to the theory of Abraham Maslow is a must. Abraham Maslow propounded the theory of hierarchy of needs.

Maslow wanted to understand what motivates people. He believed that people possess a set of motivation systems unrelated to rewards or unconscious desires. Maslow (1943) stated that people are motivated to achieve certain needs. When one need is fulfilled a person seeks to fulfil the next one, and so on.

The earliest and most widespread version of Maslow's (1943, 1954) hierarchy of needs includes five motivational needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid. This five stage model can be divided into basic (or deficiency) needs (e.g. physiological, safety, love, and esteem) and growth needs (self-actualization). The deficiency or basic needs are said to motivate people when they are unmet. Also, the need to fulfil such needs will become stronger the longer the duration they are denied. For example, the longer a person goes without food the more hungry they will become.
One must satisfy lower level basic needs before progressing on to meet higher level growth needs. Once these needs have been reasonably satisfied, one may be able to reach the highest level called self-actualization. Every person is capable and has the desire to move up the hierarchy toward a level of self-actualization. Unfortunately, progress is often disrupted by failure to meet lower level needs. Life experiences including divorce and loss of job may cause an individual to fluctuate between levels of the hierarchy. Maslow noted only one in a hundred people become fully self-actualized because our society rewards motivation primarily based on esteem, love and other social needs.

3.2.1 ABRAHAM MASLOW’S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

1. Biological and Physiological needs - air, food, drink, shelter, warmth, sex, sleep.

2. Safety needs - protection from elements, security, order, law, stability, freedom from fear.

3. Love and belongingness needs - friendship, intimacy, affection and love, - from work group, family, friends, and romantic relationships.

4. Esteem needs - achievement, mastery, independence, status, dominance, prestige, self-respect, and respect from others.

5. Self-Actualization needs - realizing personal potential, self-fulfilment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences.

It is important to note that Maslow’s (1943, 1954) five stage model has been expanded to include cognitive and aesthetic needs and later transcendence needs.
3.2.2 EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Maslow's (1968) hierarchy of needs theory has made a major contribution to teaching and classroom management in schools. Rather than reducing behaviour to a response in the environment, Maslow adopts a holistic approach to education and learning. Maslow looks at the entire physical, emotional, social, and intellectual qualities of an individual and how they impact on learning.

Applications of Maslow's hierarchy theory to the work of the classroom teacher are obvious. Before a student's cognitive needs can be met they must first fulfil their basic physiological needs. For example a tired and hungry student will find it difficult to focus on learning. Students need to feel emotionally and physically safe and accepted within the classroom to progress and reach their full potential.

Maslow suggests students must be shown that they are valued and respected in the classroom and the teacher should create a supportive environment. Students with a low self-esteem will not progress academically at an optimum rate until their self-esteem is strengthened.

3.2.3 EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF THE UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

While speaking about the needs, we spoke of the hierarchy of needs by Abraham Maslow. He spoke of different stages of human needs. One of those stages of human needs was the need for self-esteem. Educational needs of an individual will come under this category of needs. Achievement is part of self-esteem. Every human being takes pride in being educated and qualified in the society. It is a human need for everyone to be qualified and be recognised in the society as an educated individual. So are the unaccompanied children in the society. They constitute the potential youth of the country.
3.3 UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND CARE-TAKERS - THE WORLDWIDE CONCEPT

The Unaccompanied Children are the most noticed section of the society living on the pavements and city streets of our country in particular and in the globe in general. The presence of Unaccompanied Learners is a worldwide reality. It is not restricted to any specific parts of the world. Human beings all over the world face similar challenges in the society. Presence of Unaccompanied children is one of such major challenges. There are many organisations at the worldwide working for the upliftment of such category of children. UNICEF is working as a powerful body to eradicate children on streets. The statistics of children worldwide is alarming. Street children can be found in a large majority of the world's cities, with the phenomenon more prevalent in densely populated urban hubs of developing or economically unstable regions, such as countries in Africa, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia.

According to a report from the Consortium for Street Children, a United Kingdom-based consortium of related non-governmental organizations (NGOs), UNICEF estimated that 100 million children were growing up on urban streets around the world. Fourteen years later, in 2002, UNICEF similarly reported, "The latest estimates put the numbers of these children as high as 100 million". More recently the organization added, "The exact number of street children is impossible to quantify, but the figure almost certainly runs into tens of millions across the world. It is likely that the numbers are increasing" The 100 million figures is still commonly cited for street children.
3.3.1 CARE-TAKERS IN THE INDIAN SCENARIO

India has an estimated one million or more street children in each of the following cities: New Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai. When considering India as a whole, there are over 11 million children who earn their living off the streets in cities and rural areas. It is more common for street children to be male and the average age is fourteen. Although adolescent girls are more protected by families than boys are, when girls do break the bonds they are often worse off than boys are, as they are lured into prostitution. The Republic of India is the seventh largest and second-most populated country in the world. Due to the acceleration in economic growth, an economic rift has appeared, with just over thirty-two per cent of the population living below the poverty line. Owing to unemployment, increasing rural-urban migration, the attraction of city life, India has developed as one of the largest child labour forces in the world.

3.3.2 CONCEPT OF UNACCOMPANIEDNESS

Children are normally under the care of their parents. But it is also a fact that there are many children who are not under the care of their parents. The reasons for this could be many- poverty, illiteracy, unemployment etc. In other words, there are many of such children who are not accompanied by their parents. They ultimately turn up to the streets for support. They are then categorised as ‘street children’. We are living in an age where we are very cautious of the terminologies we use to address different categories of disadvantaged groups. Hence they are no more called ‘street children’ rather ‘unaccompanied children’. Since we are speaking in terms of their educational intervention, they are addressed as ‘Unaccompanied Learners’.
3.3.3 UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND THEIR LEARNING

Children from good family backgrounds do not have any problem in their education. But it is not so with the unaccompanied children because they do not have any one to take care of them. They often do not see the portals of an educational institution due to their unaccompaniedness. They need proper guidance by elders. To their rescue often come the Non- governmental organisations and other service oriented groups to support such children. Often the educations of many of such children are taken care of by these groups.

3.3.4 ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN UPLIFTING THE UNACCOMPANIED

There are interventions at government level to uplift the Unaccompanied Learners. Systematic efforts are on to rehabilitate them. The numbers of such category are so large and alarming that it is impossible for the government agencies alone to cater to, so huge a number of Unaccompanied Learners. Hence it is noticed that there are many non-governmental organisations working for the rehabilitation of such learners.

India has set in place various forms of public policy concerning street children over the past two decades, but they have largely been ineffective because they are uniformed by sociological, anthropological, and geographical research on street children, meaning they do not always correctly assess and address needs.

Prior to 1993, the “Official Vocabulary” of post-independence India did not contain the term “street child,” and street children were only helped because they were grouped with other children that worked on the streets. For instance, the Coordination Committee for Vulnerable Children worked to give identity cards to children working on the streets in order to help protect them from police violence. In the early 1990s,
facing pressure from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Indian government created the “Scheme for Assistance to Street Children,” which launched in February 1993. Though many NGOs had meetings with the government to give feedback about the scheme and suggestions to improve it, none of these recommendations were included in the final draft, making it very difficult for NGOs to participate in it.

Since their entrance into the policy arena and the Scheme was set in place, street children have been included in some other policies and programmes as well. The Indian Council of Child Welfare has included street children in their programmes, and in the 8th Five Year Plan a scheme for children in 6 metropolitan cities was set in place. The Ministry of Labour has also included street children in their livelihood training programmes, though this has been met with minimal success because many street children do not have the education necessary to participate in the programmes.

3.3.5 ROLE OF NGO’S, PHILANTHROPISTS AND CHARITY ORGANISATIONS IN EDUCATING THE UNACCOMPANIED

There are different types of strategic interventions. There are also other service organisations initiating interventions in their educational training. It is important to understand that there is an inter play of two factors during the whole process of intervention- educative intervention and educational intervention. Right from the point of first contact we could say that educational intervention begins, of course alongside with it- educative intervention. The educative intervention as such may not be evident and pronounced. That is something that would be taking place within the individual. This can only be inferred. The educational intervention in the strict sense of the term begins, when an individual is initiated into his or her studies. But for our reference we will say that with the initial contact with an individual the educational intervention already begins. But in the clarification of terms we will make a distinction between the
two. We cannot speak of educational intervention isolated from educative intervention because they go hand in hand. Thus we could say that alongside with educational intervention, educative intervention travels like a shadow.

As mentioned above the educative intervention commences right at the very moment these learners come in contact with these organisations. This would be the right attitude to their intervention. The educational intervention does not mean just enrol them to a college or school. This was the understanding once upon a time. The whole process has the educative intervention as its base. We need to understand deeply the psychology of these learners. Every act of kindness shown to them right from the moment of the initial contact is educative for them. They begin to imbibe many values right from the moment of the first contact.

We can speak of a cycle of intervention. This is followed in an organisation called ‘Bosco’ in Bangalore. This intervention has a very scientific approach and this organisation has been at it for about thirty years and more. Since the organisation is dealing with abandoned children and youth, they work in collaboration with the police department. Every abandoned child or youth is brought to this organisation with due permission from the police. Sometimes the police themselves refer such unaccompanied to the organisation.

There are staff on duty round the clock in places where these unaccompanied land up. The places they usually land up are in the metropolitan cities, that too in the bus stands and railway stations. They are straight away taken by these staff and brought to an office in the vicinity.

As soon as an individual is brought to the office, it is important first to ask if he or she has eaten something. This is the most educative intervention. That moment the
individual looks for some concern and care. It is important to understand their psychological frame of mind at that moment – feeling of insecurity. They need to feel that they are in safe hands and that they will be cared for, then the individual will become more at home. Thus this becomes the first educative intervention ever. This is the reason for saying that the educational intervention begins at the initial inquiry done to gather information regarding the individual’s whereabouts.

In the initial contact, this Unaccompanied Learner is welcomed warmly to the institution. Though enough caution is taken to make them feel at home, they still feel out of place. It is something very natural. The initial inquiry is a very tough and tedious task. Often these learners will not open up. It is natural because the environment is strange for them. That is why we say that we need to make them feel at home and comfortable in our company. Even with all our effort to make them comfortable, they will still consider us to be strangers. Only over a period of time they will open themselves up. They will always have a fear as to who we are and what our intentions are. But as time passes they will begin to judge our intentions and motivations and will gradually begin to open themselves. In the initial inquiry we can always expect them to tell you chain of lies. Facts will unfold itself very gradually only. It will happen only after they build up true confidence in you and that you are no more a threat to their personal lives. Those interested are brought to the institution. Others are taken back home after recording their details for future reference.

The individual is brought to the institution and a data card is filled up containing the details about the child. Simultaneously counselling takes place on a regular basis. Depending on their age they are taken to different centres. Those 14 and below are in one centre and those above 14 are in another.
Once they come to the institution they try to contact their parents. If they are able to contact the parents the child is taken back home. If the child is comfortable at home, he is followed up for one more year, if not the child is brought back to the institution and the child is offered assistance to do the formal or non-formal education.

If they are not able to contact the parents they continue in the institution. The child is offered formal education. Those who are interested will be provided formal education. Others are offered vocational training. At the same time they continue to track the child’s family. There is assistance extended to them for job placement in the formal and non-formal streams. Once they are settled with a job they leave the institution and manage their affairs. The organisation even settles them in marriage, in many of the rehabilitation interventions. This is the cycle of educational intervention of Unaccompanied Learners.
Figure 3.1: Life Cycle of an Unaccompanied Child
3.4 CATEGORIES OF UNACCOMPANIED ‘MILEU’

All have equal rights to learn in a Democratic country like India. Though our country is democratic in nature we have many groups of Unaccompanied or Disadvantaged Learners who have no chance of learning. They never see the portals of a school. There are many groups of such Disadvantaged Learners.

3.4.1 STREET DWELLERS

Street dwellers are those people living on the by lanes of busy roads in the cities and who make market places their own home.

3.4.2 SINGLE PARENTED CHILDREN

Children and young people taken from the street by Government homes, NGOs and other service organisations for rehabilitation to bring them out of the street and enable them to live a decent life and make them good and responsible citizens of the country could be children of single parent. At times, some of them do not have the support of their father and at other times the support of their mother. But this feeling of not being accompanied by their parents is substituted by the genuine concern shown to them by the different organisations. Thus they are accompanied to become responsible and educated citizens of the country.

3.4.3 JUVENILE DELINQUENTS

Juvenile Delinquents are those children who commit crimes. These crimes are often not intentional. When some life threatening situations arise they have recourse to such activities to protect their life. At other times they don’t think about the consequences of their misdeeds and venture into such dangerous activities. The statistics of such children in some places of our country is very revealing and alarming.
Today more and more children are committing crimes in India. The statistics of juvenile crime boosted up from 21,088 in 2006 to 22,865 in 2007. India has seen 8.4% increases in the number of juvenile crime in 2007. Out of this, 7,498 were theft followed by 4,832 for hurts, 3,744 for burglary and 2,231 for riots. Madhya Pradesh reported the highest 5,089 number of juvenile crimes in the country followed by 4,499 in Maharashtra and 1,864 in Gujarat. (Stop Juvenile crimes in India 19 ideologues by Ruchi Malviya-Feb.23, 2011)

These juveniles are protected and kept in rehabilitation homes after sorting out legal issues. They may be termed disadvantaged as they are not put for normal schooling. Though they became devoid of the atmosphere of malpractices, yet they are curbed to mingle with the normal peer groups. Their learning methodology may suffer due to this.

3.4.4 ORPHANS

Another group of such disadvantaged learners are the orphans. Orphans are those who have no parents and other relations to support and take care of them. Orphans are often taken care of by the government homes, service organisations and also NGOs.

3.4.5 ABANDONED

This category consists of children and young people who have been sent away by their parents or relatives. There are several causes for sending them away. They may not be wanted at home. For parents they are a burden. Poverty could be another reason. Too many children at home could be another reason.
3.4.6 CHILDREN OF CRIMINAL PARENTS

Another category that belongs to the Disadvantaged group of learners is children of criminal Parents. Children of the Parents who have committed crimes tend to become offenders themselves. They observe the parents and they in turn commit crimes.

3.4.7 CHILDREN FROM BROKEN FAMILIES

Due to lack of family relationships, marriages break up and the children of such parents have no place to go. They form another Disadvantaged group in the society.

3.5 UNACCOMPANIED LEARNERS- ADDED ASSET TO THE SOCIETY

Left to nature’s mercy, caught up in the clutches of poverty, quenching thirst and satisfying hunger with bitter pains, justice denied- amidst all these heavy odds of existence live the millions of abandoned and orphan children and youth who long to hear a word from someone “You are worth someone!” These Unaccompanied Learners are no strangers to us because they are a familiar lot in the society. They manifest characteristic traits peculiar to their situations and living conditions. Education of such disadvantaged group of learners is of utmost concern in the modern educational scenario of our country. Empowering them through education is a rising need of the hour. To bring them in par with the accompanied learners in the society is the duty of every educator. We cannot turn a deaf ear to the desperate cries of these little ones in our society who have no one to care for. With widespread awareness on RTE in our country, it is only right and fitting that we venture into the educational intervention of this section of our society.
3.6 CHARACTERISTIC TRAITS OF UNACCOMPANIED LEARNERS

Unaccompanied Learners run away from home for various reasons. They lack basic amenities. Sometime they pick a quarrel with their parents. Some of them don’t like to study. Others lack genuine love from their parents and siblings. For reasons like these and numerous others, they run away from home and are more often found roaming around the streets of our metropolitan cities. They loiter around aimlessly due to lack of parental support and guidance. They become victims of substance abuse. A common feature we find in them is addiction to sniffing white correction fluid (solution). It is the easiest and cheapest sort of drug they can have easy access to without much of dire consequence like being caught by the police for being in possession of unwarranted items. The original drugs like tobacco or nicotine are very expensive and not easily available.

If we are observant, it is a common feature to find them more in our metropolitan cities with a piece of cloth in hand smeared with this solution or spilt on to this cloth. They sniff or inhale this solution from the cloth through mouth and go into a kind of trance. This is often adhered to when they are in hunger pangs. It is thus the cheapest and best substitute for original drugs.

They also get into other bad habits like smoking and drinking. Each of these bad habits is formed gradually because of the curiosity to test different things.

The type of chores they do on the street are very characteristic of them. They include rag picking, collecting bottles, washing plates and wiping tables in hotels, work as coolie porters and many other odd jobs to make a living.

Another peculiar feature about these Unaccompanied Learners is that they spent all the money they get on entertainment and on food. Going to movies is their greatest
happiness. They watch the same movie several times if their loved heroes are there. They often become film hero worshippers because they do not come across other good role models to emulate from. This is indeed a saddening fact.

They also become prey to abuses of several kinds. They are very often sexually abused by grownups due to their helplessness. They gradually get entangled in sex rackets.

The Unaccompanied Learners are vulnerable to become drug traffickers or carriers since they are paid a handsome amount to do this and they sell these materials in a clandestine manner which will again bring them an attractive sum.

They also exhibit strong bond of unity among themselves which is very difficult to break. Any individual longs to belong to one group or other for their safety and sustenance. It is also a feature in these Unaccompanied Learners to have a leader for this well knit group. Usually the senior most in the group becomes the peer leader. Everything in the group is carried out as per the directions given by the leader. No one would dare to disobey this person. He has the ultimate say in every issue concerning them. His is the last word for them on any issue. If he is not obeyed one might even have to risk his life. His leadership is imposed on the group. The leadership is not due to his genuine concern for the members but for his vested interests.

Speaking about their social networking it is important to note their peer group loyalty. The attachment to family and to its members is to a certain extent substituted by this peer group attachment. This allegiance to the peer group is purely existential than genuine. When they are in trouble they have a point of reference.

We observe diametrically an opposite feature in these Unaccompanied Learners to what is mentioned above. There is no genuine concern and care for each other in these peer groups. Their attachments are merely existential in nature. It is a saddening fact to note
at the same time that they equally do not have any genuine concern and care for their peers. They will betray each other to keep themselves out of troubles.

They are often found shabbily dressed without having proper wash and bath. Their hair will be unkempt. They will go on for days on end without having proper shower. They are least bothered about their external appearance.

Hard life on the street teaches them to be rough and tough. They can withstand any onslaught. No rain and heat will ever affect them. They attune themselves to any inclement weather. They learn to live a tough life on streets. Since life on the street is very hard and tough they also become people of that nature. The environment forces them to be that.

Generally these learners are a very talented lot. Probably it is due to their exposure to innumerable hard realities of life.

3.7 EDUCATING THE UNACCOMPANIED LEARNERS

The Educational Method propagated by Don Bosco for this group of Unaccompanied Learners is called ‘The Preventive System.’ We have often heard the maxim in English “Prevention is better than cure.” It is better to prevent a disease by taking some precautionary measures than to treat the disease itself. This saying is often referred to in the context of medicine. But it is proved to be very practically applicable in the educational method suggested by this great educationist of the 19th century. As the name of his educational philosophy suggests, prevention in education, was better than cure because the latter often involved repression or the infliction of a penalty for a fault already committed. We are able to grasp better the ‘Preventive System’ suggested by Don Bosco, when we explain the 3 underlying Fundamental Principles to it. The 3
fundamental principles of his philosophy of education are: Reason, Fear of God and Loving-kindness. We will now explain these fundamental principles.

3.7.1 AUROBINDO’S SCHEME OF EDUCATION

He has a humanistic approach to education. He gives importance to the development of the soul of every individual. He always wanted the spiritual growth of humanity. He also speaks of each individual in a nation fulfilling his swadharma (one’s duty). Defining true education he wrote, “There are 3 things which have to be taken into account in true and living education, the man-the individual in his commonness and his uniqueness, the nation or people and universal humanity...”

In his philosophy of education there is place for reason also. His education is a combination of the east and the west. He insists on integral education. It would comprise of the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual. Passing through these different stages one reaches the stage of supramental education, where one realizes his true worth or his spiritual worth. This supramental education is thus an important contribution of Aurobindo to the field of education at a time when everyone speaks of man-making education.

3.7.1.1 MAN MAKING EDUCATION

Aurobindo speaks of Man making education. All education should ultimately make everyone a perfect human being. The goal of education is to meet this noble ideal. The more knowledge one acquires the more human a person should be. As human beings climb up the ladder of education, the humaneness within individuals should broaden to endless horizons, so that individuals don’t keep out of their circles other human beings. So that a better society is moulded for everyone to embrace the whole humanity.
3.7.1.2 EDUCATIONAL AIMS OF AUROBINDO

1. Perfection- He speaks of perfection of human race. And this perfection is achieved through integral yoga.

2. Harmony- He hopes to achieve this in the individual, community and humanity through the process of integral education.

3. Evolution- He aims at the evolution of the individual, nation and humanity through education.

4. Humanization- He aims at man-making education. The individual and the nation have to grow as members of one humanity.

5. Harmony of the individuals and collectivity- He speaks of harmony between individuals and also between nations.

6. Building the innate powers- The aim of the school and the teacher is to develop the innate powers of the body, the vital, the mind and the spirit.

7. Cultivation of values- The values to be cultivated should be physical, mental and spiritual.

The school he conceives of is one which would impart a man-making education. As regards the teacher, he has assigned a very important place and he is the guide. But the central place is assigned to the student and he thinks of molding an ideal child through his method of education. He has no rigid scheme of curriculum. He insists on freedom.

3.7.2 DON BOSCO’S SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

Don Bosco was a great Educationist of the 19th century. Don Bosco was born on August 16, 1815 in a little hamlet called Becchi in Turin, Italy. His parents were Francis Bosco and Mamma Margaret. His full name was John Melchior Bosco. They were peasants. He was a person who was born poor, lived poor and died poor. Don Bosco died on
January 31, 1888. His method of Education for the Unaccompanied Learners is a unique one. Don Bosco made use of a special method of education in educating them and he called it “The Preventive System.”

Don Bosco was a person who set aside his life for the abandoned youngsters of the Society. He had a soft heart for the unloved and the uncared of the Society. He dedicated his life for the empowerment of the neglected. Don Bosco’s educational intervention is as a direct response to the dehumanizing and oppressive life situation of the youth of his day especially around Turin in Italy. The rapid growth of industrialization and its consequent need for cheap labor had lured many an adolescent to the city in search of work and shelter. But what they received were long hours of grueling work, poor and oppressive working conditions. Don Bosco responded to this situation with his Educational Philosophy- The Preventive System, intended to mold the young minds into good and honest citizens. Thus the educational philosophy of Don Bosco strives for the total development of the person. This educational intervention started in Italy has spread to the other parts of the Universe. It has spread over to 126 Countries in the world. This method continues to inspire many Unaccompanied Learners even to this day, making them true, good and honest citizens to serve the Society at large.

3.7.2.1 REASON AND PRESUPPOSITION

Don Bosco believed that if the student comprehended the reasonableness of what he or she was doing, or what was being done, he or she did not need external and repressive measures or persons for the maintenance of discipline. Moreover, this prevailing sense of reasonableness on the part of the educator, brought out in the child a desire to be cooperative, self-disciplined from within and not one controlled by external or
repressive forces. To be reasonable one has to avoid complications, artificialities, exaggerations, formalisms, when dealing with the young. To be reasonable was to be natural. Enable the youngsters to choose from the many options that are available to them. To reason out the pros and cons of a problem vexing an individual requires time. We need to put our precious time at the disposal of these people so that they have ample time to arrive at an amicable solution.

Another factor that we need to understand in the context of explaining the principle of reason is to explain the term ‘assistance’. The term means the help rendered to another person in a needy situation. When we speak about the principle of reason, we need to mention the concrete way in which we become reasonable in our approach to the students. It is by way of, what is called ‘assistance’ in the context of the Preventive System. This is a friendly and brotherly presence among the students always. By this presence we avoid the occasions for the young to go astray from the right path. We are with the students to show them the right path before they trample the wrong path. Our presence is not like a police man who is waiting to trap the wrong doer. The presence is like a genuine guide who wants to lead the Unaccompanied Learners to the real goal, just like a good teacher who would explain systematically to his or her students the steps involved in solving or approaching a problem. In this method there is no room for trial and error because there is constant assistance to the Unaccompanied Learners. This is how they are being accompanied all through their stages of learning.

3.7.2.2 ‘SPARE THE ROD AND SPOIL THE CHILD’- THE OLD MAXIM

‘Spare the rod and spoil the child.’ was once upon a time the well-known dictum in English. The understanding of this saying is very clear. If the student fails to fulfill his or her duty, the best method to check his or her irresponsibility is by way of inflicting
punishment; that too by way of physical punishment. The physical pain that he or she suffers is tremendous and hurting.

There is severe psychological trauma the students undergo as a consequence of this physical infliction of pain. The students turn out to be moody. They seclude themselves from the whole class. They become very arrogant and revengeful. They gradually lose interest in everything. The punishments meted out to the students are so severe that they become very bitter in their attitude to those who correct them. Physical punishments are not educative. Physical punishments hinder their psychological growth. Physical punishments are only just instant pain creators without any educative advantages. Hence they must be completely stopped to help students grow positively. They need to be taught to reason out for themselves and not physical infliction of pain which only humiliate students. The modern educative trend is to teach children without physical punishments.

The modern educative methods insist even on avoiding psychological punishments. Once upon a time psychological punishments were considered to be a better option than physical punishments. But it is not so in the modern educational era. Educationists say that even psychological punishments can be detrimental to their growth and development.

It is in the wake of these thoughts and considerations that we look at educating our students through other effective ways. Thus we have given birth to modern technology that facilitates better learning without fear of punishments. The modern technology promotes user friendly environments and methods to make students learning more experiential. It is in this context that the relevance of this research is justified. Students
learn their lessons in an unthreatening manner and at a pace of their own. Here there is no threat of an impending punishment if results are not achieved.

3.7.2.3 ‘SPARE THE ROD AND SAVE THE CHILD’ - THE NEW MAXIM

The old proverb ‘Spare the rod and spoil the child.’ thus opens itself to new horizons of thinking and formulating the maxim as – ‘Spare the rod and save the child.’ It simply means in simple words avoid infliction of every sort of physical and psychological punishments. This sort of space created for learning in an unthreatening manner will go a long way in developing methods that are educative and experiential. The new formulation of the old saying is very relevant in the modern understanding of how we must treat students in the class room environment. We harp upon the point of not punishing students in our class room environments so much that it is the ripe time to develop ways in which students can learn in environments that are nontthreatening, educative and experiential. It is in this line of thinking that educationists of the recent past and in the modern days begin to think of ways and means to teach students in a friendly atmosphere where physical punishments are not remedies for students’ inactivity or disinterest. This is where the role of modern technology comes in, to save students from old monotonous ways of learning. The modern technology has ushered in, to help students learn much more effectively through the modern e-learning materials. This research too is a humble effort in this line to make the learning of a small group of unaccompanied learners more productive, educative and experiential.

3.7.2.4 FEAR OF GOD

All of us believe that God is the creator of us all. Every religion has basic belief and trust in God. Fear of God is the second principle on which Don Bosco’s philosophy of education is based. Don Bosco always instilled in his students fear of God and deep
faith in Him. Our allegiance to Him and childlike confidence in Him will carry us along this journey of life. All what we have and all what we are, is not because of our merit. It is God’s benevolence. He insisted with his students always to remain in the grace of God.

Don Bosco was conscious of the fact that successful Education required Religion as its base. In his Treatise on Education Don Bosco wrote “Religion alone is capable of bringing ahead the work of true Education.” Don Bosco also had the unshakable conviction that in education, religion ought to have top priority because religion alone can touch the heart of the student so as to transform him or her effectively into a true human being, bring out the finest qualities latent in him or her. Don Bosco’s educational activity was directed more to the heart of the individual than to the intellect and hence the next principle.

3.7.2.5 LOVING-KINDNESS

Basically every human being craves for love. We need to genuinely love people. The teacher needs to express his or her sincere love for his or her students by the real concern shown to them. The students should feel that they are truly cared for. When students feel that his or her teacher is genuinely interested in them, they will automatically follow our directions without any compulsion. They understand that the teacher is wishing their good. Love is the distinctive characteristic of Don Bosco’s system of education. He expressed this love as loving-kindness which is in essence supernatural love blended with reasonableness and human paternal and fraternal understanding. It is the teacher-pupil relationship which makes the educator live the life of his students; and love what they love. This interaction between the educator and the students produces a true rapport where mutual trust and respect exist and engender a truly friendly, sympathetic, and helpful situation. Thus this principle transforms the
educative rapport into a filial and fraternal rapport and the environment of education into a family.

In the context of this principle it is significant for us to consider the old English proverb which all of us are familiar with and have used it often in the context of teaching—“Spare the rod and spoil the child.” This is not an acceptable proverb any more. In an era when corporal punishments are considered to be an offence against pupils we say that this proverb does not have any meaning at all in the modern educational scenario. Probably we can reformulate this proverb and use it in the modern context of the 21st century—“Spare the rod and save the child.” This reformulation of the proverb will definitely make sense to the modern educators and educationists. The inner meaning of the reformulated proverb truly reveals to us educators, what it means to be loving and kind in our educative approach to students of the present educational scenario of the 21st century.

Don Bosco is an educationist par excellence. His educative method “The Preventive System” is the result of the long experiment of his educative principles of the method, for over a period of time during the 19th century. It is interesting to note that a pertinent pedagogical response to the educational need of that period of history is relevant even to this day. His greatest contribution to the present educational scenario through his “Preventive System” is the far sightedness and vision he had about the corporal punishments. His principles of the system especially, reason and loving-kindness refers to nothing but the avoidance of physical punishments. It is enough that we reason out with our students to make them do the right thing. Our sincere, genuine, love and concern will never stray them away from the path of truth. This effective pedagogical method is probably unknown to many educators and educationists of the contemporary
world. This method is followed and practiced even to this day in all the institutions under the banner of this great educationist of the 19th century. Let us imbibe the spirit behind this method of Don Bosco in our pedagogical settings and we will notice marked changes, wonders and marvels taking place in our pupils.

### 3.7.3 MUHAMMEDAN SCHEME OF EDUCATION

The dictionary meaning of the word Madrasa is school. The word is derived from Arabic word “darasa” which means to impart lessons. To this word “darasa” the syllable *ma* is added as a prefix; and as per the Arabic grammar with this addition the word Madrasa implies the place at which the act (of imparting lessons) is performed. In other words, Madrasa means the place of imparting knowledge. In common language, educational institutions like pre-primary and secondary schools and even part time centres of Quranic education attached to mosques and fulltime residential institutions of Islamic education are all called Madrasas. But technically the term Madrasa is used for institutions of Islamic education which are generally full time residential schools which imparts education of Islamic theology and law.

In Islamic history Madrasas have played a vital role in building and shaping the future of Muslims from the very inception of the Islam. These Madrasas have a great contribution to religious education, which helps Muslims to know deeply about Islam. Madrasas not only fulfil religious needs of Muslims providing a great contribution to the field of knowledge and art; but also try to make them complete human beings from every angle. Madrasas were among the first institutions onto the path of generalization of modern education. The service rendered by Madrasas is an established fact. In India these Madrasas have played an important role in protecting human, Islamic and social values. These institutions have also played an important role in the survival of Islamic practices, publication and dissemination of Islamic literature, protection of Islamic faith.
and development of culture and civilization besides contributing to the development of the country. These invaluable services rendered by Madrasas can’t be ignored and forgotten.

**3.7.3.1 ISLAM AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

Inclusive education takes place when no individual is excluded from the right to education. As human beings, we may differ in many ways but those are not considerations to exclude one or the other from pursuing education. Inclusive education is beyond all disparity.

All human beings are equal in the sight of the Almighty. In similar manner Islam stands for inclusive education. There is no exclusion of any person or category in the matter of Education. Everyone has the right to be educated. Education is irrespective of gender, caste, creed and any other considerations of this kind. There is no disparity of any kind in reference to education.

**3.7.3.2 EDUCATION THE BIRTH RIGHT AS PER QURAN**

The Holy book of Islam ‘Quran’ has many references in it where it speaks about education as the right of everyone, irrespective of any disparity. There is a chapter in Quran titled ‘Al Khalam’ which means writing material (pen or pencil).

There is also a mention about Absolute Knowledge. In Arabic the word for Absolute Knowledge is ‘Al Hiqmath’. Absolute Knowledge is to be sought going to any extend of the world. Go and search for knowledge, which is the exhortation of the holy book of Quran.

The Quran is called ‘Al Kitab’, which means ‘The Book.’ This book enshrines all knowledge to mankind. Another word used in Quran is ‘Iqhra’, which means, keep reading throughout. Verse 269 of the Holy Quran reads ‘Surah al Baqrah’, and it means
Almighty grants wisdom to whom he wills and who so ever has received it has overflowing benefit.

Rabbi Zidhini Ilma – this means, O God increase me in my knowledge. Rabbi Ishrahali Sadri Wa Yasirli Amri Wahalul Huhudatam Millisani Yafkahu Kawli- this means O Allah open up my chest and make things easy for me and remove the knot from my tongue so that people may understand what I say.

3.8 SUCCESS STORIES OF THE UNACCOMPANIED

The success stories give a boost to the present research. They are truly eye openers for educationists to make educational interventions and bring them to the forefront of the society and make them real added assets of the society.

3.8.1 ON WINGS OF HOPE

On his 24th birthday, Arun Koundinya is a commissioned officer in the Indian Air Force. He was commissioned in June 2011. Looking at this brilliant, active and fun-loving young man, one would think he is a product of one of those high-profile public schools. Far from it, the fact is that his childhood and adolescent years were nothing more than pain, anxiety, uncertainty and struggle.

Arun’s family broke up when he was hardly 4 years old. He lived with his father, S.R.Koundinya in Hyderabad. Koundinya was a very brilliant and well-red man and worked as a freelance journalist. Arun had an elder sister, Sara. They both attended the local school.

Arun was very fond of trains. One day when he was around 8 years old and in Class II, he bunked class and went to see the railway station, along with a friend. The AP Express was about to leave the station. Arun and his friend jumped into the train and
the train chugged off with them! They got down at Nagpur, some 600km away. They enjoyed the journey and were so excited! At Nagpur station they roamed around for a while. It was all fun! They had brought with them some money. They were then planning how to go to Delhi when the railway personnel rounded them up and took them to the State Children’s Home in Nagpur. The authorities of the Home tried to trace the children’s families, but they did not succeed.

Meanwhile, back in Hyderabad, Arun’s father Koundinya was frantically searching for his lost son. He visited Children’s Homes in all parts of the country. It was on one such journey that he happened to come to Don Bosco Navajeevan Balabhavan, a network of Shelter Homes for missing and runaway children, in Vijayawada. It was there that he met Fr. Thomas Koshy, Its Director. Fr. Koshy offered him all possible help. In fact, he made a lot of efforts to search for Arun through the network of Don Bosco Institutions all over India. Koundinya was so impressed by the efforts Fr. Koshy made to trace his lost son that he kept up the contact with Don Bosco Navajeevan and Fr. Koshy.

Arun was, in the meantime, feeling very worried and sad. He was missing his father so much! He and his friend spent about a year in the Government Home in Nagpur. One day in 1996 they escaped from the Home, and after walking a long distance, reached a railway station. Then they boarded a train and came straight to Hyderabad. He then started looking for his father in the station and the surrounding areas. Being a small boy and having been away in a faraway place for over a year, Arun couldn’t trace back his home. Arun lived on the platform for a few days hoping that he would meet his father someday. Finally one day, Arun met his father at the station! His father had come there looking for his missing son! It was the end of an exhausting year-long search!
After returning home, Koundinya took Arun to meet Fr. Koshy at Navajeevan, Vijayawada. During that meeting Fr. Koshy suggested that Arun and his sister could be put in Don Bosco boarding school at P.T.Paru, near Guntur. Thus Arun and Sara began their studies there.

In 1997 Koundinya died suddenly of a massive heart-attack. Koundinya was a kind man and helpful to everyone in the neighbourhood; hence everyone in the area loved him. The neighbours also knew how close Koundinya was to Fr. Koshy. They contacted him at once and informed him of his death. Fr. Koshy reached the spot immediately and stayed there till the cremation was over. After all the religious ceremonies were over the neighbours took Arun and Sara to Don Bosco Navajeevan and entrusted them to Fr. Koshy. After keeping the children at Navajeevan for a period of time, Fr. Koshy arranged to admit Arun and Sara in Don Bosco Boarding School, Ravulapalem, in Godavari District. Arun was admitted in Class 5 and Sara in Class 7 in June 1998.

In the meantime, Fr. Koshy made efforts to search for their mother and finally he succeeded. She was living in Delhi. She came to meet Fr. Koshy and the children. She kept regular contact with the children. During holidays, the children used to go to Delhi and stay with their mother. In fact, when Sara completed her 10th Class, she went back to her mother in Delhi and continued her studies there. However, Arun had made Don Bosco Navajeevan his home- the teachers, staff members, Anu Aunty, Fr. Koshy, and others became his family members. He completed his 10th Class with 76% marks in 2003.

Thereafter, Fr. Koshy put Arun in Loyola College, Vijayawada, for his Intermediate studies. He stayed in the college hostel. He completed his intermediate in 2005 with
78% and on his request Fr. Koshy arranged for him to study Aeronautic Engineering in Indore, Madhya Pradesh. Unfortunately the College at Indore was undergoing a lot of academic and administrative problems and so after about two years of study Arun wound up the course there and returned to Navajeevan. Arun then pursued a B.Sc. Degree in Mathematics, Electronics and Computer.

By then, Arun had a desire to get into some good government service especially Air Force. So he used to keep looking for ads in the newspaper inviting applications for government services. One day, he saw an advertisement from ‘Indian Air Force’ for Ground Duty Officers’ Course (GDOC). He applied for it, cleared the written test and the various interviews. He passed all the tests and got selected on merit for GDOC. Just then his Degree results also came; it was June 2010. He got 62% marks. Immediately he joined the Course at the Air Force Academy, Hyderabad. On 18th June 2011 he completed the training and became a Commissioned Officer. Believe it or not, Arun is now all set to conquer even greater heights!

Arun now says: “All what I am I owe to Don Bosco Navajeevan, to the various persons at Navajeevan, like Fr. Koshy, Anu Aunty and others. It is true, that I applied for jobs, wrote the exams etc. But, without the support of these persons, I would not have reached where I am today. At a time when I was going through hard times, it was Don Bosco Navajeevan that supported me, sustained me, motivated me and stood by me”.

3.8.2 FROM SLIPPERY STREETS

Look at his stunning records! First movie role at the age of 10; four feature movies by age 14; the ‘Best Child Artist’ citation at the South India Film fare held at Chennai in 2001. And in Sports, the ‘Best All-Rounder’ award in the All – India Pepsi Cricket Tournament in the under – 18 category in 2005; the ‘Best All-Rounder’ in the Pepsi
Tournament in 2008, at the age of 21. No mean achievement for a boy who, as an 8-year-old, was thrown into the streets, and spent two years begging for food on railway platforms in Bangalore!

Born in May 1989 at Yeswanthpur, Bangalore, in a respectable middle-class family, Manjunath studied up to Class 3 in a private school. His father worked in BSNL (then P&T), and his mother was an artist in a Drama troupe. Suddenly in 1997, some problems cropped up in the family due to which his father left home. His mother struggled to prolong their stay in the rented house for some more time, but had to move out, unable to pay the rent. Finding no support anywhere, she came to the Bangalore Railway Station with her only son Majunath, then 8 years old. For the next two years, this railway station became their home and source of daily bread!

One day in 1998 Ms. Shanti, a staff of BOSCO (a Don Bosco organization for the care of children at risk in Bangalore), met them at the Station and talked to them. She encouraged the boy to visit BOSCO Yuvodaya, a Shelter Home for children on the streets, closed to the Railway Station. Thereafter, Manjunath began to be a frequent visitor to the Shelter.

One day towards the end of that year, his mother fell ill, and BOSCO staff admitted her to St. Martha’s Hospital, Bangalore. She was in the hospital for over two months. Manjunath, worked day and night to find the money for her treatment! Ms. Sheeba, another staff of BOSCO, in the meantime was coaxing the boy to come and stay at BOSCO. By the end of 1998, Manjunath came to stay at BOSCO Mane, another Shelter Home of BOSCO, at Chamarajpet, Bangalore.

From day one at BOSCO Mane, Manjunath showed his aversion to study. No amount of coaxing would change his stand. He wanted to work and ‘do’ things! Hence, he was
first allowed to train as a two-wheeler mechanic, and later he also did Welding, Carpentry, Book-binding, etc. He was quick to learn everything!

In the beginning of 1999, one day, Smt. Kavitha Lankesh, the famous Kannada Movie Star and Director, visited BOSCO Mane with the intention of finding a boy to act in a movie (Deveri) she was intending to produce. She selected a few photos of the boys, and out of them she finally chose Manjunath! In the meantime, his mother was admitted to NIMHANS, Bangalore for further treatment. One day in May the same year, he was on the sets, shooting Deveri, when the news of his mother’s unexpected death reached him. He attended her funeral calmly, blending the agony and ecstasy of that hour!

After the completion of the shooting of Deveri, to the surprise of all, Manjunath expressed his desire to go to school. Manjunath explained, “I saw those aunties and uncles (meaning, the movie personalities), I listened to their conversations, watched their movements, and their culture.” He paused to control his feelings, and continued, “And in my heart there and then sprouted a desire to be like them.” Again he paused thoughtfully. “After Deveri became a success,” Manjunath continued, “When the media persons came to interview me, I could not respond well; I felt so ashamed! There and then I decided I must go to school.” He was enrolled in Class IV in June 2000, at the age of 11.

In 2003 – 04, a few more offers for acting in movies came his way. So far he has acted in four Kannada feature films: i) Deveri (Oct. 1999); in this film directed by Kavitha Lankesh, Manjunath acted as Kyatha with Nandita Das, acting as Deveri, his sister. This was his first movie, and he was only 10 years old then. The film was a success and ran for over 50 days. Manja (as Manjunath was fondly called) received ‘the Best Child Artist’ citation in the South India Film fare held at Chennai. He was also awarded the
‘Best Child Artist Award’ by the government of Karnataka in 2001, for the same movie.  

Despite the glamour of the movies, Manjunath wanted now to give more attention to his studies. He worked hard and performed well, so much so, in the Class VII Board Examination (2004) he secured 98% marks!

In the summer of 2003, fortune again smiled on him! The Imtiaz Ahmed Cricket Academy (IACA), the famous Bangalore-based cricket club which has produced master cricketers like Rahul Dravid, Robbin Uthappa, Barringon Rowland, and others, contacted BOSCO and selected a group of children for their coaching camp. Manjunath, then 14 years, was one of them. In the year 2005, he was selected to the under- 18 Team to play for the All India Pepsi Tournament in Bangalore. The team won the title and Manjunath was chosen the best all-rounder. Soon he got into the Third Division of Gary Cricketers Club (Approved by Karnataka State Cricket Association). Most recently, in October 2008, in the same Pepsi Meet at Hyderabad, not only did the Senior Team of Imtiaz Ahmed win, but also Manjunath was awarded the Best All-rounder title and won a trophy! Manjunath now plays also for Corporates.

While all these were happening on the sports front, Manjuanth completed his SSLC in 2007 securing a First Class. He was then admitted in St. Joseph’s Composite College, Bangalore, for his PU. In 2008 – 09 he completed his PU studies with 69% marks. At present Manjunath is doing B.Com, second year, at St. Joseph’s College, Bangalore. He is also doing a part-time job as a Life-skills facilitator at Dream a Dream, an NGO,
promoting sports, through the help of Fr. Cyriac Adayadiel of BOSCO. He is now drawing a salary of Rs. 8,000/- His attention now is divided between his college studies, his work and playing cricket for the Academy-certainly a difficult balancing act.

While on the one hand, Manjunath nurtures his ambition to get into the Karnataka State Cricket Team, he is making every effort to leave a mark in the field of acting and movies. He also wants to contribute substantially to the child care sector.

**3.8.3 A HERO FROM ZERO**

Arindam Mahato hailed from Dumurdi Village of Purulia District in West Bengal. He lived with his father Nihal and his mother Gundal. His mother died while giving birth to his younger brother Ganesh. Theirs was a low caste Hindu family. Arindam’s family lived in a small single-room mud house. Nihal worked as a daily wage labourer in the village. He was addicted to alcohol. There was always unhappiness and tension at home due to his father’s drinking. His father would beat and abuse all of them regularly. There was extreme poverty, not even enough food for them to eat. After his mother’s death there was no one to love the children. The home environment was very unpleasant. Then his father married the second time without giving any prior notice to his children! It happened when Arindam was in Class 4. One day when he came back from the school he was surprised to find a woman dressed up like a bride in his house. On asking a neighbour who she was, he was told that she was, his stepmother and that from then on their life would be made more miserable! On hearing this he felt like an orphan. He was cursing his father in his heart. Without hesitating for a moment he just ran away.

When he left, the 10-year-old Arindam had no idea of where he was going and how he would survive. He only knew that in order to live a better life, he wished to stay away
from his parents. He was feeling very lonely. Images of some other boys from his village who had left home earlier flashed across his mind. He did not inform anyone and did not take anything for the journey ahead. The only thing that he carried was pain in his heart!

He came to TATA Bus stand. Here he started working as a helper in a hotel close by. He had the task of washing dishes. His owner was very happy with his hard work and sincerity but would punish him for every small mistake. Arindam did not like this. He was looking for peace, respect and dignity.

One day, a customer who came to the hotel, offered him a job as a domestic helper. Without a second thought, he left the hotel. In his new job too he did not find happiness. There was no time for rest during the day. He alone had to do all the household work. The environment was that of mercy and dominance. He left the place after four months. He reached Howrah Railway Station. He sat on a bench staring into the distance. His face was blank! Just then Brother Tasha Joseph, a staff member of Don Bosco Ashalayam, passed by. Seeing Arindam he stopped and talked to him and invited him to Don Bosco Ashlayam, a Shelter Home for runaways and lost children.

On reaching Ashalayam he liked the whole atmosphere. Many Fathers, aunties and uncles talked to him. He felt accepted. After being there for a few days, he underwent a bridge course at Asha Neer, a sub-centre of Ashalayam. This was a sort of preparation for him to go to school. Thereafter Arindam was admitted to Class IV at Asha Jyoti School. On completing Class X, Arindam decided to undergo vocational training. He completed his ITI at Don Bosco Industrial Training Institute at Liluah, in 2010.

Once he had settled down, attempts were made to link him up with his family. But Arindam did not ever express a desire to go home even during the vacations. He did not
want to maintain any contact with them. Whenever he was asked anything about his family by anyone, he would avoid the conversation and request that the topic not be raised.

It was during the second year of his ITI course that he went home for the first time. It was nine years after he had left home. This too was out of compulsion as he needed his birth certificate. He did not remember his house. When finally he reached home, both his father and stepmother gladly welcomed him and accepted him wholeheartedly.

Today Arindam is working as a C.N.C. operator in Vikrant Forge, Dankuni, Hoogly, West Bengal, drawing a salary of Rs. 5,500 per month. He is 21 now. Hard work, will power, self-confidence and positive thinking are qualities found in him. He is a role model for other children in Don Bosco Ashlayam. He is especially known for being a good listener, one who listens to others with an understanding heart.

He has re-joined with his family. His stepmother has accepted him and he has developed a bond with her. He is happy to be a part of his family. At the same time, he is rooted in his past. He says that it has always driven him to do better in life. The support he received from Don Bosco staff members is cherished by him. He often visits Ashlayam to share his joys and sorrows. He seeks guidance and support from the Fathers whenever he feels necessary. He is recognized and appreciated in his native village too. Once a mere zero, today he is a hero.

Arindam wishes to give back what he has received from Don Bosco in some form to the society. One way he does it is by spreading awareness about the rights of individuals as citizens of a country. He talks to people regarding the importance of being responsible citizens by acquiring the Voter’s ID Cards, as well as collecting other certificates that they have a right to obtain from various civil authorities. He involves himself in
teaching villagers regarding the importance of education, especially elementary education. He is also involved in making people understand the ill effects and legal implications of social evils such as child marriage.

3.8.4 RAG-PICKING TO COMPUTER ENGINEERING

The Shelter Don Bosco, at Wadala in Mumbai, is a Home for runaways and missing children. The Shelter has been instrumental in transforming the lives of many a youngster. Arjun Pratap Singh is one of them. Arjun, presently 20, is in the first year of Engineering. He hopes to become a Computer Engineer one day.

Arjun comes from an economically stable joint family in Rourkela in Orissa. His parents got separated when he was very young. He stayed with his mother, maternal grandmother and three maternal uncles and their families. The family started ill-treating him and finally put him to work in a hotel. Within two days, the hotel owner too sent him away as he was not satisfied with his work. He did not know what to do or where to go. He only knew he didn’t want to go back home. He went to the Railway Station where he was befriended by a group of boys like him. After some days, the group took him to Delhi. Being in a group was fun. From there he went to Mumbai. When they reached the city, the first temptation was to go sight-seeing. In the process, Arjun’s friends left him and went away. In his attempts to survive in the city of Mumbai, he found some more friends. They taught him different tricks to carry on.

Around that time, a social worker took him to a Centre on Santhurst Road. Here he participated in the Children’s Mela organized by Shelter Don Bosco, a centre for children at risk at Wadala, Mumbai. He left this place too as he preferred the freedom of the streets to the more ordered regimen at the centre. This time too it was peer influence that had brought him out into the street.
Soon, with some of his friends, he went back to Delhi where he worked as a rag-picker. As he was not found very efficient at this work, he was asked to move away. Then he was for a while with a family that made flower garlands to earn a living.

He was brought back to the Shelter in Mumbai by one of his street friends. After this he went to Jamshedpur where he worked in a hotel for a while but soon came back to Mumbai where he started washing cars to earn a living.

One day in 1998 he was seen by a Don Bosco CHILDLINE Staff. The boy was brought to Shelter Don Bosco again. From that time, he settled down in the institution. Attempts were made to re-start his education. He began with non-formal education.

Now Arjun also wanted to get in touch with his family. He wrote several letters but there was no response from home. Don Bosco accompanied him in these efforts. In 2003 Don Bosco was able to trace the boy’s family and showed them some of Arjun’s photos. The family was unable to recognize the child. This was disappointing for little Arjun. He would often be seen upset. He was helped to overcome his depression through counselling. Soon he was transformed into a different child.

Arjun proved he was a quick learner. Within no time, he picked up enough to be sent back to school. Seeing this, Shelter Don Bosco got him admitted to Sitaram Prakash Hindi Medium High School. This was a further source of motivation for him and he started doing well in extra-curricular activities too. This was the place where he completed his higher secondary. He passed the SSE examination with 74%, creating a record for the Shelter too! After knowing his potential, Shelter Don Bosco offered to take care of his higher studies. He was sent to Don Bosco Ahmednagar for his intermediate studies which he finished with 62.33% in the Science stream. Thereafter, he entered Don Bosco Institute of Technology at Kurla, Mumbai, where he is currently...
doing the first year of Engineering. Shelter Don Bosco is proud of Arjun Pratap Singh, one of the few boys who could go as far as Engineering.

3.8.5 A GEM OF PUREST RAY

Chantamma worked as a coolie labourer till the age of nine. Today at 18 years, she is doing Engineering in the prestigious Indian Institute of Information Technology, Nuzvid, Andhra Pradesh. On asking how she achieved this feat, she only blushes! “It’s all due to Don Bosco Navajeevan, Vijayawada, and Fr. Thomas Koshy”, says Chantamma with all modesty! If it were not for the timely intervention of Navajeevan, this little girl’s fate would have been no different from what poet Thomas Gray describes in his ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’:

“*Full many a gem of purest ray serene,*

*The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear;*

*Full many a flower is born to blush unseen*

*And waste its sweetness in the desert air*”.

Chantamma Vilugudi was born in a small village of Chigudipadu in Krishna District of Andhra Pradesh. Her father Kandha Rao and mother Lakshmi Kandamma were both agricultural labourers. They belonged to the Madiga community (traditionally engaged in shoe making).

Chantamma was the youngest of the three daughters of her parents. They lived in a small house allotted to them by the government under the housing scheme. They had no land of their own. Since her father often suffered from ulcers and her mother got frequent attacks of migraine headache, they could not go for work regularly. Hence at
the age of 7 Chantamma also joined her sisters for coolie work in the neighbouring agricultural farms. Poverty, illness and the sheer inability to support three daughters left Kandha Rao and Lakshmi with no option but to ask their little ones also to contribute to the meagre family income.

As a result, Chantamma had no time to go to school, to play or even to take rest. Deep inside, this bright and intelligent girl longed to go to school to learn and to have fun, but these were dreams beyond her reach. She had no one to turn to for help. “This is my fate”, she would tell herself, stoically suppressing the pain in her heart and resign herself to the daily drudgery of working in the fields.

This was the time Don Bosco Navajeevan launched in 2002 and Anti-Child-Labour Campaign in the State of Andhra Pradesh. Rallies were conducted and door-to-door surveys made. During one such campaign, Ms. Syamala, a social worker and staff of Don Bosco Navajeevan, one day visited Chantamma’s house and learned about the girl’s plight. She explained to the Parents about the implications of child labour and how child labour perpetuates the cycle of poverty. Syamala told them about the existence of Government Hostel facilities for children and also offered them the opportunity to reside at Navajeevan and go to school. Though it was not easy, she was able to convince the parents. Finally, they allowed their youngest daughter Chantamma to go to Navajeevan. By now Chantamma was 9 years old.

At Navajeevan, Chantamma was admitted to the residential Bridge Course for girl children called setu. She had to begin with the alphabets! On completion of the Bridge Course, Chantamma was admitted to class III. She was very quiet and hardworking. She was obedient and self-disciplined. The Girl’s spirit of determination was her biggest strength which made her move ahead very fast in studies. Very soon she was
sent to Class IV in a mainstream Government school with residential facility at a Government-run welfare Hostel at Gunadala, Vijayawada. Navajeevan kept providing all the necessary support. She was a very quick learner and a rank holder every year. Finally, in 2011, in Class X, she gave a stunning performance, scoring 547 marks out of 600.

At this time there was a Government Scheme for rural students who score more than 500 marks in SSLC to directly enter Engineering colleges through what was then called Integrated Engineering Courses. For Chantamma it was smooth sailing to the prestigious Indian Institute of Information Technology, Nuzvid, Krishna District, on scholarship! After the six-year course, Chantamma will be a triple IT Engineering Degree holder.

Currently, she is a first-year Engineering student and stays in the Campus Hostel in Nuzvid. Her hard work and determination, with the timely intervention and support of Navajeevan Vijayawada, has made possible for Chantamma something considered hard to achieve even for children from rich families. The Government takes care of her study and hostel. She is also eligible for various awards and incentives that Navajeevan provides for meritorious students.

Children like her, Navajeevan is accompanying Dhantamma on her journey, besides the regular follow – up and emotional support, it is taking care of her expenses like stationery, exam fee and pocket money.

Chantamma has been linked back to her family too. She regularly visits her family during holidays. They too come to meet her whenever it is possible for them. They are grateful to Don Bosco Navajeevan for its facilitation and support.
Chantamma wishes to live a good life and help other girls like her to come up in life. In her own words, “You have given me so much in my life. . . It was a start from scratch. I want to pay it back by helping other girl-children to come up in life”.

3.8.6 DROPPED OUT, BUT NOT OUT

Mounesh Kammar, Son of Rangappa from Garbagudi village of Harapanahallik taluk of Davangere district, Karnataka, dropped out of school when he was in Class VI. When he was six years old his father died. He was an agricultural labourer. He has three brothers and a sister, all elder to him. They all lived in a small tiled single-room village house. Since his mother Lakshmamma, who also did coolie work, was unable to sustain the family, Mounesh started working on a farm belonging to their neighbour. He was paid Rs. 15/- for a full day’s work.

In 1998 Don Bosco Child Labour Mission (DBCLM) started the Residential Bridge Course for child labourers in Davangere. Don Bosco also formed a network of NGOs in the district for the eradication of child-labour. By then, Mounesh had worked on the farm for about a year and a half. An NGO known as SEEDS (Socio, Economic and Education Development Society) identified Mounesh at his workplace and brought him to DBCLM for the Residential Bridge Course. The boy showed great interest in learning. After one year, he was re-admitted to the Government school at Harapanahalli and placed in Class VII. He was also admitted to the Government hostel for scheduled caste students in Harapanahalli. He studied there till he passed his SSLC.

After his SSLC, Fr. Kuriakose Puthenpurayil, Director of Don Bosco Child Labour Mission, helped him to join the Pre-University Course (PUC) at Shree Ujjaini Jagadguru Morularaja (SUJM) College, a private college in Harapanahalli. In the first
year, he stayed in a rented room as he did not get a room in the Govt. Hostel. But in the second year he stayed in Govt. Hostel. He passed PUC with 81.66% marks. It was a remarkable achievement.

After PUC he got admission for Diploma in Education (D.Ed.) under the Government quota where he had to pay only a small amount. He completed his D.Ed. with 80% marks. After this he prepared himself for various competitive examinations and in December 2010 he was selected for the post of Police Constable. Since December 2011, Mounesh is undergoing training at the Police Training School at Khanapur in Belgaum District.

Mounesh says that Fr. Kuriakose is like a god for him; what he is today is due to him. He is also grateful to his brother who supported him partly during his studies.

On being asked what would be his motto in life as a Police Constable, Mounesh said he would work for bringing justice for the poor. He is a model for all the students of Don Bosco Child Labour Mission and makes DBCLM proud.

3.8.7 WHEN EVERYTHING SEEMED HOPELESS

I am Rakesh Das from Nagaland. I have my parents and a younger brother at home. When I was studying in Class VII, I had a fight with some boys in the village and they threatened me with dire consequences. So out of fright, I escaped and reached New Delhi Railway Station. Not knowing what to do. I was roaming about in the station in 2003 when I was befriended by Don Bosco staff members who brought me to Don Bosco Ashalayam, a Shelter Home for runaways and missing children.

Don Bosco first put me through a Bridge Course, and then admitted me in Class VIII. Thereafter I had regular schooling up to Class XI. In the meantime, I got in touch with
my family and came to know that they were in dire need of financial help, in fact, facing starvation. Then I met Fr. Jose Mathew, the Director of Ashalayam, and explained to him my situation. I told him that I need to discontinue studies and go for some work to support my family that was in dire need. At that moment Fr. Jose talked to the authorities at Radisson Hotel at Mahipalpur, New Delhi, and arranged a job for me there.

After a few weeks, seeing my sincerity, hard work, and computer knowledge, the management selected me as a Job Trainee in Human Resources Department. On completion of the training, seeing my satisfactory performance, I was promoted as Human Resource Associate in August 2011.

Today at the age of 21, I draw a salary of Rs. 12,000/- and enjoy many facilities, which is a great achievement for me. With the money I sent home every month, my family was able to tide over the crisis. Today they are very happy.

My life in Don Bosco Ashalayam, New Delhi, is something that I cherish very much because there I was given lots of opportunities to develop myself. This “Abode of Hope” gave me hope when everything seemed hopeless in my life. All that I am today is because of Ashalayam, I am very grateful to Don Bosco for all the things that it gave me to make myself self-reliant and confident in my life.

3.8.8. A TOUCHING STORY

Malhari was born in Tasgaon, a village in Sangli district of Maharashtra, on 7th February 1992, as the youngest of six children of his parents. All his elder siblings were girls - Mangala, Sandeepa, Vaneeta, Suvarna and Sujata. Baburao his father and Gokula his mother were weekly-wage agricultural labourers. Unable to feed so many mouths with their meagre income, Malhari’s parents sent all his sisters to work in the
field. Being the only son, the whole family set their hopes on Malhari; they hoped he
would one day become a good farmhand and look after the family. No one in his family
had ever gone to school. By the time he was nine, he was doing three jobs-selling
newspapers, working at a bakery and digging in the field.

If life had been a daily struggle for Malhari and his five sisters it became unbearable
when their father began to be addicted to alcohol. After drinking, his father would beat
up his mother and his sisters too! This was an everyday occurrence. The worst day in
the week was Wednesday as it was the weekly market day. His father would bring all
his ‘bottle-mates’ home and have a party! His mother had to cook meat for the party.
Once the party was over and the friends gone, the beating and abuse session would
begin! For young Malhari, it was such a painful scene. One Wednesday, his mother and
sisters were beaten so badly that, unable to take it any longer, Malahari picked up an
argument with his father, for which he too was thoroughly beaten up. And that very
night Malhari left home, with only the clothes he was wearing and some little money
that he had with him and reached Pune Railway Station, which was about four hours
journey by bus from his village. Malhari was just 14 years old then.

When he reached the station, he was very hungry. He did not know what to do. He ate
something from a stall at the station and slept on the platform. In the morning, he got
into a train and reached Vijayawada the following day. Throughout the long journey,
he had neither eaten nor slept. He was very tired and hungry. At the station he looked
for food. But what could he get? There was no money. He had no choice but to pick up
a loaf of bread from a stall and run away. He got a cup of tea at another stall and did
not pay for it too. The fear of being caught made the little boy get into a train. He was
now destined to reach Chennai.
At the Railway Station, Malhari met a man called Sangappa who offered him a job - taking care of 10 buffaloes. In return, Malhari could stay in the house and would be given food and all other things. The family was rich. Besides the cattle, they had about 10 acres of agricultural land. But Malhari could not stay for long there. The verbal abuse of Sangappa’s wife was unbearable; he was not given, even two regular meals. Whatever he got was only stale leftover food! After a month’s work, unable to bear the ordeal, he left the place.

He was once again in train, and this time he reached Banglore. Malhari narrates that he had been roaming on the fourth platform of Bangalore’s Majestic Railway Station for a day when Bro. Noel from BOSCO (a Don Bosco Organization in Bangalore that is at the service of the young at risk) saw him. This was a time when Malhari had lost hope of finding any job and was finding it difficult to trust people any more. But Brother managed to convince him and the next day he was brought to BOSCO Mane in Chamarajpet as he had expressed desire to study. From BOSCO Mane, he was sent to Don Bosco, Ajjanahalli, a sub-centre of BOSCO, for continuing his education.

Malhari says it was difficult to adjust to the demands of School life as he spoke only Marathi. Also he had never gone to school before. He did not even know the alphabets. The counsellor Ms. Sheeba counselled him and he came to the conclusion that it would be better for him to join the skill-training programme. Malhari opted for welding and successfully completed the basic training in one year and a half. Thereafter he was sent for on-the-job experience at Don Bosco Sumanahalli where he worked for one year.

After the training, he was placed in Datta Fabricators for work. After about six months of work there, Ms. Silvi, a senior staff of BOSCO, motivated him to contact his family. A letter was sent to his home sometime in June 2010. After a few days, Malhari’s
father called up BOSCO. Next week his father and mother came to BOSCO and saw Malhari, for the next several minutes, three hearts fused together in one warm embrace! Malhari went home with his parents that day. The entire village had changed except his house and his surroundings and also his father’s drinking habits. All his five sisters were married off. The whole village came to see Malhari. They were all happy about return. He also joined for work at Prabhat Fabricators at Rajampure where he gets a monthly salary of Rs. 7,500/-

However, Malhari was sad about his father’s drinking habit and the situation at home. One day he called up Silvi aunty at BOSCO and told her about his situation. He was motivated to explain to his father his situation. He was assured that the situation could improve. He decided not to feel bad about his father’s addiction but to help him out of it. One day he was in Sangli, a nearby town, trying to buy a mobile when he met a doctor in the shop who was working on addiction. Malhari shared his concern with the doctor. The doctor prescribed a medicine which was to be mixed with tea and given to Malhari’s father. From that day, Malhari himself has taken the responsibility of giving his father tea. With regular use of this medicine, his father’s addiction reduced. For Malhari this was a big boost. Now he suddenly became very enthusiastic and positive about life.

In the meantime, Malhari has purchased his own house in the village. This cost him around Rs. 1 lakh. He took a loan of Rs. 50,000 for this purpose. Now he is working day and night to repay this loan. Malhari narrates that he does not mind working for 16 hours a day now. Apart from working at Prabhat Fabricators where he draws a salary of Rs. 7,500/- he also works as supervisor in a neighbouring shop called Vanitha Textiles which pays him Rs. 4,500/- He can easily take care of his parents too. There are many difficulties, but now he never thinks of running away. He is not afraid of working hard
and facing all that comes. He is happy that he can take care of his family and live a
decent life.

At least once a week Malhari calls up Silvi aunty and seeks her advice. In Malhari’s
words, “From Silvi aunty I knew what love and affection meant. She taught me how to
behave. She has helped me to turn my trials into trails”. He expresses pride in having
been associated with BOSCO which has been instrumental in transforming his life and
the lives of so many other young people.

3.8.9 BONDS BEYOND CHEMISTRY

With an M.Sc. in Chemistry and a Master’s in Social Work and gifted with inborn
leadership qualities, Chittajallu Anand Kumar would seem cut out to be the CEO of a
company earning a fat salary. But, Anand delights in another kind of chemistry in life
and that puts him in a class apart. To grasp the world of Anand Kumar, you need to
listen to his life story as he himself narrates it. “I belong to a traditional, middle class
Hindu family of Vijayanagaram town which is also the headquarters of Vijayanagaram
District of Andhra Pradesh. My father Krishna Rao was a technical helper as he had
studied ITI. He worked in various factories, but would not stick with anyone for long.
My mother Lakshmi was a house-wife and had studied up to 7th class. I had an elder
brother by name Kiran and a younger brother by name Ravi.”

“My father earned enough for all of us to live a respectable life. But he was addicted to
alcohol which almost ruined our life. He would disappear from home for long periods
of time and then reappear suddenly. In the meantime, my mother had to get all the
things we needed from her parents. But when he reappeared he would grab everything
in the house and sell them for his drinks. I had seen my mother being regularly abused,
both physically and verbally.”
“When I was around 7 years old and studying in Class III, My father disappeared for a long time. My mother was finding it very hard to bring up the three children all by herself. One day, she took us all to our maternal grandparents houses in another part of the town. Since it was difficult to keep all three of us there, one day my aunt came and took me to my paternal grandparent’s house. My paternal grandmother was a school teacher. Unfortunately there I was not happy. I was separated from my mother and my brothers. On the one hand, I was angry and sad, on the other, I was jealous of my brothers. I always wished to escape from my grandmother as I was scared of her. I was also constantly punished and shouted at by my aunt, who was my father’s sister. As for my grandmother, though she was a school teacher, she hardly seemed to understand children and childhood. She wanted me to do all the household work at the cost of my going to school. My mother and siblings seldom got an opportunity to see me. This situation went on for some years.”

“In the meantime, I made friends with Sunil, a boy from the neighbourhood. He was facing similar problems at home. So we both decided to look for better options. We left our homes without informing anyone. It was in 1995, when we were both studying in Class VIII. Sunil and I met outside our school while the other children were in the class. We went to a shop where bicycles were given on rent. After taking one such bicycle, we started riding in an unknown direction. After riding for about 120km, we were completely lost, so we left the bicycle there and went to the railway station. It was Tuni Railway Station near Visakhapatnam. We did not know where we wanted to go, yet got into a train. The ticket examiner saw us and spoke to us. After hearing our story, he put us in a train which would take us back to our home town.”

“After reaching the station, Sunil went to his house with a lot of fear in his heart. I too was scared to go home. So I came to the neighbourhood and enquired from a neighbour
about the situation in my house. He told me that my grandmother, aunty and everyone was upset and angry about my running away. I got so scared and thought that they would thrash me if they found me. So I entered the house when my grandmother was not there, and taking some money (I knew where the keys and the money were kept). I ran out of the house, never to go back again. On the way I counted the cash Rs. 600/-”

“I went straight for a movie. From Vijayanagaram, I remember taking a train to Vishakapatnam, then a bus to Tuni and then a truck to Rajahmundry (All these were done just to mislead my family members from tracing me). From here I got into a bus again. This brought me to Vijayawada early in the morning. I went down to the Krishna River to have a bath. Someone stole my clothes when I was having the bath. I had entrusted my clothes, with all the money in my shirt pocket, to a family I saw on the river bank. This was one of the worst days in my life! I was left with only a towel around my waist. I was embarrassed and kept hiding in the cold waters for many hours. Then I noticed a shirt hanging on a drying line for a long time. At one moment when no one was watching, I took that shirt and walked away. I spent some more time on the river bank and walked towards the railway station. I was wearing a towel and the stolen shirt. I was very hungry. There at the railway station I was met by another boy named Srinu. He talked to me and they took me to Don Bosco Navajeevan Balabhavan.”

“At Don Bosco Balabhavan I was given a good meal and clean clothes. Though I stayed there only for a few days, there I felt accepted, loved and nurtured. A staff member, Mr. Anand interviewed me and wrote down some of the details. I recall not being able to trust anyone and giving all false details. Based on the interaction that Mr. Anand had with me, I was sent to Vidya Bhavan, a unit of Navajeevan. Here I was with 20 other boys of my age. The place was like a home with foster parents to look after us. Within three days of my stay, I was admitted in Class VII in the R.C.M. High School in
Pezzonipet. Initially school was not an interesting experience. I would fall sick often. Since I was a runaway child – a street child— I was treated with contempt by the teachers. They behaved towards me as though I was a second-rate student. I worked hard and slowly created a place for myself. I kept working hard but I didn’t receive recognition until one day the Maths teacher put before the entire class a difficult mathematical problem. I was able to solve it and nobody else could! Thereafter the Maths teacher began to like me and I began to feel accepted.”

“I motivated five other Navajeevan companions of mine in my class. We decided that we would show everyone that we too can perform well. In fact, all six of us did very well in studies. With the support and constant encouragement of Fr. Koshy and Anu Aunty, I improved in academics and started taking part in all extracurricular activities. We also did well in sports, science club, and various school-level and inter-school competitions.”

“I started receiving the love and care that I had always longed for, but never experienced. In addition to that, my foster parents, Fr. Koshy and Anu Aunty were regularly in touch with me. I was a topper in my class and soon the leader of the Home. I started motivating all the boys in the group. Soon our group became one of the best groups of students in Navajeevan.”

“In Class X, I became the leader of my school. I stood first in the public examination. All my companions from Navajeevan also secured First Class with high marks. I became the topper in my school with 78% marks! The things that helped me the most in my journey ahead were the love, care and personal attention I got from Fr. Koshy and Anu Aunty. We were given freedom and were trusted, and that changed the lives of so many boys, including me. Fr. Koshy became my role model and I in turn became a role
model for other younger boys. It was a beautiful feeling to be recognized and appreciated.”

“When I finished my Class X in 1999, Fr. Koshy sent me to Loyola College to do my Intermediate Studies. I stayed in Navajeevan and attended college. It was the first time I was learning everything in English. It was a struggle. I scored 63% in Intermediate. After this I joined Satavahana Degree College, Vijayawada, for a B.Sc. degree (Maths, Physics and Chemistry).”

“In 2004, the third year of my Degree course, encouraged by many persons, particularly Anu Aunty and Santhosh, a long-time friend of mine, I decided to pay a visit to my home. Ten years had gone by since I left home! So many changes had taken place that it really took me a lot of time to locate my mother’s house. And when I identified the house there was a woman sitting outside the house. I asked her if that was Rama Rao’s house. She was actually my mother’s sister. She almost guessed it might be me and then slowly recognized me. She was so overcome with emotion! She was all excited. She hugged me and welcomed me to the house. My mother was not there at that time; she had gone to her elder brother’s (he is a police constable) house in Vishakhapatnam. My mother’s sister informed my mother at once and the following day my mother came home. I was happy to see my mother, yet I was not so excited. I recognized that I had some anger towards her. Later I realized that it was not really her fault that I was sent away to my grandma’s place. In the absence of my father’s support she was trying to divide the burden and manage the situation. Then I accepted her and showed my love towards her. I was happy to get back my family again. Thereafter, I have kept up the contact with my family.”
In the same year I received the news of my father’s death. Since he had the habit of going from city to city, one day some people found him dead on the wayside. It was also reported in the newspapers. Some people gave the news to my home and my family members identified the body. I went home for the burial.”

“I finished my Degree in 2004 scoring 68%. At this stage I wanted to get into a job to earn some money. But everyone encouraged me, particularly Fr. Koshy and Anu Aunty, to continue studying. Hence I enrolled myself for M.Sc Chemistry (Though, personally I wanted to study computer, everyone encouraged me to go for Chemistry). In 2006 I completed my Post Graduation with a score of 71.1% marks. Almost immediately I got job offer from a reputed Biotech Company in Hyderabad, as a trainee in production. I worked there for six months (I was paid Rs. 4,000/- a month. I was not happy to continue there as I was missing Navajeevan.)”

“I wanted to be in Navajeevan and work for children like me. I wished to give back some of what I had received from Fr. Koshy and Anu Aunty. Hence I joined as a staff at Navajeevan in 2007. Knowing my desire to work with them, Fr. Koshy suggested that I do my Masters in Social Work. Soon I registered myself for MSW in Nagarguna University through correspondence. I completed the course in 2010. After this I got associated with the Child Safety Net Project (CSN) under the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS). Now I am the Project Coordinator of this project at Navajeevan. Now I am paid a salary of Rs. 13,000/- a month.”

“I wish to continue to work for children through Navajeevan as this is the place which gave meaning to my life. Many people ask me why I am working in Navajeevan for a small salary, when I am a Post Graduate in Chemistry. But I am determined to serve Navajeevan and strengthen its programmes and projects for children. I have also
undergone many training programmes under NIPCCD, UNICEF, etc. I enjoy being a Trainer in Children’s Parliament. Soon I hope to become a Programme Manager in Navajeevan.”

“I stay in a flat outside Navajeevan. Sometimes my mother stays with me. She also stays with my other brothers for some period during the year. Since my home is some 400 km away, I am not able to go home often to meet my brothers and others.”

“I feel proud of being a part of Navajeevan, which did not just look after me, but nurtured me! This is where I learned to respect children. Navajeevan has a fantastic scheme, and a heart that cares for children. I have learnt immensely from Fr. Koshy, Anu Aunty (Ms. Annapurna) and others. Fr. Koshy is the one who has influenced me most. His life is like a book for me; I imitate him every way!”

3.8.10 STREET URCHIN BECOMES FACTORY OWNER

In 1993, the 16-year-old Shivakumar ran away from home. He worked and begged on the railway platforms of Bangalore. He also worked in hotels where he was abused and ill-treated. Today, at 32 he has a two-storied house, for which he paid Rs.28lakhs! He owns two small factories and does good business. Recently he purchased a plot of land in Bangalore paying Rs. 35 lakhs! A true ‘rags to riches’ story. ‘How?’ is the obvious question you will ask! Find out as his story unfolds here.

Shivakumar hails from Chennakuppa Village near Katpadi in Vellore district of Tamil Nadu. He has not seen his father Purkotiya. His mother Kuppamma told him that he had hanged himself after a dispute with his grandmother. His mother worked as a coolie for Rs.20/- a day. Poverty and hunger were all that Shivakumar knew in his youth. No wonder he dropped out of school while in Class VII and started working as a
coolie. But there was no steady income and whatever he got was hardly enough to meet his expenses. After a month’s hard work he would get about Rs. 300. He thought he would go to some big city and earn something more to support his mother.

With the little money he had earned, Shivakumar left home, came to Katpadi railway station and boarded a train. It took him to Bangalore. As he alighted, a man approached him and offered him a job in a hotel. The place was Ganganahalli. After working there for a month, he asked for his salary. The owner said ‘next month’. He worked there for three months without pay and then ran away. All his dreams got shattered. Somehow he reached the Bangalore City Railway station. He was so tired and sad. He lay down and slept like a log in a quiet corner to recoup himself. He was not sure how many hours passed; he was woken up by Mr. Ramesh a staff of BOSCO (a Don Bosco organization that takes care of children at risk in Bangalore). The two chatted for a while and Shivakumar agreed to go with Ramesh to BOSCO Yuvakendra.

At BOSCO, Shivakumar shared his story with Ms. Mary Triza, the counsellor. As he shared the story of what happened to him in the hotel. One of the staff Ms. Brinda Adiga, who was then in-charge of Advocacy in BOSCO, took Shivakumar to the hotel where he had worked and, with the support of the police, got his salary released – Rs.1,200! After this, Shivakumar was taken back to his home in Vellore.

After staying at home for a few months, Shivakumar returned to Yuvakendra. He had come on his own, and with a clear purpose. He wanted to learn to stand on his own feet. Mary Triza identified this urge in him. Mary says that Shivakumar would have been 17 at that time (1993). He chose to go to his maternal uncle, at Tannery Road, for learning some trade. He was allowed. The work there was that of cable wiring. Shivakumar found the work difficult and left the place after a week. He came back to Yuvakendra.
Mary then placed Shivakumar with Mr. Arun who was trainer and employer known to BOSCO. He had a Nickel Chrome Plating factory on 80-feet Road, Rajaji Nagar. He was also a member of the “Youth for Youth” and a friend of children. Mary chose the place because the employer was known and there was another Tamil boy, Muruga, at Don Bosco Yuvakendra who was going to the same place for work. Shivakumar knew very little of Kannada. Muruga would be good company for him and would also help him pick up the work as well as the language. The two became very close friends and keep in touch even today.

It took Shivakumar several years to learn the intricacies of Nickel Chrome plating. At the end of the period, he was getting a salary of Rs.3,500/- per month. Mary describes the joy on his face when he received his first salary. She remembers scolding him once for spending the entire salary on enjoyment. She recalls personally collection the salaries of Shivakumar and some of the other boys. She says that the temptation to spend was very strong among the teenager; so, collecting the salary was also a part of disciplining them.

Mary says that Shivakumar was very focused on his work. Muruga and he were sent to live independently in a room near Magadi Road. The security deposit for this room was paid by BOSCO and the rent had to be borne by the boys themselves. Later he changed his job as he was offered a better salary Rs. 5,000/- per month—at Sarbana Electrical Plating at Srirampura. Shivakumar worked here for three years.

He got married to his maternal cousin Pramila in 2003. Now he was no longer a bachelor and hence wished to have his salary increased. The employer did not agree. He waited for 3 months but the employer was adamant. This was the time when Shivakumar’s wife gave him the idea of starting their own factory. Pramila contacted a
friend of hers, Mr. Munirappa, who lent her Rs.1 lakh. It was a pleasant surprise and a
great motivation for Shivakumar to start his own enterprise.

With Rs. 1 lakh and some bank loan, Shivakumar started his factory of Nickel Chrome Plating about 8 years ago. In the initial stages Pramila would also devote a lot of time
to the factory. She had studied up to Class X and hence could understand accounts and
do a lot of secretarial works that were needed. She would manage all this while
Shivakumar looked into the practical aspects like production and marketing. As the
business started flourishing, he was able to buy gold and jewellery for her. Shivakumar
proudly says the credit for the success of his venture goes to his wife. Shivakumar was
also able to support his brother financially to contest and win the Gram Panchayat
elections in his village.

Three years ago, he started another factory. He has also purchased a house three years
ago in Ramachandrapuram close to Okhlipuram. The property is a two-storied building
which cost him Rs. 28 lakhs. Shivakumar is constantly on the path of progress.
Recently he purchased a site in Pinya worth Rs. 35 lakhs. He has also acquired two
vehicles.

Five years of the marriage had passed. The couple did not have children. Again Mary
Triza helped them see Dr. Padmini in St. Martha’s Hospital and then took her to Desai
Nursing Home. A lot of money and effort went into this. The treatment was successful.
A baby girl was born to them; the cute little one, Kirti, is now one-and-a half years old.

Shivakumar has not forgotten his journey from misery to success. He does not lose any
opportunity to contribute in BOSCO’s programs, materially and financially.
3.9 CONCLUSION

In conclusion it could be said that Unaccompanied Learners are truly added assets to the society. The statistics provided will reveal the urgency with which we need to initiate ways to rehabilitate such students. The strategic method of intervention explained can accompany individual learners to grow up as empowered citizens of the society. Inclusion of this unaccompanied group of learners into the mainstream of education through this experimental intervention makes this research a significant one in the area of education. This intervention makes this group of Unaccompanied Learners move from their present status to a comparatively better state of life. The researcher was able to assist them in their learning and thus accompany them in their learning. Thus they are accompanied to a certain extent in their learning difficulty. They are empowered to be better learners in the society through this experiential learning. The success stories were the contributions of a NGO in Bangalore by name ‘Bosco’. The success stories from different parts of our country inspire the researchers to do research for such disadvantaged group of learners. It is worth spending time doing research on such category of Unaccompanied Learners because the success stories reveal the dramatic ways in which they are transformed into responsible citizens and how they are accompanied by different organizations. It is even more satisfying to know that they become even officials at the government level and they in their turn have great concern for such category of learners. They take great interest to be of great service to such learners because they know the hard way through which these Unaccompanied Learners come up in life.