



STORIES FROM THE GROUND

“

“Muktangan has **empowered** us in many ways. We earn something which adds to the family income. Even our **status** in the family has improved. When we step into the community, people recognize us as Muktangan teachers.”

CHHAYA JADHAV

Community Developed Teacher, School Leader and
Teacher Educator



Table of Contents

1. Varsha Lanjwal
2. Himanshu Jaiswal
3. Reenudevi Chourasiya
4. Kartik V. Parmar
5. Pournima Jadhav
6. Ansh Shivhare
7. Priyanka Nakka
8. Saikiran Sanku
9. Smita Naik
10. Ananya Sangare
11. Ashok Gupta
12. Vivek Tandel
13. Tabassum Sayyed
14. Aditya Yadav
15. Sawroop Basutkar
16. Ansh Yadav
17. Aparna Kamte
18. Vineel Krishna
19. Radhika Kadam
20. Meghna Durgam
21. Ruksar Qureshi
22. Khushi Sayani
23. Case Study Guide!





VARSHA LANJWAL

Muktangan Teacher, Prabhadevi School

“I always wanted to be a teacher so I immediately applied to Muktangan but two people suddenly passed away in my family. So, I couldn’t give my interview. It felt like this was another major setback to my career”.

Varsha Lanjwal was born and brought up in Pune. When she shifted residence from Pune to Mumbai, she found out about Muktangan. At the time Varsha worked as a part-time typist so she could support her family. While it seemed like a downhill path from there, Varsha never gave up her passion. The determined lady that she is, she applied to Muktangan, and after a few hiccups she successfully got through.

She joined us as a preschool teacher and progressed each year to a higher standard through hard work and zeal. However, she hit, what seemed like, another humongous roadblock when her niece was diagnosed with Tuberculosis. Varsha was the only one in the family who could go back and forth to the hospital, taking care of the child. This meant missing classes and erratic school timings. She was able to manage only thanks to the immense support received from her colleagues and senior teachers.

“Whenever I had to leave early or take leaves, my senior teacher never said no. I was getting immense support and I felt protected. If not for that, I don’t know if I could have sailed through it”.

Varsha still recalls the most special day of her career. When she was teaching at Love Grove School, her student - Abdul - fell ill and was hospitalized for ten days. She missed having him in class. One day she was surprised, to receive a call from Abdul’s father.

“He kept pestering his father for a whole week that he wanted to talk to me. Abdul got on call and told me that he will get well soon and come back to school. I felt so nice, I can’t express in words. I motivated him and said that his friends and teachers were all eagerly waiting for him”.

Varsha cherishes immensely the bond she shares with her children at school. More than anything else, she feels satisfied that she has an identity of her own because she has paved her own path. She has completed her B.Ed. course this year, at the age of 43.

Even during lockdown, she continues to hone her English-speaking skills by watching videos, reading books, and conversing with her niece. During these tough times she volunteers to provide breakfast and tea for the watchmen and cleaner of her building, showing empathy and generosity - upholding the values of Muktangan.

“One must fulfill common people’s needs”.



Himanshu is a 13 year old student of Muktangan who has been with us since the Jr KG. He possesses a deep interest in science, a passion was cultivated in him from childhood and only increased since he began learning Biology.

He is keen enough to keep pestering his teachers with doubts and increase his knowledge constantly. His teachers, too, took notice of his immense interest and supported him with many opportunities to continue to develop it. They encouraged him to participate in national examinations like the annual scholarship exam, Homi Baba exam and Science Olympiads.

Even during lockdown, he keeps replenishing his knowledge through self-study. He reads a lot of science related books and attends all his online Muktangan lectures. His father works as a taxi-driver and his mother is a housewife. He tells us how he has never faced any major hardships in life because of the constant support provided by his parents.

His biggest learning from Muktangan, is a value that even his parents have reinforced in him; to be helpful to people and society. He aspires to become a heart-surgeon. He wants to be the best at his job, and at the same time conduct free heart surgeries for underprivileged people. With his passion combined with compassion, Himanshu is sure of achieving his life-goal which is to be a good person.



REENUDEVI CHOURASIYA

Muktangan Teacher, Eliphinstone School

“I still remember my first ever day at school. I was in front of a group of four-year olds and I didn’t know what to do. I was so scared that I started crying. But Lakshmi ma’am, my senior teacher helped me. Whenever I face any problem, I always think of what Lakshmi ma’am said. I will never forget her words – Never give up and always keep trying in life”.

Ever since she was a child, Reenu aspired to become a teacher. The drive to become an educator is what led her to eagerly fill out the form for the Muktangan teacher education program; but she was disqualified due to age constraints. Trying again after her 12th standard examinations, she cleared through all interviews and today she is close to completing 14 years with Muktangan. Initially, Reenu’s father dissuaded her from taking up any work because of their community's value framework.

“A girl has to get married and do household work. Only that is the correct way for women here”.

She persisted and was allowed to do so because the teaching profession was considered respectful. After joining, the biggest challenge she faced was communication. Having studied in a Hindi Medium school, Reenu was almost alien to the English language. But as she entered the Muktangan Teacher Education Programme, she started experiencing the change herself. With the support provided by Muktangan, through English proficiency classes, Reenu improved rapidly. From not being able to complete a sentence in English to teaching tenth standard students the language subject, she has truly come a long way.

Reenu has gone through many ups and downs in life. Before joining Muktangan, the economic condition of her family was not good. Her father ran a paan shop and the pay she received was barely enough to sustain a comfortable life. As she gained proficiency and growth in teaching skill, she started providing well for her family.

Once she got married, she continued her job so that her family could lead a secure life. Her husband, was earning reasonably well and her in-laws were supportive of her job. Reenu was developing professionally and her life was slowly enhancing. However, things took an uncertain turn when both her children were diagnosed with serious illnesses. Had it not been for her mother, she would have had to leave the job to take care of them. She struggles even today, with her mother getting older but Reenu is determined, she has dreams for herself. She wants to add to her professional qualifications by pursuing a B.Ed course, simultaneously while working. She wants to work for at least two more years and then take a call for her future.

“Yes, teaching is my passion, but I might have to leave my job sometime soon. I have two children, both are constantly unwell. Even though I am passionate about my job, family comes first”.

“My teachers stood for me and supported me a lot, especially Prachi teacher. She compulsorily made me do my homework and took extra classes so I could cope up”!



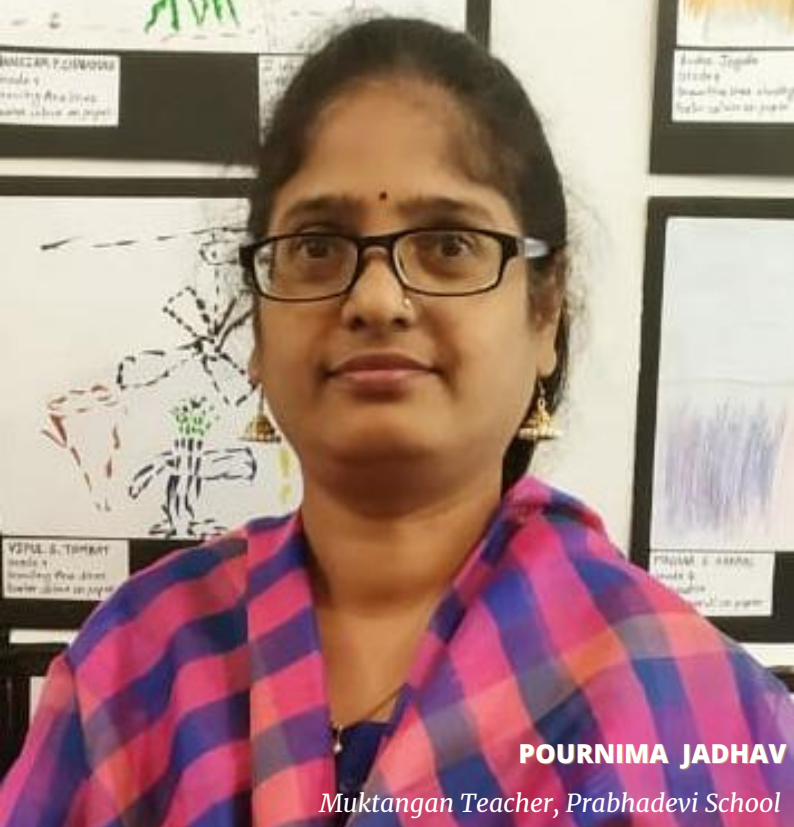
KARTIK VIJAY PARMAR

Muktangan Student, Eliphinstone School

Karthik started his formal education at the Muktangan Globe Mill Passage School when he was five years old, he is currently in the tenth standard. He lives with his parents, grandparents, siblings and aunt, an 8-member household. From a very young age, he always seemed to be a very bright student, who parallelly excelled at sport as well.

Right from Carrom, to Kabaddi, to Football; Karthik had a keen interest in most games. So much so, that he used to eagerly wait for the PE periods and after-school time when the teacher allowed them to play. As he approached higher grades, being the responsible student that is, he felt the need to shift his focus more towards academics.

Today, Karthik comes across as a clear-headed boy, oozing self confidence. His father works at a wine shop and his mother is a home-maker while his aunt works as a beautician. Despite living in a crowded household his parents and family are very supportive of him and his dreams. When asked about his future goals, he was quite candid when explaining that though he had the aptitude to pursue vocational interests like becoming a chef or a Merchant Navy Officer, what he really aspired to become was a hairdresser. His aunt inspired him to do so and he has had conversations with her about the occupation, skills required, and the courses he will have to complete to take it up as a profession.



POURNIMA JADHAV

Muktangan Teacher, Prabhadevi School

“Even today when I go wrong, my faculty teacher supports me. She asks me to be free from fear, otherwise it would hinder my learning. There is nothing right or wrong, there is room for improvement for everyone in this world and Muktangan gives me the courage that we can all become better everyday”!

Pournima teaches Sapling year and has been with us for four years now. Before joining Muktangan, she was unemployed and desperately searching for a job as the economic condition of her family deteriorated. Her brother was the only one providing for the 7-member household and it was becoming more difficult by the day. Her neighbour, a friend, happened to be a teacher at Muktangan, shared details about us and encouraged her to connect.

However, at the time, Pournima could not speak English at all and she was extremely shy when it came to interacting with new people. Her worst fears came to life on her first day at the development centre where she was put in a room full of confident English-speaking strangers. Most of them were young, just completing their Bachelor’s Degree and there she was- a 39 year old homemaker. She feared that she would not be able to catch up as easily or quickly. But she kept pushing herself because of her family’s needs. Two months into the job, she felt like she couldn't do it anymore. She wanted to leave because she kept doubting herself.

“I felt like others were learning things faster, I felt I was not caring enough, I couldn't plan or explain anything to the children. I felt that the children shouldn't suffer because of my incompetence”.

When her faculty and senior teachers noticed this, they intervened and counselled her. Slowly she started realizing that it was not a competitive environment but a developmental one. She opened herself up to her colleagues and she was surprised to see how benevolent they were.

"This (program) was not a race where I had to do better than the other teachers, rather every teacher needs to embrace their own uniqueness, and learn in their own time. What is important is the spirit of learning".

She had joined the teacher development program due to a financial need but it turned out to be a blessing instead. The job ignited a passion in her. Not only did it give her economic independence, but also transformed her personality completely. She now buys things for herself and also feels proud to contribute to the family income. She is enthusiastic about going to school every morning and learning new things. She now also mentors teachers who face the same problems she did. She finds her creativity inspired and is always bubbling with ideas during meetings regarding class activities.

“At Muktangan, I learnt that everyday you have to learn”.



ANSH SHIVHARE

Muktangan Student, Prabhadevi School

Ansh is a nine year old student at Muktangan's Prabhadevi School. His mother is a housewife while his father is an ice-cream vendor. He has a 5 year old little brother who is also enrolled at a Muktangan school. He is a very happy-go-lucky, playful child who loves playing games, especially football. His favorite subject is English as his teachers encourage him and his classmates to speak in English.

His favorite teacher is Mumtaz Ma'am as he likes her kind personality. He enjoys his P.T. sessions as well and his favorite part of school is Annual Day when he gets to perform on stage. Despite his exuberant personality, he has some very profound thoughts as well. Even at this age, he is clear that his career goal is to become a doctor one day.

He is an independent child, who studies on his own because his parents are too busy most of the time. He says that he has learnt a lot from Muktangan for academics and life. He really misses school during lockdown, and his friends but is in touch with his teachers and keeping up with his studies even as he stays with his family at his village.



“I never thought I would become a teacher. But when I joined Muktangan as an intern, I thought why didn't I study in this school? I need to come from the first standard and study again here”!

Before joining the Muktangan Teacher Development Program Priyanka worked in a bank back office. She was not satisfied with her job because it did not allow her to grow, her schedule was very hectic, and she could not spend any time with family or on herself.

“I had only that much knowledge, it never expanded. But here, I learn new things everyday”.

Her own brother and sister studied at Muktangan and that is how she got familiar with our educational program. They both were part of the first ever student batch of Muktangan and Priyanka used to accompany them to school meetings. She loved the method of educating through activities and experiences which, she thought, was in stark contrast to her times of rote learning.

It surprises her how she never thought of being a teacher before, because now, she wants to continue in Muktangan till retirement. All this would not have been possible without the support of her faculty and colleagues. There was never a sense of competition among teachers to outperform anyone or hold back anything new they had come across. Everyone would open up with a plethora of ideas during the planning sessions, making it the most accepting and inclusive space without any judgement whatsoever. Not only would they share the good parts, like their ideas, methods and strategies but also their difficulties.

“Muktangan is a giving family”.

The teacher community is so close knit that Priyanka could share absolutely anything with the hope of getting advice and support. Her biggest pillar of support has been our CEO Dymphena. They share a special bond because whenever they meet, they hug each other and talk. She is Priyanka's safe-space, who gives her every support. They have had conversations on all kinds of topics, ranging from life to paper conservation. With all this support and encouragement, Priyanka is now confident of her capabilities. She has now turned her profession into her passion, and constantly seeks to learn new things.

“School is too interesting for me, I have to go there and enjoy it. That is my default”.



SAIKIRAN SANKU

Muktangan Student, Ambedkar School

Saikiran is currently in grade 5 at Muktangan's Ambedkar school. He has a keen interest in science. He first aspired to be a doctor but he is not very sure currently. Whenever he discovers a new profession, he is immediately interested in it. He is waiting for that interest to develop into a deep passion so that he can pursue it for life.

Saikiran likes discovering new things, especially through reading. When there is a reading activity in school, the teacher closes all computers and projectors. She animatedly reads out the story and conducts activities so that they can remember it better. This is the time he enjoys the most in school, when he can let his thoughts flow free and fire up his imagination. At the same time, he looks forward to the morning prayers and songs at school everyday.

*“For an energetic day ahead, it is important to calm ourselves fully first.
Then we can kick-start and end our day with full zest”.*



SMITA NAIK

Muktangan Teacher, Ambedkar School

"I realized, I had the ability required to take care of both simultaneously Muktangan and my own home. Both are my family".

Smita joined Muktangan in 2009, she was the mother of a two-year old child. She was nervous and scared thinking how she will manage her household and her job. But she gathered all the courage within her.

With the support of her family and faculty at the Teacher Education Centre, she was successfully able to fulfill her dream and become a teacher. At first Smita found it tough. She was very introverted and fearful. She had gained a lot of knowledge through training but she was not confident enough that she could deliver it properly. As she started growing closer to her colleagues and seniors, she opened up and got more comfortable with the school environment.

As her child was growing, her career was taking off as well. At home, she implemented the tactics she used in school. She started labeling all things at home so that her child could easily identify them. She used to sometimes tire of balancing her personal and professional life- both of which were at their peaks. But whenever she felt like she was nearing burnout, she used to motivate herself by remembering both (Muktangan and her home) were her families.

Her students share a very deep and special bond with her. She recollects one unfortunate but special incident that has forever cemented her bond with the children. During the early days of her career, when she was still not very sure about her actions, she used to depend on the advice of her senior teachers. One child in her class had recently lost both of his parents and seemed disturbed during the morning prayer session. As everyone was praying with eyes closed, he came and hugged Smita tightly and silently started crying. Smita got very scared at first.

"Why was he doing that, I could not understand. But my senior teacher asked me to let him hug. In that moment, I did not judge him or think of any reasons. I just let him hold on to me".

Even during Covid-19, Smita is making sure to do her bit to contribute to society. Her father is her inspiration. She has tied up with community groups on the ground, providing essential ration packets to six families so far. She has also taken up the responsibility of distributing the immunity-building homeopathic tablets in her building. On her son's birthday, she made an effort to take sweets and biscuits for the homeless people and police personnel of her area. Her kind and benevolent personality is clearly visible in all her actions.

“The education system at Muktangam is very high, I don't want it to change after everything resumes post-lockdown. Although the environment is very disciplined, it is also extremely kind and fun at the same time”!



ANANYA SANGARE

Muktangan Student, Prabhadevi School

Ananya is 11 years old and has been with Muktangam for five years. Since she started performing in the third standard, gained more and more confidence in the fact that she wanted to become an actor/dancer when she grows up. Her parents have supported her ever since. She excels in Indian as well as western dance forms of Kathak and Contemporary. Her teachers at Muktangam recognize this keen interest of hers and after every Annual Day, her confidence raises a notch higher.

She looks forward to the Zero Period the most because that is the time when all students and teachers showcase their talents and explore new things. Ananya's mother is a nurse and father works as an optician. As she is staying with her grandmother during Covid-19, she misses seeing them both. Ananya's parents are working diligently on the front-lines during this pandemic.

Despite her worry for the safety of her mother and father, she is spending her time in lockdown very productively. She spends most of her time reading books and trying to understand and learn new things. She also attends virtual classes and learning sessions using the links and apps provided and recommended by her teachers. She and a couple of her friends have also began a language study group where they virtually get together and learn French primarily through Youtube videos. Despite her other interests and lack of a time-tabled schedule, as she would have had during regular school days, she is diligently keeping abreast of her studies and ensuring that she completes her homework on time. During our interview with her, Ananya emphasized how badly she misses school, her teachers, friends and Zero Period Dance sessions.



ASHOK GUPTA

Muktangan Teacher, Ambedkar School

“The future of this country is in our hands. We need to do something for our nation – something good. If the thought behind it is good, it will become extraordinary on its own”.

Ashok joined Muktangan in 2015 and teaches the Humanities to classes 7th and 8th. He learned about Muktangan through his wife who is a teacher at Muktangan herself. He was working at a bank and his life was very hectic. He didn't have peace of mind and felt unsatisfied with his life.

His life took a turn when his wife got diagnosed with cancer. His unhappiness only increased. He was mostly sitting at a single place in his work and learning nothing, additionally just feeling more frustrated. His wife noticed this and supported him.

“I want you to be happy. Give it a try, join Muktangan as a teacher”.

He decided to apply and she was indeed right; he got the smile back on his face. Other than the positive and encouraging environment, he was also getting time to spend at home. He lives in a nuclear family because his parents and other family members never supported them after his wife was diagnosed. But his colleagues at Muktangan extended unwavering support through all his ups and downs.

When his wife was admitted to the hospital for the second time, all his co-workers and seniors provided him with emotional support, he is especially grateful to Ms. Dymphana and Ms. Jyoti, also Mr. Satose who helped him settle all medical claims and get through the toughest time in his life. However, his biggest support came directly from our trustee Mr. Sunil Mehta, who provided him with an empathetic and patient ear at a time when Ashok felt completely alone. Even when his own family didn't support him, his Muktangan family were there to help selflessly.

He still remembers the Annual day distribution ceremony when Mr. Mehta greeted him while handing out his certificate.

“Ashok, we are so happy to see your whole family with us – you, your wife and your daughter”.

Ashok now aims to complete his education by attaining a B.Ed. degree and continue teaching at Muktangan till retirement. After that, he wishes to build a school in his village. There is a lot of poverty there and he wants to provide free education for giving opportunities to the bright minds.

“One has to develop new skills constantly and move with times. I love creating art and so, the interest for graphic designing is increasing day by day”.



VIVEK TANDEL

Muktangan Student, Prabhadevi School

Vivek has been a part of Muktangan for a very long time now and is in the 10th grade. He was always a quiet boy, who used to remain aloof because he couldn't converse fluently in Hindi or English. But as he acclimatized to the teaching methods, and the interaction styles at Muktangan, he soon began to open up letting his real personality shine through.

Because of an illness, he would have to visit the hospital often to get blood transfusions. He used to frequently fall sick and miss classes. However, his teachers supported and helped him wholeheartedly, while his friends were an immense moral support.

Through various extra-curricular activities, he has developed a passion for drawing. He would look forward to art class so that he could draw and constantly request feedback from his teacher. Now, Vivek is a confident and motivated child. He has developed public speaking skills and can converse with almost anyone.

He courageously accepted his challenges and constantly works towards moving ahead, irrespective of them, He sometimes finds it difficult to write continuously in a legible handwriting, and give long exams. But no hardship is big enough to stop him from constantly improving and developing.

He aspires to be a graphic designer. He earlier wanted to become an artist but, he says. The Muktangan Lighthouse program helped him understand the profession in-depth and helped him choose it as a career. He wishes to work in his own office and be his own boss.



TABASSUM SAYYED

Muktangan Teacher, Worli School

“During my training days, I would show up with bruises on my face from the fight I had at home. People on the road, in trains used to stare at me and give me looks but nobody ever did this at Muktangan”.

Tabassum comes from a family where her husband never supported her. She was asked to sit in one room for the whole day and was not allowed to leave the house because her husband didn't trust her. She went through immense trauma. But she had never experienced any of this before and she didn't know how to face it. When she went to stay at her parents' house for a while, she learnt about Muktangan and the opportunities it provides. She immediately applied and got through all the examinations and interview rounds.

When she joined the program, her husband used to question her job. He never trusted her and would call to check on her many times. She joined Muktangan but within months, she had to leave her job because her condition on the personal front was miserable. However, she had the support of her colleagues and faculty this time.

They used to advise her and make sure she is safe at home during her training period. Our head of department at the time Ms. Jumana Rampurawala called her husband to make him understand her struggle. This served as a great support system for Tabassum as she now felt she had someone to trust with her feelings. Moreover, her experience as a teacher also helped her become more confident and realize her capabilities and self-worth. She had learnt to fight back.

“I told my husband that I was not bearing it because I was not strong, but because I had respect for him. I had realized my strength and even started smiling again”.

As much as the environment at Muktangan helped her come out stronger, it also provided for a happy place away from all worries of life. she says. She remembers Teacher's Day of 2019 when there was a program for all Muktangan teachers. She had never danced in her life before but the mood was so celebratory that she join her friends on stage. That day, was the most enjoyable for her as she grooved without a care in the world within this, her safe space. Even today when she thinks of that moment, she can't stop herself from smiling widely.

Before Muktangan, Tabassum was a house-wife. She had very little confidence in herself to be able to achieve anything on her own. Today, she is a successful teacher, teaching Science to 9th grade children. Her husband has started understanding and supporting her. She is independent, emotionally and financially. During lockdown, although she does not own a computer, she continues to hone her IT skills through youtube. She carries positivity and hope in her thoughts and actions.

"The aura of Muktangan schools binds everyone's problems together and provides them all with a collective solution of education."



ADITYA YADAV

Muktangan Student, G.K. School

Aditya joined Muktangan in the second grade when he shifted from his village to Mumbai city. He is very fond of his village school, the quiet atmosphere, being surrounded by nature. He thought it was very difficult to transition between two lives that were so starkly opposite. But the environment at Muktangan was more than welcoming.

He felt comfortable seeing that there were many other children like him, not necessarily with the same fears but with their own difficulties. Some had never heard of English or Hindi as languages before, while others had confidence issues.

Aditya is an all-round sports player. He had never played games like throw-ball, and volleyball in his village but after enrolling at Muktangan, he has mastered all of them. He wants to be a computer engineer or a graphic artist when he grows up. His teachers' support was a crucial factor, helping him decide this. They encouraged him to hone his ICT skills after understanding his aptitude for the subject. The Lighthouse mentorship program also helped him understand the professional aspects of the skill and careers open to him. He is now determined to follow his passion.



SWAROOP BASUTKAR

Muktangan Teacher, G.K. School

“Here the methodology for passing on knowledge is so evolved. We don't teach $1 + 1 = 2$, we give the children blocks and let them figure it out on their own”.

Swaroop has been a library teacher at Muktangan for the past ten years. Her children have studied at Muktangan right from Jr KG to the 10th standard, thus she was familiar with the teaching methods here. She was a housewife before but when the family faced financial problems, she felt the need to look for a job.

She knew she didn't speak English fluently, but in order to become a librarian, she had to conduct storytelling sessions for children and help them with any difficulties they faced while reading books. For this, she trained herself to speak English proficiently.

She shares a special bond with her students which is equivalent to a very special friendship. Apart from teaching them, she also listens to them when they call her to discuss their problems. She never feels tired, rather she is rejuvenated when she returns home from school because she is constantly refreshed by the purity and innocence of her students.

“Friendship, Calmness and Discipline – these three qualities that were somewhere missing in me, Muktangan helped me develop them. It has always taught me to be clear and confident in my goals, and at the same time equally enjoy life”.



ANSH YADAV

Muktangan Student, G.K. School

Ansh shifted residence from Uttar Pradesh to Mumbai, he shifted schools and became a part of Muktangan. He has been with us for six years now and is currently in the 9th grade. He has a family comprising of 14 members. His father is a taxi driver, while his mother is a housewife.

Ansh was always a naughty child. He was quite good at sports and he thought he could continue to focus on that while keeping academics as his second priority. However, his teachers noticed that Ansh had started putting less effort into his studies and sat him down to have a conversation.

His teacher Renuka played a big part in making Ansh understand the importance of his education. So much so that today, the one thing that he misses the most about school during lockdown is his studies. His keen interest in science drives his want to be a doctor when he grows up so that he can be of help to people.



APARNA KAMTE

Muktangan Teacher, Sayani School

“How is a girl any lesser than a boy? I asked such questions directly and my family was very sensitive and gave honest answers. Both, my family and I, were trying to understand each other’s perspective and very freely discussing uncomfortable yet important topics”.

Aparna has been working with Muktangan for one year and she currently teaches the 3rd and 4th grade. She had finished her education in biotechnology. She worked for a small private pharmacy company but after she became a mother, she felt the needed a less stressful job. She wanted to continue working because she didn't want to lose her skill and wanted to keep herself busy and economically independent.

As she read through the teacher’s job profile at Muktangan and saw their teaching methodology, she was instantly interested in joining the organization. Initially, she was very nervous regarding the job because she had a toddler at home and she was tensed about her in-laws ability to handle the child by themselves. She was also tensed about the fact that she had adopted a completely different career and doubted her ability to live up to expectations.

When she saw the teacher-student relationship at Muktangan she was taken by surprise as it was far from the conventional one. Here the teachers shared a very friendly relationship with the students, they would hug them, talk about their emotions with each other etc. As she became a close knit member of the Muktangan family, she learnt how these values the organization was founded on manifested themselves through these relationships.

The values instilled in the teachers right from the teacher development programs were helping shape the bright minds of the future. She particularly remembers how the Teacher-Learner-Society module helped her gain new perspectives. She learnt about how a teacher can affect the shaping of society. They had elaborate discussions about discrimination based on gender, class, caste etc. This made her think and wonder, she could and even talk about these ideas at home. When she had a girl child, her in-laws were not particularly sad, but they were expecting a boy. She took all her learning from the TLS module and implemented them at home through discussion with her family, focused on the implicit sexism that exists in all of us.

Being at Muktangan, Aparna has discovered different sides to herself. She recollects the program on the last day of school, when she danced for the first time in many years. She felt like a college girl all over again. She grooved without a care in the world as her family, in the audience, cheered her on.

“Friendship, Calmness and Discipline – these three qualities that were somewhere missing in me, Mukhtangan helped me develop them. It has always taught me to be clear and confident in my goals, and at the same time equally enjoy life”.



VINEELKRISHNA

Mukhtangan Student, Sayani School

Vineelkrishna is a student at Mukhtangan, studying in the 2nd grade. His family moved to Mumbai from Telangana. When he was 7 he was enrolled to Mukhtangan's pre-school program. His mother, having done her B.Ed degree, was familiar with child development and thus when his aunt told them about Mukhtangan, she knew she wanted to send her kids here.

Vineelkrishna is an extremely confident child now but he had problems adjusting to the new environment initially. He faced a major language barrier as he only knew Telugu. As he started forming a bond with his friends, however, he started learning Hindi and today, he can speak it fluently. He has a major liking for drawing and art. He has participated in several competitions and won many accolades as well. He keeps watching youtube videos on art and craft.

One may think, he would consider becoming an artist when he grows up, but even at the tender age of 10, he aspires of becoming a soldier. He aspires to fly an airplane and wishes to be an Indian Air-Force Pilot someday. He keeps playing fighter plane games on his parents' phones and when given a blank paper to draw or doodle on, he always starts with drawing an airplane. Since joining Mukhtangan, he has become very disciplined. He has learnt to help others and understand their problems. He dreams of making his country, parents and teachers proud one day.



“Who has seen tomorrow and what change can you make to yesterday? So think about today, that is how I live”.

Radhika is a second grade teacher at Muktangan. She always wanted to become a teacher. Earlier, she used to run an Anganwadi at her house because her daughter was too young for her to leave and go to work. But as the years passed by, problems started building on the financial and personal front.

There was a lot of fighting which caused her immense mental trauma. She finally decided to move into her parents' house and separate from her husband. Now she stays in an independent rented house with her two children. Her financial background might not be that stable but she says that it is better than her earlier days. Back then, she didn't have any emotional stability and she credits her colleagues and senior teachers with helping her get through it. Initially, she was very shy and wouldn't open up to anybody.

She was mentally disturbed, tensed about how she would bring her children up responsibly whilst handling a job. If the absence of a father figure could affect them negatively. Thankfully, for her, the experiences at Muktangan helped her open up and gain confidence. She was now able to tell her co-workers that she was a divorcee because, she had her own identity. She had achieved something big through sheer hard work.

With her emotional burdens now more manageable, she could focus on her children and she proudly claims that they have grown up to be dutiful; earning as they study and managing their college fee. She shares a very special bond with her children.

She recalls the year when she shifted schools and many parents of her old students would call her up to tell her that her students were missing her. When she visited the old school during annual day, her children encircled her and started asking her when she would come back. This love, she feels, is the most priceless gift that Muktangan has provided her with. Her children often tease her by saying that she loves her school children more.

One particular school incident stands out for Radhika. She once noticed that a child from her group was more hyper than usual. Speaking to his parents she understood that he was diabetic and his dosage cycle had been disturbed, causing him to act erratically. After bringing it to their notice it was a relief when his parents took the appropriate steps, the child was much better and the parents appreciated her for bringing the problem to their attention. Radhika loves her job and focuses on living her life peacefully despite her financial struggles. She may sometimes forget her household chores but she never forgets her school work of lesson plans and activities. She carries herself with a positive and grateful attitude.

“I want to read people’s behavior and cure them of whatever problems they have”.



MEGHNA DURGAM

Muktangan Student, Sayani School

Meghna is a student at Muktangan in the 7th standard. She is extremely confident and soft-spoken at the same time. Her favorite subject happens to be science because it helps her to learn about her environment and the human body. She wants to use this knowledge to become a psychologist when she grows up.

She wants to make sure she puts in a lot of effort in her studies because she thinks that being a therapist is a very difficult job, needing a very strong academic foundation. Meghna is very excited about the Lighthouse program that she will be attending next year at Muktangan. She would love to know more about psychology, its professional opportunities.

During lockdown, she makes sure she follows a disciplined time-table so that her studies are not affected in any way. Her friends and she have made a pact to get up early everyday to perform yoga and then attend online classes. She personally benefits from it a lot as she is able to concentrate better and develop a lot of patience for this new and difficult method of teaching. They all exchange whatever they have learnt in their respective schools so that everyone can collectively benefit from it.



“(Ms. Zainab) comforted me like my own mother. ‘Why are you so nervous? Please open up, you don't have to worry about anything. Take your own time but be sure that you be yourself here’, Zainab ma'am would say. Her support and confidence in my ability meant the world to me”.

Ruksar joined Muktangan just after she had completed her B.Com degree. She wanted to become a doctor or a teacher since she was a child. Although her tenth standard marks were good, she couldn't take up science because of lack of opportunity in her village. She eventually moved to the city and once she completed her graduate degree, an acquaintance suggested that she should join Muktangan's teacher development program.

Provided with the opportunity to fulfill one of her childhood dreams, she applied to become a Muktangan teacher. She was new to the world of work and very nervous. She would not open up to anyone and would remain silent throughout her sessions. She thought she would not be noticed and would not have to face her fear of talking to strangers. However, this was not missed by her tutor, Mr. Zainab, who approached her about the matter.

She clearly remembers the best moment of her life to be the certificate distribution day at the end of the program. As she got down from the stage her mentor Ms. Zainab asked her to handover the certificate. Ruksar became very nervous at the firm request and even got a bit upset as she thought a mistake had been made and her certificate would be taken away.

But Ms. Zainab took the certificate and gave her a big smile, returning it with the words

“I want to give it to you with my own hands. I am so proud of you”.

She never thought she would come so far. When the children in her class inquire why she missed a class or when her colleagues praise her, she feels like she has achieved a lot in a very little time. She started as a pre-school teacher and within 3 years, she started teaching secondary school. But she says none of this would have been possible without the support of her mentors.

“If my mother's supports me 10%, Muktangan is the remaining 90%. Right from my health to my happiness, they care about everything. Only by talking to them, half of my worries go away”!

“I was very shy, it became very difficult for me to interact with others. It was my grandmother and my school that has helped me improve my confidence and speak to people”.



KHUSHI SAYANI

Muktangan Student, Sayani School

Khushi is a 9th standard student at Muktangan. She lost her father at the age of two and since then lives with her grandparents and her sister, she has a shy and introverted nature. When she joined Muktangan in the Jr. KG, she saw all the energetic children playing around her but she always felt apprehensive mingling with anyone.

Through the years Kushi has been an ideal student and her teachers only shared a single focused feedback; that she would not openly express herself. During every meeting with her teacher, her grandmother kept hearing about this. But as she got older, she found the confidence to talk to people and address a crowd. She cultivated this quality in herself, with the support of her peers and educators. Today she can face any audience.

Going to school means going to an environment of encouragement and learning is fun for her. She makes sure she never misses a single day of school. Even during lockdown. Although she gets to learn through online classes, the thing she misses the most is the face-to-face interaction and activities that ignited her imagination and helped her learn.

She remembers the last day of 8th standard when the students knew that they would be moving into secondary education and a new phase in their lives would begin. This also meant leaving behind their teachers who had been with them until then and moving to another school building. It was a very emotional day for the students at Sayani school, however, Kushi and her friends decided to turn it into a happy one. As it was their School Head's birthday on the same day; the children got handmade cards and surprised her with a cake.

She still remembers the smile on Ms. Sushma's face, she was beaming and proud of all her students for being kind and creative. Khushi aspires to become a doctor and continues to hone her knowledge base in science so she can become successful in her profession and serve her country.

**Collated and designed for the Muktangan Education Trust
collaboratively by Ms. Kaavya Ramamoorthy and Ms.Tanya D'mello
Muktangan Communications 2020**