

Devli Kumari

Devli has become the voice of children deprived of education due to poverty, exploitation or slavery.

Three generations of her family had been slaves in the stone quarries of Haryana, India, living and dying without ever seeing the outside world until she and 112 others were rescued in 2004.



Devli is now 11 and lives in Jodhpur with her family. She recently represented deprived children at the launch of 'Education for All: Class of 2015' at the United Nations in New York. She silenced the gathering of some of the world's most powerful people when she told them how she had managed to get 15 children from her village to attend school, and threw out a challenge:

“If I, as a girl, could enroll 15, is it not possible for all the world leaders to enroll all children into schools?”

As a result the leaders pledged resources to ensure that the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) in education is achieved and to help educate over 15 million children around the world.

I am Devli. I was born in a stone quarry in Haryana. My parents were also born there. Our entire family worked in the stone quarry as we were bonded labourers. It was only when we were rescued by Bachpan Bachao Andolan that we understood what it means to be free.

I started working at the age of five. I used to break bigger rocks into smaller ones. My sisters and I used to load rocks into trucks along with everyone else. We had never seen a banana or any fruit. When we were first given a banana after being rescued, we ate it without peeling it off. We had never seen paper and didn't know anything beyond the stone quarry and the work there.

After rescue we were given homes in Jodhpur, our native place, in a colony, where I stay now. I went to Balika Ashram, a centre of BBA in Delhi where I learned to read and write and also received training in how to use computers. After staying there for a year, I went back to my parents and now study in the school in my village.

I also enrolled 15 children into school in my village. I am now in class five. I like going to school, studying Hindi and English and playing with my friends. I want to be a teacher when I grow up.

 Devli's story in her own words (translated by Sandya Ch)

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