



Isha Vidhya
Educating Rural India

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Dear readers,

We are well into the 1st term of the 2009-2010 academic year, and we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support in making quality education for rural children a reality through Isha Vidhya. This 6th edition of the Newsletter will catch you up to speed with new happenings and inform you about what to look for on the horizon.

June 2009 presented the beginning of a new academic year, as well as a year of immense growth for Isha Vidhya. With the opening of two new schools in Villupuram and Cuddalore, plus the addition of a higher class level in each of the existing four schools, the overall student strength jumped from 1,100 in the previous academic year to more than 1,800 this year. To keep up with the increase in students, volunteers across India, the USA, the UK and Lebanon successfully joined their efforts to raise nearly double the number of scholarships; from 659 the previous academic year to close to 1,250 this year. The Isha Vidhya Academic Team also stepped up their tempo; bringing more than 70 teachers to the ashram for an 11-day training program in May and releasing the publication of their first textbook.

An unforgettable event this year was Sadhguru's visit to the Tuticorin and Nagercoil Schools, which recently occurred on August 17th. Details of the day will be covered in the upcoming newsletter. You can also look forward to a major revamp of the Isha Vidhya website, including new pages where individuals can spearhead their own funding projects for Isha Vidhya.

Though the students and teachers are settling into this academic year, the Isha Vidhya Project Team is well into planning for the next academic year and already looking at potential locations to open new schools for 2010-2011. As we move forward, we encourage you to get involved to help further Isha Vidhya's success.

Please enjoy reading further in this 6th edition Newsletter, and feel free to contact us with suggestions, ideas or questions at info@ishavidhya.org.

*Sincerely,
Isha Vidhya Editorial Team*

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TWO NEW SCHOOLS!

June was a time of excitement in the communities around Cuddalore and Villupuram with the welcoming of the new Isha Vidhya Schools.

The Villupuram School is situated 20 KM outside of the city and strikes a stunning image with its cheerful red and white structure set amidst fields of vibrant green rice paddies. With local residents suffering major economic hardships over the past 10 years due to falling agricultural yields and prices, 210 out of the 232 students at the Villupuram School were awarded Isha Vidhya scholarships. These students come from five surrounding villages, where their parents work for daily wages as tenant farmers, masons and carpenters.

Coming from a variety of social backgrounds, some of the new students are significantly behind their classmates in social and development skills. Resource teachers were designated in both the Villupuram and Cuddalore schools to assist these students in integrating socially and academically with their peers. About 10% of the Villupuram students come from the scheduled caste (the lowest caste), and the Isha Vidhya teachers dedicate time daily to giving them special guidance in simple hygiene and social conduct. These students initially stood out for their unruly behavior and manners, but after the first two months of school, a very noticeable improvement has occurred.

Cuddalore students come from 25 nearby villages. The area was devastated by the 2004 Tsunami, and fully 90% of the students are from the scheduled caste. These children have had no previous exposure to English and little to no academic foundation in mathematics or Tamil (the local language). Their parents scrape by on mea-



ger earnings working as farmers, fishermen and factory workers, and all but two of the students in the Cuddalore School are receiving scholarships. From LKG all the way up to Class 2, the teachers are starting right from the basics: the ABCs, 123s, Tamil letters, and simple health and hygiene education. With the help of the Karadi Rhymes class, DVD sessions and Computer Assisted Learning, the students have already started to build their English speaking and comprehension skills.

While choosing English as the medium of education presents many challenges, the future benefits will be life changing. Already, parents' faces are lighting up with smiles of hope and joy as they see their children building a bright future.



FROM BRICKS TO BUILDINGS...



My life was on a usual path until I participated in an Isha Yoga Program, which changed everything. I decided I wanted to get involved with Isha, so I asked Sadhguru how. He told me to set the hotels I was managing on auto-pilot and join the Isha Vidhya Team. My first thought was, *“I don’t want to touch education with a 20-foot pole!”* But Sadhguru said, *“Simply do it and things will happen.”* Taking it as a great opportunity to impact others and explore the spiritual possibility within myself, I joined the project.

The Isha Vidhya team put me in charge of construction ac-

tivities, giving me 90 days and a frugal budget to expand the four existing schools and construct two new ones. Though I wondered how this would be possible, I rolled up my sleeves and started planning.

I appointed two engineers and went about purchasing all the major raw materials. Furniture, doors and windows were ordered from the Isha design and fabrication units. With inputs from Sadhguru, we cut costs on the design front and negotiated prices to stay within our budget.

We started with the two new school sites. Construction at Villupuram started with great gusto; but Cuddalore, which we thought was an easy site, posed great challenges. Digging barely a foot down brought water gushing out, and our foundation ended up looking like a swimming pool. Swami Niscalla, the manager for construction at the Ashram, came up with an innovative yet simple solution to drain the water into an adjacent pit long enough to set the foundation. However, the process set us back more than two weeks, and because admissions were going so well, we decided two more classrooms would have to be built. However, our contractor refused to take up the additional work, so we had to call in the Ashram construction midway through to take over. To make up for lost time, we doubled the work schedule into two shifts per day.

With Cuddalore so behind schedule, I was relieved to see construction at the other schools progressing on schedule, and the four expansions were completed in time, with only some painting to be finished once the schools re-opened in early June. Villupuram construction turned out beautifully, and the students and parents all came the first day, June 15th. In the end, things at Cuddalore also all fell into place, and the school opened just a few weeks late on June 22nd.

With about 40,000 square feet built in the span of 90 days, about 30,000 KMs on my odometer, tears rolled down my eyes when I saw the children coming to the schools so full of excitement. What I have done is just a drop in the ocean, and I know much more needs to be done, many more schools are yet to be built. These 90 days felt like 9 lifetimes, and I am already drawing up plans for the next academic year.

Gopi P.— Isha Vidhya Infrastructure Coordinator

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM



So far, 1,100 scholarship donations have come in. While this is nearly double last year's total of 659 scholarships, **150 students are still in need.**

Sponsoring a student represents a unique and powerful way to touch the life of a child. Please share this opportunity with anyone who might be interested. Scholarship donations will continue to be accepted for this year's students, and can be made online at www.ishavidhya.org/donate . For more details about the scholarship program, please write to scholarships@ishavidhya.org. Sponsors will receive a confirmation letter and photo from their student by the end of August.

Admissions to the new schools of Villupuram and Cuddalore were a huge success, even exceeding our expectations! With such high enrollment, the initial goal of raising 1,000 scholarships for this academic year fell short of the student need. After reviewing scholarship applications and conducting home visits, the Scholarship Committee found a total of 1250 students in need of scholarship assistance for this year.

With great determination, volunteers from all over the world reached out to businesses, friends, family and contacts to make it happen.



INTENSIVE TEACHERS' TRAINING

More than 70 teachers from all across Tamil Nadu came for 11-day Isha Vidhya training workshop in Coimbatore this May 2009. The workshop covered the basics in education, from how to build a lesson plan, to how to guide students in activity based learning. The majority of teachers joining Isha Vidhya have no prior teaching experience, and the May workshop provides a critical orientation into the Isha Vidhya teaching methodology, while also giving the teachers an opportunity to see that they are a part of something which extends far beyond just their classroom and their school.



“All last year, I worked on getting students to write more legibly, but they were not motivated. This year, I put stamps like “Excellent!” and “Good Work” on the papers with neat handwriting, and all of a sudden, all of the students took interest in their writing!”

*- Yasotha, teacher at Isha Vidhya,
Perumapalayam*

The key focus of the workshop was providing an opportunity for teachers to implement different teaching methodologies in front of their peers, followed by self and peer feedback. The practices of self-evaluating at the end of each class and observing other teachers' classes to get ideas are valuable tools which will enable the teachers to continuously to upgrade their teaching techniques.

Based on teacher feedback from previous workshops, this workshop gave substantial attention to the topic of class control. Beyond the obvious no-no's, like no corporeal punishment, teachers discussed what types of negative reinforcement should not be used in the classroom, and the alternatives are for motivating students and maintaining class control. After returning to the schools and implementing their new ideas, the teachers were genuinely surprised to see how effective positive reinforcement is in shaping student behavior.



...TEACHERS' TRAINING (CONTINUED)

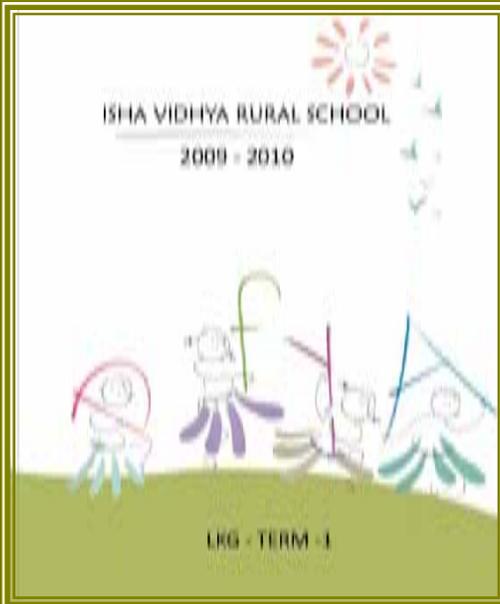
In addition to receiving training from the Isha Vidhya Academic Team members, the Isha Home School teachers stepped up this year to contribute experience and knowledge in their specialized areas. Anandi led the teachers in activities and games involving language use; Suzanne covered learning language through motion; Dipankar demonstrated various science experiments; Maa Poojita led the teachers in art activities and puppet shows; and Chandrika showed the Montessori activities for the Kindergarten students.

As the majority of the Isha Vidhya teachers have substantial home responsibilities, spending even 6-11 days away from home is quite demanding; the bulk of their training, therefore, happens at the individual school sites on weekends and after school. Isha Vidhya's Academic Team members have become expert in navigating the bus and train routes to the schools in their numerous site visits. This July, the Erode teachers had a special visit from an experienced teacher and trainer from the US, Kerri Murphy, who led an interactive workshop on skill based teaching for primary level students.



“During the Teacher Training Workshop, I realized that Isha Vidhya is a project through which you not only transform the lives of the rural students but also rural teachers. Training these teachers will help them to excel in their performance in the class, which in turn will have a huge impact on our students.”
– *Raji Kumaraswami, Academic Coordinator*

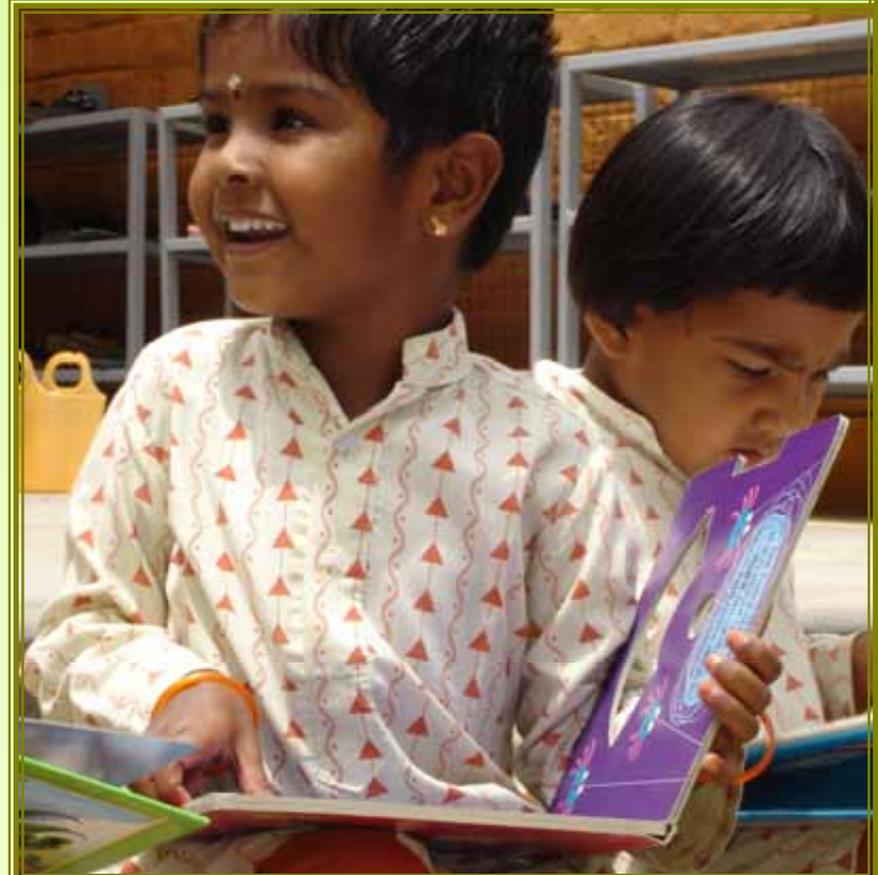
ISHA VIDHYA'S FIRST TEXTBOOK PUBLICATION



Isha Vidhya's first textbook publication contains simple exercises to help LKG students master recognition and identification of the English and Tamil alphabets and numbers 1-10. A second book will be issued this year to cover the 2nd and 3rd Term material.

Recognizing the dearth of quality textbooks, Isha Vidhya's Academic Team has begun designing textbooks specifically aimed to meet the needs of rural students. The majority of Matriculation Board textbooks employ complex language and provide purely recall-based exercises. "For rural students who usually have no one at home and can read or write English, it is critical that the language used in the textbooks is simple and direct. Otherwise, they simply memorize the questions and answers without grasping any meaning. At the same time, it is of great assistance that the teacher of the textbook provides exercises which challenge the students to analyze and think creatively. For most subjects, no textbooks are available which meet these criteria for our students," explained Diana Price, Academic Coordinator, Isha Vidhya.

Students and teachers have greeted the materials with great enthusiasm and appreciation, especially noting the high-quality printing of Isha Foundation's publication branch, *Impressions*.



INDIVIDUALS ARE MAKING IT HAPPEN...



Individual donors and small groups have made huge contributions to support Isha Vidhya financially. ASHA Foundation has led the way in scholarship donations, sponsoring 80 children from the Tuticorin School both last and this academic year.



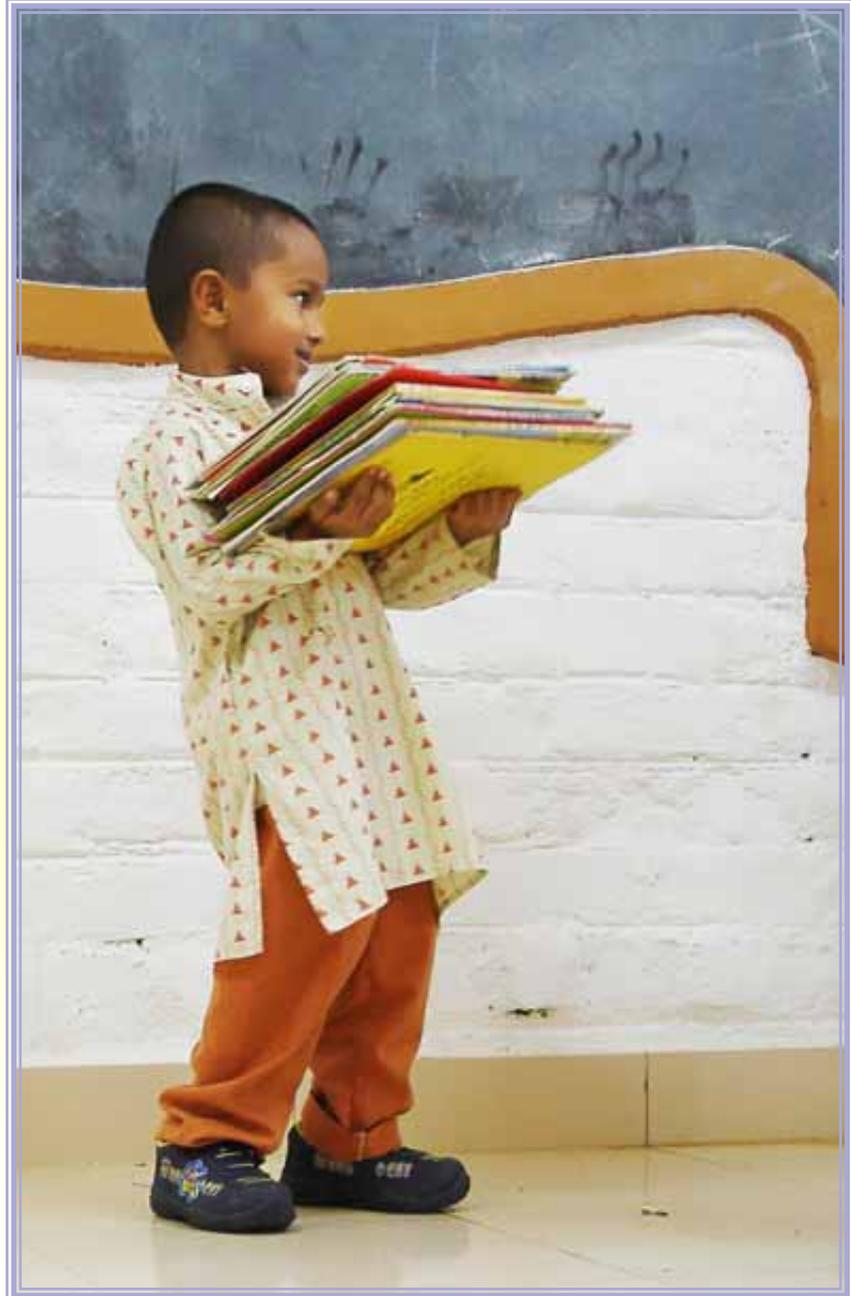
A big boon this year was a donation from Capt. Avinash Batra to fully build and stock a school library at the Tuticorin School. More than 1,500 books have been already been acquired for the school. Sharing her feelings on the topic, Ms. Meena, the Tuticorin School Principal, said, "The school library will change the lives of our students by opening up so many opportunities to explore new topics and see new perspectives through books. We are grateful beyond words to Capt. Avinash Batra for his generosity in reaching out to our students." Look for more details in the upcoming newsletter, Edition 7, about the Tuticorin Library Inauguration ceremony with Sadhguru. The Coimbatore School will also inaugurate a new school library later this year. To contribute towards their effort, visit the Isha Vidhya Wish List online at: http://www.amazon.com/wishlist/J1XP001ZKXQV/ref=cm_sw_em_r_wl

LEND A HELPING HAND...

The focused work of a single person can make a profound difference. A perfect example is the fundraising project set up by Christy Foley. With plans to come for 3-month retreat to the Isha Yoga Center in India, Christy decided on a whim to do a fundraising project in conjunction with her trip. Utilizing the website FirstGiving.org, Christy designed her own webpage and contacted friends, family and coworkers to support her in raising \$20,000 to build 4 new classrooms. In just 6 months, she reached her goal and was here to see the construction begin for the new classrooms, now finished and full of enthusiastic, young learners.

“Seeing the success Christy had using the the internet as a venue to reach out, we wanted to open up the same possibility ti others. While FirstGiving offers a great template, they take 9% of the donations. **We like to ensure that 100% of our donations go directly towards helping the children**, so we’ve gone about creating a similar format directly on our website. The first such page is already up and running www.ishavidhya.org/Lakshmi ,” explained Krishan Venkatraman, the Isha Vidhya Project Director.

To find out more about how you can launch a funding project, write to info@ishavidhya.org.



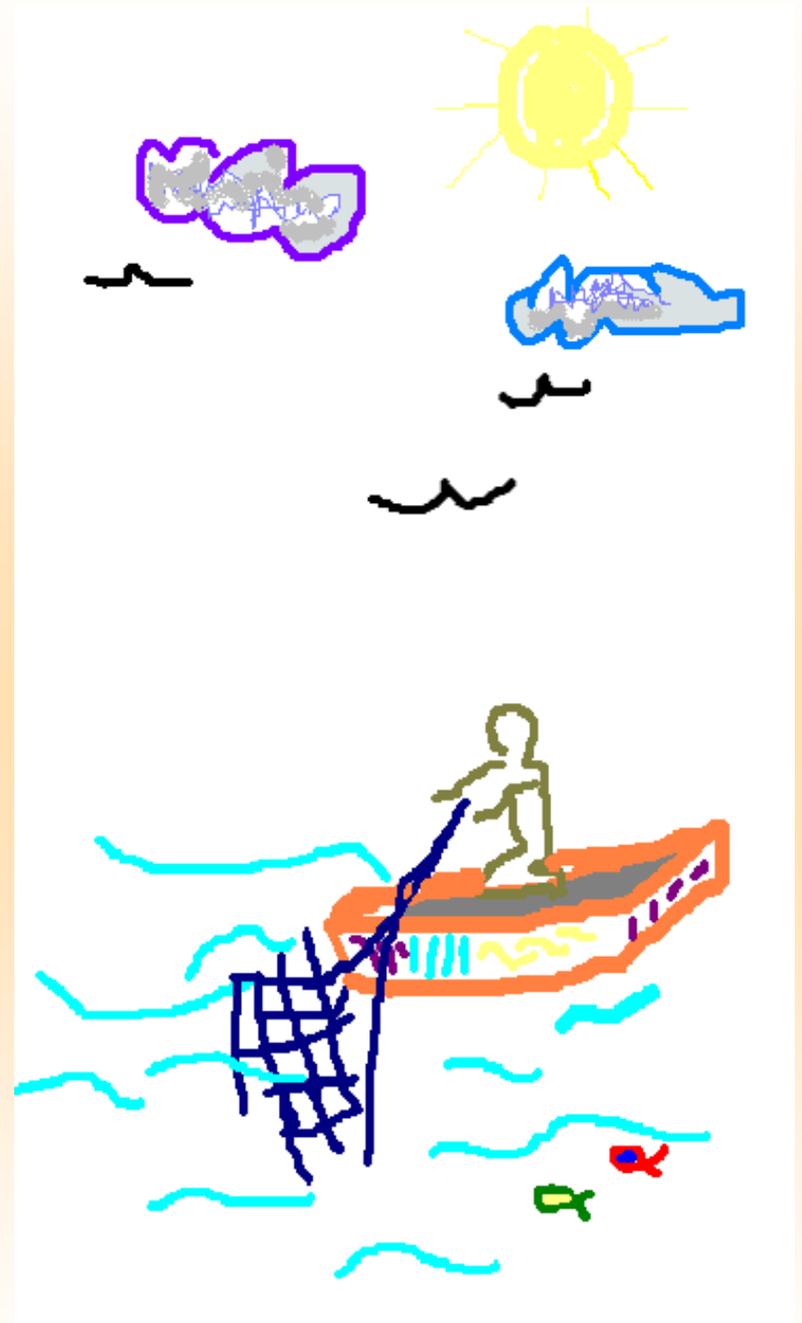
WHITE, POWDERY SAND... GREEN WATER...

*During an April meeting of the Isha Vidhya Scholarship Team in Cuddalore, the team took a break to go out in one of the fishing boats. **Scholarship Coordinator, Shanti Murali**, shares her first experience venturing into sea:*

When the boat picked up speed along the tides, shrilly screams of thrill and excitement broke out among us. I think the boat and tides joined hands to scare us out, but there was no way!

The crew of a tiny service ship we passed was shocked to see all these brave women packed in the shallow boat, just inches from the water, with nothing to hold as the tide tossed us. They graciously shared their biscuits and fruit juice with us, and the Chief Officer curiously asked us what our mission was out in the risky sea. We saw a beautiful, pale, glossy-green jellyfish passing in the water. One of the school administrators took it in her hands but quickly put it back as it flinched at her touch.

When we came back to the shore, we had our lunch. Then we went to the school site, just 200 meters from the beach, where we saw the construction work going on at full speed. In two months time, the work would be finished and the school would be filled with children blossoming like flowers into their futures. I won't forget this day; the white powdery sand and the green water; a trip of adventure and visual beauty.



CAREER/VOLUNTEER/ DONATION OPPORTUNITIES



CAREERS

The success of the schools depends on the dedicated hard work of the principals, teachers and staff. Isha Vidhya is seeking enthusiastic teacher candidates and experienced principal candidates to join its dynamic team. English ability and an open mind are more important than experience for new teachers as training is provided once hired. With the schools located in rural areas, finding the right teacher and principal candidates can be a challenge. If you or anyone you know fits the above description, please contact us at careers@ishavidhya.org

VOLUNTEERS

Short term and long term placements are open for volunteers in the schools or as a part of the Isha Vidhya project team. Assignments cover a wide range, including reading stories to children, joining the construction team, helping develop curriculum, being part of the scholarship coordination, and many more opportunities. A minimum two month commitment is encouraged - the more time you commit, the more of an impact you will make! To find out more, please contact us at volunteer@ishavidhya.org

DONATIONS

The generosity of donors from around India and the world is making Isha Vidhya happen. Your support will touch many lives, whether it is sponsoring an entire school infrastructure or donating a single library book. At this time, donations for scholarships and scholarship renewals are being accepted. Donations can be made online at www.ishavidhya.org/donate or by downloading the PDF form and mailing in a check. For more information, please contact us at info@ishavidhya.org.

Small drops make an ocean.

Dear Ashwini and Vidya Lakshmi,
Hi my name is R. Balakrishna.
I thank you for helping me go to school.
I am in class 3. I am 8 years old.
My favourite colour is orange. My
favourite subject is science. My favourite
fruit is banana.

yours sincerely
R. Balakrishna

THANK YOU