Source: https://thebetterindia.com/changemakers/bethala-veera-swami-pard-india-rural-children-education-andhra-after-school-12765819

He Saw Kids His Age Leave School for Work. 15 Years Later, He Is Supporting 90000 Children in 110+ Villages



By **Raajwrita Dutta**

Edited By **Khushi Arora**

30 Oct 2026

Growing up in a daily-wage family in Andhra Pradesh, Bethala Veera Swami watched classmates pulled out of school to work, not for lack of ability, but of access. Decades later, from Abu Dhabi, he runs an after-school network reaching tens of thousands of rural children.



Growing up in a daily-wage family in Andhra Pradesh, Bethala Veera Swami watched classmates pulled out of school to work. Photograph: (Image generated by AI)

"Education can become a burden when a family has limited resources."

For Paturi Namratha Siri, a student from Yernagudem village in Andhra Pradesh, there were times when continuing her education felt difficult. She did not always have the learning resources or support she needed after school.
Advertisment

"Understanding some subjects was hard, and I needed additional guidance," she explains.

Her experience is familiar to Bethala Veera Swami, who is now 58 years old and grew up in the same village several decades earlier.

The village he remembers

Born in 1968, he spent his childhood in Yernagudem, studying from Class 1 to Class 10. His parents were daily-wage agricultural labourers. The family had a small piece of land, but it was not enough to provide for everyone through the year.
Advertisment

"My father and mother were daily-wage workers when I was growing up. They would go to the agricultural fields every day, and our family depended entirely on what they earned that day. This was the reality of my childhood," he tells *The Better India*.



Some children entered the workforce. Others left school because there was little support at home.

His parents nevertheless encouraged him to study.

After school, he went to DNR College in Bhimavaram for intermediate and then joined the College of Engineering at Osmania University in Hyderabad, where he studied mechanical engineering from 1986 to 1990.
Advertisment

He began his professional career in 1991 and spent the following decades working across India and overseas, including in Nigeria, Kuwait, and the UAE. Today, he works as a lead contracts engineer in Abu Dhabi. But while his career took him away from Yernagudem, what he had seen there stayed with him.

> *"I saw children my age being pulled out of school, not because they lacked ability or ambition, but because their families could not afford to keep them there."*

Some children entered the workforce. Others left school because there was little support at home or because they had fewer opportunities to learn beyond the classroom.
Advertisment

"What struck me most was the inequality of opportunity. The gap was not about intelligence or potential, but about access," he says.

It started with a question among childhood friends

In 2010, while spending time with childhood friends in Yernagudem, Swami began discussing how they could give something back to the community they had grown up in.

Their answer was education.

They wanted to 'gift education' to children they would later call V-Kids, beginning in their own village. On 13 January 2011, the Pragathi Association for Rural Development was registered as a society. The organisation later came to be known as PARD INDIA.

Swami was already working abroad, and he continued his career while he and his friends began building the initiative around their existing jobs, local volunteers, and people from the communities they wanted to work with.

The first programme was launched in August 2011 at the Government MPP Special School in Yernagudem, where Swami had studied. It began with 50 children from Classes 4 and 5.

What happens when the school day ends?

For many children in these villages, the challenge was finding someone to help them with their studies after school. Their parents often worked as agricultural labourers or in other

daily-wage jobs, returning home late with little time to help with lessons.

Swami and his friends wanted to address this gap. Their first initiative, the After School Education Programme (ASEP), gave children a place to continue learning with guidance once their regular school day ended.

"Most of the children we cover have parents who work on daily wages. In the villages, they go to the fields and may not return until four, five, or even six in the evening," the founder says.

ASEP runs from 3.30 pm to 5.30 pm, six days a week, offering children two hours of guided learning. They receive help with mathematics, English, science, moral education, and computer skills.

They also make time for reading, sports, drawing, debates, competitions, storytelling, guest lectures, and tree plantation activities. Teachers monitor attendance and speak to parents when children begin missing classes.

The programme is also meant to catch warning signs before a child drops out of school altogether. PARD INDIA tracks attendance and works with teachers, parents, and local volunteers when children are regularly absent. Swami says the organisation has found that the reasons are mostly tied to circumstances outside the classroom.

"Poverty remains the biggest barrier to education. For families living on daily wages, education can feel like a luxury, and when they have to choose between sending a child to school and meeting immediate financial needs, education is frequently sacrificed," he explains.

But money is not the only issue.

"The challenge goes beyond finances," he adds. "Rural children are just as intelligent and ambitious as their urban counterparts, but they lack exposure, mentorship, digital access, and supportive learning environments."

Bringing computers and new opportunities to villages

The initiative gradually added other forms of support to address the different challenges that could interrupt a child's education.

The Village Knowledge Centre Programme (VKCP) began in August 2012. At the time, internet access was still limited in many villages. Swami personally contributed Rs 8 lakh and helped establish a centre with 15 computers.

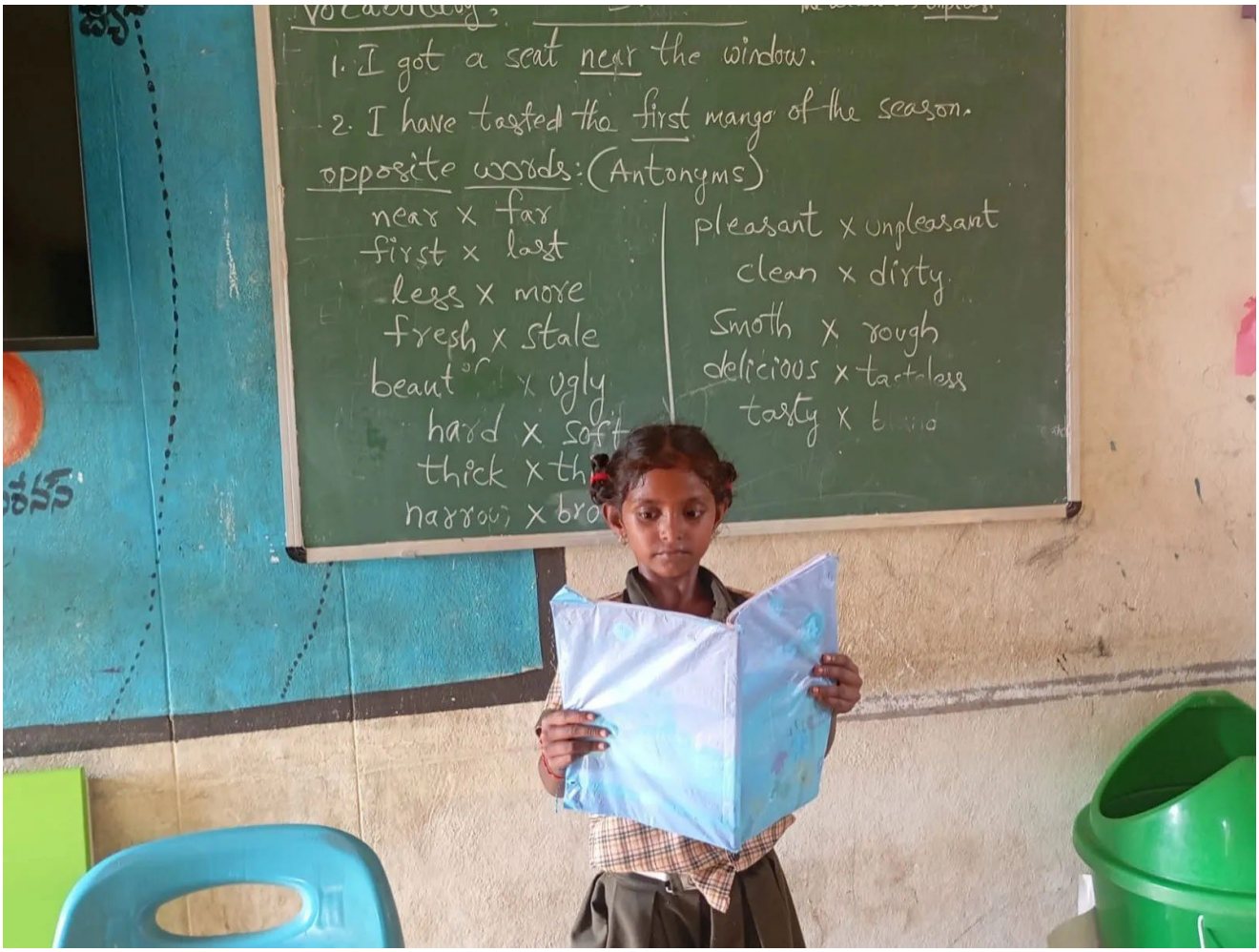
Children could learn basic computer skills and use programmes such as Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.

The centre operated for nearly eight years.

Over time, the computers became outdated. The team now hopes to upgrade and expand the programme with CSR support and has approached several organisations for funding. Alongside computer lessons, the programme also offers career guidance and personality development sessions.

For Swami, the idea was simple: children growing up in villages should have the same chance to learn new skills and explore career opportunities as children elsewhere. He wanted them to feel confident about their abilities and know that their circumstances did not have to limit their ambitions.

Two years later, in July 2014, PARD INDIA launched the V-Kid Scholarship Programme (VKSP).



In 2010, while spending time with childhood friends in Yernagudem, Swami began discussing how they could give something back to the community they had grown up in.

The programme supports children who may otherwise struggle to continue their education because of financial circumstances, with particular attention to orphans, children of single parents, and economically disadvantaged families.

Students apply according to set criteria, after which the organisation tries to connect eligible children with local donors. Support can extend from Class 1 through graduation.

The team also runs the V-Kid Knowledge Boost Programme (VKKB), through which children are selected based on merit-based tests and receive longer-term scholarships.

An Rs 800 scholarship and the confidence to continue

In 2017, Vamisetti Ganesh from Devarapalli Mandal took part in one such examination.

His parents were daily-wage workers, and paying for everything the family needed was not always easy. He secured fifth place in the VKKB examination and received an annual scholarship of Rs 800 for six years, covering his education from Class 6 to Class 10. The scholarship was supported by Mr Nageswara Rao, one of the donors.

"Because my parents depend on daily wage work, meeting all our family and educational expenses has not always been possible," he says.

The scholarship eased some of that pressure.

"It helped with school-related expenses and reduced the financial burden on my family," he says. "It also motivated me to take my education more seriously and aim for better academic results."

He is now pursuing his graduation.

For Madhuri from Yadavolu village in East Godavari district, the scholarship provided similar continuity. She came from a family dependent on daily wages and received a six-year scholarship through the VKKB programme, covering Class 6 to Class 10.

Today, she is pursuing intermediate education in Zangareddigudam and hopes to become an engineer. The difference is not always visible in a single examination result. Sometimes it means that a child keeps going to school the following year.

'I want to support people in need'

For Yangala Uma Maheshwari from Gopalapuram, education became particularly difficult after she lost both her parents. She had been associated with PARD INDIA since she was six years old and had received support through the VKKB scholarship programme.

When she lost her parents, the organisation continued to stand by her.

"The most difficult period of my life began when I lost both my parents. Their absence left a void in my life, and I was suddenly faced with uncertainty, emotional pain, and the question of how I would continue my education without them," she explains.

The support she received went beyond the scholarship.

"During that difficult time, the team stood by me and provided emotional as well as academic support," she says. "Their continued care gave me the strength to keep moving forward."

She is continuing her education and now wants to help other people facing difficult circumstances.

"I want to support underprivileged and needy people, just as this organisation supported me when I needed help the most," she says. "I hope to become a source of encouragement and hope for others."

From 50 children to over 110 villages

What began with 50 children in Yernagudem has since spread across Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

The non-profit now works in more than 110 villages and has influenced more than 550 communities. Its work has reached places including Cheepurugudem, Dubacherla, Nallajarla, Chinnayagudem, Devarapalle, Tyajampudi, Yadavole, Duddukuru, Goplapuram, Rajahmundry, Kakinada, Vijayawada, Abdullapurmet, Kuntloor in Hyderabad, Jafarguda, Rajivgruha Kalpa, Mathuguda, and rural clusters around Visakhapatnam.

As of March 2026, the organisation reports 116,841 direct beneficiaries, including children and elders, and 90,494 V-Kids supported through its programmes. Its work has touched 492,567 lives through education, healthcare, nutrition and community empowerment.

Within its education work, ASEP alone has provided 569,419 hours of free education to 3,165 children across 79 villages as of 31 March 2026.

The Village Knowledge Centre Programme has delivered 33,999 hours of IT training to 538 children and young people. More than 30 students have received annual scholarships through VKSP.

These figures cover different programmes, each addressing a challenge that can affect a child's education. A child should not have to leave school simply because there is nobody at home who can help with a difficult lesson, because the family cannot manage an educational expense, or because the child has never been shown what might be possible beyond the village.

Namratha is one of the children still at the beginning of that journey.

'I want to become a district collector'

Namratha, a Class 5 student, says her after-school classes helped her understand difficult lessons and gave her individual attention when she was struggling.



They wanted to 'gift education' to children they would later call V-Kids, beginning in their own village.

"Whenever I doubted myself, the teachers encouraged me and reminded me that I could do better," she says.

Her confidence has changed too.

"I have become more confident in my studies and in myself. Earlier, I would sometimes hesitate when I faced difficult subjects or challenges, but now I feel more comfortable taking them on," she adds.

Today, she wants to become a district collector.

"I want to complete my studies and build a successful career," she continues. "I also want to inspire other children to continue their education and never give up on their dreams."

For Swami, these ambitions are precisely why the work needs to continue.

"The greatest reward of this 15-year journey has been seeing children who were once at risk of dropping out now dream of becoming engineers, doctors, teachers, entrepreneurs, civil servants, and community leaders," he says.

Keeping children in school takes a village

Supporting these children across villages requires a network of people who can stay connected with them and their families.

The initiative's work is supported by a 16-member executive committee, directors and advisers, brand ambassadors, project management teams, an IT team, and volunteer committees at the state, district, *mandal* (an administrative subdivision), and village levels.

The founder puts the wider team at around 52 people, including full-time and part-time members, teachers, volunteers, and others involved in its programmes. There are currently around 20 project management team members and a four-member IT team, while the number of people working on individual projects changes according to their requirements.

But a large part of the work rests with people who live in the communities themselves.

Village committees help connect children, parents, teachers, and local volunteers. They also help identify children whose attendance is falling and encourage families to keep them in school.

"This is the strength of our organisation," the founder says of its volunteer network. "Wherever we run the After School Education Programme, we make sure there is a village committee in place. We do not implement the programme without the committee's involvement."

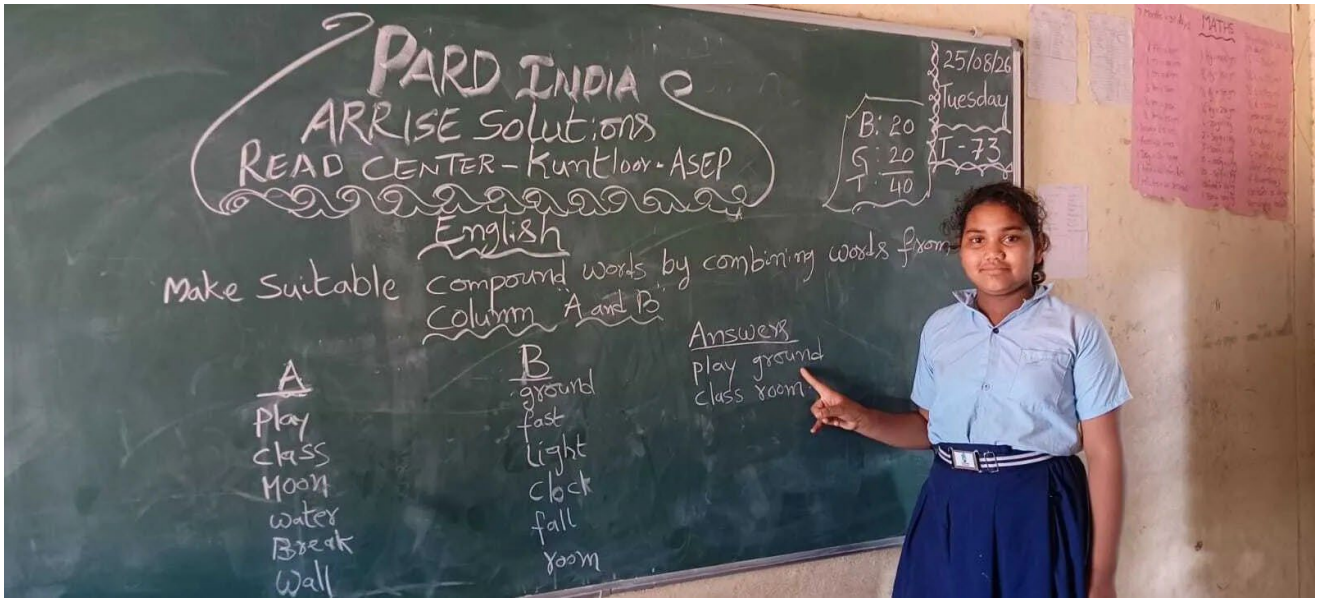
The organisation's model has allowed it to remain connected to villages even while Swami continues to work abroad. He brings his professional experience in planning, contracts, and project management into PARD INDIA, while the organisation keeps him connected to the place where he started.

"My corporate career and social service journey complement each other," he says. "While my professional role challenges me to manage complex projects and think strategically, my work with this organisation keeps me grounded in the values of compassion, community service, and human impact."

More villages, more scholarships and bigger dreams

The initiative now wants to reach 20,000 children across 150 villages by 2030 and provide more than eight million hours of free education. It also plans to introduce STEM-based projects in government schools, expand scholarships from Class 1 through graduation, and develop Village Knowledge Centres with computer- and AI-enabled literacy and skills training.

For Swami, the work has always been about more than numbers.



ASEP runs from 3.30 pm to 5.30 pm, six days a week, offering children two hours of guided learning.

"Education is the most powerful catalyst for social change," he says.

He has spent much of his adult life working on large projects overseas, but the reason he continues to return to this work is rooted in what he saw as a child.

"I firmly believe that lasting change must begin where we come from. Staying involved with the initiative is not just about leading an organisation. It is about honouring my roots, empowering V-Kids, uplifting families, strengthening communities, and making sure that no child's future is determined by poverty or circumstance," he explains.

In Yernagudem, that idea now sits alongside a very different kind of future.

Namratha is still in school. Ganesh is pursuing graduation. Madhuri is studying towards her next stage of education. Uma wants to help other children who face the kind of loss she did.

Their journeys are different, but each began with the chance to keep studying.

And that is what Swami has been trying to protect since that first conversation with his friends in January 2010. He wants every child to have the chance to stay in school long enough to decide what comes next.

All pictures courtesy PARD INDIA.

■