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Nothing can stop these Shooting Stars

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Education Times explores the hardships and challenges faced by the first-generation learners from economically weak and underprivileged backgrounds, who went to modest schools but gave an exemplary performance

Their struggles became their strengths and built their resilience. Enduring hardships, both social and economic, these students set an example by making it to the top. In an age, when expensive coaching classes are the mantra of success for children from urban neo-rich educated families, these students combat all the roadblocks to emerge a winner.

These are the students, who are first-generation learners and may be going to a school in a small village, may not have the luxury to hire a home tutor or extra books, but they have an indomitable will, and within their limited means, they are writing their own success story.

Jashandeep Kaur, 16, from Satya Bharti Adarsh Senior Secondary School, Rauni, Punjab, daughter of an electrician scored 97.2% in CBSE class X boards. She used peaceful mornings in her one-room house for self-study. "We only get uninterrupted power supply early morning. So, I used to get up at 2 am to study peacefully," says Jashandeep, who took help of the extra classes, books and learning material provided by the school. Aspiring to be a gynaecologist, she wants to serve in villages facing lack of primary healthcare. It is not easy for students in her locality to study, as most of them are burdened with household chores before rushing to school. "Several students are exposed to alcoholism and domestic violence from early childhood, making it necessary for us to counsel the parents as well," says her teacher Harjot Kaur.

For Jaspreet Kaur (18), daughter of a farmer, student of Satya Bharti Adarsh Senior Secondary School Fattubhilla, who secured 96% in class XII, it was the lack of internet access at home, which bothered her more than her parents' lack of formal education. "I was totally dependent on my teachers and school," says Jaspreet, who dreams of joining the Civil Services once she graduates with History and Political Science. Her principal Ramma Raina, says the teachers motivated them through inspirational stories and group discussions. "We work on their language skills and vocabulary to help them understand the texts. With no private tuitions centres here it is sheer hard work that makes them succeed. The biggest challenge lies in motivating the parents to drive home the importance of education," she adds.



Sana Niyaz, a student of Delhi's Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya near Jama Masjid, scored 97.6% in the CBSE class XII board exams and topped the list of Delhi government school students. Her father, who is a cook at a local restaurant, was against educating Sana and her sisters. But, it was the determination of her mother that led the girls to continue their education. Not requiring any tuition, the four sisters help each other with studies and are the first to have finished class XII in their entire extended family. Sana is now eyeing Delhi University's St. Stephen's College to pursue a BA programme but has not decided the core subject yet.

In Telangana, where several tribal students are striving for basic education, a few have created a record by clearing the JEE Main. In a first, 506 students belonging to Telangana Tribal Welfare Residential Educational Institutions (TTWREIs) and Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutions (TSWREIs) have passed the Main 2019.

Rajnikesh Vardhan from Social Welfare IIT College, Gowlidoddi secured 203 out of 360 marks with 98.41 percentile. L Tejaswini and K Priyason from social welfare schools scored 93.4 and 93.62 percentile, respectively. Dedicated long-term coaching facilities, food and teaching materials are provided to these students. "All them are first-generation learners coming from marginalised households of tribal hamlets. We train them so that they can acquire an academic orientation," says RS Praveen, secretary of the institutions. Having uneducated parents is not the only thing the students battle, as many of them are subjected to alcoholic fathers, domestic abuse, abject poverty and even sexual abuse.

"We begin with extensive counselling and motivational sessions by seniors and alumni who have similar stories to share. Pain is the common factor that bonds them," says Praveen.

S Likitha, a student at Social Welfare IIT College, Gowlidoddi, Hyderabad, is one of the 50 girls who qualified for JEE Advanced from the institute, scoring 93 percentile in Main while achieving 97.1% marks in Telangana Intermediate exams. She lost her father when she was one, and her mother works as a daily wage labourer. "I am now preparing for the next challenge and dedicate 15-16 hours to my studies every day. I want to get into an IIT and later prepare for the Civil Services," says Likitha, who also loves reading novels and has a keen interest in Origami.

Bhavana Pawar from a small village, Miragpur in UP who scored 492 marks in CBSE class XII boards, has been fighting her way to get a quality education. Her only dream was to come out of the village that had only a Hindi-medium government school and join a Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV) residential school in Haridwar.

"It was in class V that I started preparing for JNV and since then there has been no looking back. Being away from family was not easy, but it made me realise what it takes to follow the dreams," says Bhavana, who credits her primary school principal for helping her with JNV forms and preparation. She has cleared the board exams with flying colours, but her real battle is to confidently communicate in English. "I had studied in a village and got unnerved conversing with fellow students at JNV who studied in English medium schools," says the 17-year old, a devoted basketball player.

Social and economic challenges can easily demotivate students, but not for these students who are born to touch the stars.