

### **Samsur, India**

Samsur, 13, is from Kachhi Basti, Manoharpura, Jagatpura, Jaipur (Rajasthan). He has four brothers, who are 4, 9, 10 and 15 years old. Samsur's father runs a tea stall and sells garbage collected by rag pickers. His father has completed 8th grade and can read. Samsur's mother is illiterate. She is a domestic worker and helps her husband sort out the garbage to sell.

Samsur started working with his friends as a rag (garbage) picker when he was ten years old because his parents and all his neighbors and friends were rag pickers. He collected garbage from McDonalds, Pepsi factory, and Milk Processing Units in Malviyanagar, Jaipur, three hours a day (from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.), seven days a week for a year. He still has a scar on his foot from stepping on a piece of broken glass while collecting garbage. Samsur also attended school for four hours a day (from noon until 4 p.m.). During his work as a rag-picker, Samsur was addicted to *gutka* (tobacco) and sometimes used to smoke cigarettes.



Samsur, Holton-Arms School, Bethesda, MD, April 24, 2006

Samsur has completed only one year of schooling. He dropped out of school so that he could continue rag-picking throughout the day.

One day, Samsur's father met an activist from Bachpan Bachao Andolan (the South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude). The meeting was an eye-opener for his father, who realized his responsibility to work and to send Samsur to school. Without wasting anytime, he sent Samsur to the Bal Ashram, a rehabilitation center run by Bachpan Bachao Andolan.

Now, Samsur lives at the Bal Ashram in Viratnagar, Jaipur District (Rajasthan) with other children who have been withdrawn from work and are receiving educational and vocational training. Samsur is improving his reading and writing skills so that he can be reintegrated into formal school when he returns home.

Samsur is also busy fighting illiteracy, child labor, dowry (the practice of the bride's family giving a gift of money or valuables to the groom for marriage), corruption, child marriage, etc. He participates in the implementation of *Bal Mitra Gram* (Child-Friendly Villages). He interacts with villagers and children in nearby villages to advocate for a child-friendly society, which aims to eliminate child labor and enroll all children in school through establishing children's parliaments. Samsur also participates in demonstrations, rallies and marches to highlight prevalent local social problems, enroll children in school, and boycott fireworks and other products that are manufactured using child labor.

Samsur now has hope of a future that is not full of exploitation. He wants to go to university and become a good painter. He sees himself making beautiful paintings. He also wants to help other children like him and work to improve their lives. Education should be ensured so that all the children can go to school, Samsur says, and adults should be provided with employment. He knows that if children work then they do not have time to play, they are exploited by their employers, they do not receive adequate wages, and they do not have a chance to develop physically and socially to their full potential. "The best way to help child laborers is to make friends with them and persuade them to go to school. Schooling is the most important for children," he says.