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## Pratham – Second Chance

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By Foram Mehta

HOUSTON: For better or for worse, 2014 elevated the conversation about girls' education to a global stage. It was a year of juxtaposing headlines: Where a terrorist group abducted hundreds of schoolgirls in Africa and a young woman from Pakistan made history as the youngest person to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Girls' education has been on the minds and tongues of people around the world, with most agreeing: It needs to get better.

For thousands of girls in India – like Preeti from Rajasthan – things are getting better. While daily headlines suggest a bleak reality, untold stories of India's relentless fighters tell another

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tale. A victim of India's infamous caste system, 18-year-old Preeti was born into a family of street sweepers with limited possibility for a different future until the day Pratham volunteers told her she could go back to school. Preeti embraced this opportunity and worked harder than ever to learn everything she had missed since dropping out to work. Today, Preeti feels like she is in a place where she belongs. She sees a very real possibility of a brighter future and is setting a new precedent for her family of street sweepers.

Pratham, one of India's largest NGOs is a prominent voice in the global conversation about universal education, and through programs like this, ensuring that a new generation of Indian girls like Preeti will never have to fight for a chance to learn.



Established in 2011 as a pilot program in Maharashtra to help girls finish school, POSE, or "Second Chance," has evolved and now operates in 31 centers. Targeting women in underserved communities who are at risk of dropping out or have left school, it offers girls 16 and up education through a combination of textbook learning with self-esteem building.

"India is victim to many socio-cultural divides of the basis of caste, religion, and sects." says Anamara Baig, from Pratham India. "The unique opportunity that the girls get is breaking these socio-cultural barriers. Girls learn together, eat together, and in many centers, live together, forcing them to think about these differences and their relevance."

Programs like Second Chance are more important than ever for India. A recent report by UNESCO named the country as the home of the world's most illiterate, with 287 million people, as functionally unable to read or write. Furthermore, the literacy rate for women between 15 and 24 is 14% lower than for men according to the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative.

"If you educate a girl," says Sarita Gupta, Senior Advisor for Development at Pratham USA, "you are by extension ensuring that her children will be educated, breaking this cycle of illiteracy from one generation to the next."

"I think it's more critical to educate the girls who are going to become the mothers. It's a double investment. It's an investment in the girl at this time and it's an investment in the future generation as well."

For more information on Pratham USA, visit [www.prathamusa.org](http://www.prathamusa.org) . Tel: 713 774 9599

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