

Meet Moksha

Like many students on campus, Moksha's life had been filled with one tragedy after another. Her father took his own life when she was two years old; her mother moved to another area, leaving Moksha with her grandparents. Sadly, her grandmother died, leaving Moksha with her alcoholic grandfather.



When Moksha arrived at IREF, her pain was plain for all to see. However, after hearing about Jesus for the first time in her life, she was immediately drawn to his love, forgiveness, and grace.

In January this year, following the Youth Conference, Moksha made the bold decision to be baptised. Her public declaration of commitment to Jesus means it is likely she will be ostracised by her family and village. Students don't take the decision to be baptised lightly; when they do, IREF's celebrations are filled with prayers for strength, endurance, and protection. Please pray for all the students who chose to be baptised following this year's Youth Conference. In the first two months of this year, 57 IREF students were baptised!



Pre-Arranged Marriages in India

Today, about 90% of marriages in India are arranged by a couple's respective parents. Although attitudes about this ancient practice are changing in many urban areas, it is still prevalent in the rural areas that IREF serves. In arranged marriages, parents or relatives find a spouse whom they believe will be suitable for their child. Factors like caste, financial standing, and education play a huge part in determining the right fit. The two families come

together for a consultation, asking dozens of questions.

As far as IREF's students are concerned, nearly all of them will enter an arranged marriage – some at a very young age. In India, 25% of girls are given in marriage before their 18th birthday; this often happens for financial reasons. Through marriage, a family may hope to find greater financial security - either from more income, or from one less mouth to feed. Superficially, arranged marriages seem to work; only about 1% end in divorce.

But sadly, many of IREF's young women and girls leave their education early to be married. Sometimes, a girl is given to a man who cares for her; but in other cases, a girl may suffer misery. IREF grieves whenever this happens, but celebrates when students are arranged in a marriage that is both for their own good and brings glory to God.

Meet Dileep

Dileep is a living miracle, and he's proud of it! His parents lost three babies at childbirth before he was born; his birth broke the 'curse' everyone believed his family was under. Today, his parents are separated, but his mother visits Dileep at IREF each month.



Now in 8th Grade, Dileep has received more education than his parents and grandparents, but he doesn't take this for granted. He works diligently on his English, spending extra one-on-one time with his IREF teachers. IREF teaching staff are greatly impressed by his academic discipline.

Dileep himself testifies: *"I want to be different from my parents. They don't value education; but my mum is happy that I like it here. She is also surprised by how much English I have learned."* His current plan beyond 10th Grade is to move on to IREF's Junior College, and then its Degree College.

Pray for Dileep and many other students like him at IREF who are receiving an education beyond their parents' dreams.

An IREF teacher's approach

Raju experienced a different kind of system when he worked in a government school. Everyone's caste mattered, and the staff were constantly trying to

compete with each other. None of them seemed interested in doing more than simply teaching the curriculum. So students who struggled to learn or study fell behind.

But Raju's approach is very different. Last year, he saw Rebecca struggle in his class. She was a fine student, but things weren't clicking for her the way he hoped they would. So, he often pulled her aside to encourage her; he suggested she look at the material differently to other students and helped her discover the way she learns best. Rebecca is now thriving in 10th grade. She has moved from being a good student to an excellent one; nothing makes Raju happier than seeing her growth!



But it's not just Rebecca who has experienced his teacher's heart. When Praveen first came to IREF, he was quiet, because he was lonely. His village is 4-6 hours away, and adjusting to life at the school was tough for him. Raju noticed Praveen's struggles and the way he isolated himself from others. So, he encouraged Praveen to join activities and to study with others. This year, Praveen is more active and lively than ever before. IREF staff and pupils know him for his reliability and leadership skills, neither of which would have been realised without Raju's intentionality.

A true teacher looks out for students like Rebecca, who need a different way to learn; and for those like Praveen, who need someone to make them feel they belong.

Give thanks for Raju and others like him who have this kind of impact on IREF's students.

IREF Together

This year's IREF Together event is taking place at **4.00pm on Saturday, 13th April**. It will focus on IREF's dedicated teaching staff, who educate students from their early beginnings right through to IREF's Degree College and Nursing School. Their approach is holistic, helping children understand how to take care of themselves and form good habits, as much as understanding maths and grammar. Lives are changed every day through this approach to their education.

So, plan to link up with this year's event at irefusa.org/together, to be inspired by testimonies from IREF staff and students, and to see how the Lord is impacting lives in Repalle!

An insight into Hinduism

78% of India's population today are Hindus. Although Hinduism originated in India, the religion has no known prophet or single founder. Hindu beliefs seem to have formed over time. Their sacred texts, the Four Vedas, are believed to be divine, the direct transmission of the gods' words. Hinduism is polytheistic, recognising a multitude of gods. But Hindus worship one Ultimate Reality, Brahman, as well as a myriad of other deities.

Many Hindus believe in reincarnation, understanding that it is a person's desires and appetites which bind them to the cycle of death and rebirth. So Hindus desperately seek liberation from this unending and depressing cycle. They believe that they can find liberation in many ways; but each path is dependent on their own actions, whether good or bad.

Many of IREF's students come from strongly Hindu families. In such cases, devotion to their beliefs is evident, but a sense of hopelessness is also present; for if they don't achieve their hoped-for liberation, they will be destined to be reborn into another difficult life.

Only in Jesus is real hope found – forgiveness for every past, present, and future sin; the gift of his indwelling Holy Spirit to make his presence real to us day by day and provide the power for inward transformation; and when this life is over, the certainty of spending eternity in the bliss of his glorious presence forevermore! No wonder Paul was moved to write:

*"I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation of **everyone** who believes!" [Romans 1.16]*

Some Prayer Points:

- Give thanks for the many who have been baptised as new believers this year already.
- Pray for Moksha and other students like her, that they will be resilient in their new-found faith.
- Pray for IREF's female students, that they will be found good, caring marriage partners.
- Pray for every student who comes from an uneducated family that they will have a hunger to learn – like Dileep.
- Pray for IREF's teachers and those who lead the work of IREF in Repalle: Emmanuel and Dee Rebba, and their sons, Josh and John.

Thank you for your ongoing prayers and support, which are much appreciated. We are keen to increase our UK support for IREF; so please share this newsletter with as many as possible!

David Hunt [Chairman of IREF(UK)]