



Working through their schooldays

A Handsworth Rotarian, Dr Charan Bunger, has set up a charity to advance the education of poor children and young people from the Ravidassia and the other most down-trodden communities in India. The charity is run by a team of trustees, many of whom are young professionals, educated and settled in England and whose parents came from these poor communities in India. They feel like an obligation to help those children in India who are not fortunate enough to educate and free themselves from the bonds of poverty.

The Guru Ravidass Educational Assistance Trust (GREAT) was created in February 2005 and, since its launch, the charity has awarded 22 scholarships to poor but bright students and five bursaries for books and warm clothes for children in schools in remote villages. At the moment, the charity is active in Punjab, but this will soon be extended to other poorer states in India. The poor students with no chance to go to a school

are given the first priority and for others, who could manage to complete school education but can not afford to go to a college or university; awards are given to cover the tuition fees and other course expenses.

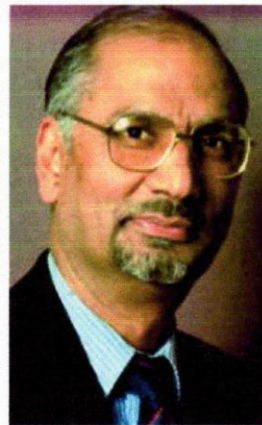
Charan Bunger migrated to England in 1968. He was born and brought up in a poor family in India and, when in England, gained a PhD at Aston University. After retiring from his academic post, he decided to set up this charity to help those who were still deprived of the opportunity to educate themselves due to financial difficulties. "There is still a large proportion of the population in India where young people and their parents find education a dream

and, because of severe poverty, children fall into the cruel state of child labour to help parents to earn living. Education is still a privilege of the few and the poor children are systematically prohibited from any kind of education with the rich and powerful keeping them illiterate and as their servants", says Dr Bunger.

When visiting India, Dr Bunger and his fellow trustees find that young children are seen sweating in the heat breaking stones, working in the fields eighteen hours a day, and working as kitchen servants at the road-side restaurants or hidden away as domestic servants. Two boys were seen working with molten metal in an iron foundry with no protective clothing or shoes. These children endure miserable and difficult lives. They earn little and are generally abused. They struggle to make enough to eat and perhaps to help feed their families as well. They do not go to school; more than half of them will never learn the barest skills of literacy. Many of them have been

working since the age of four or five and by the time they reach adulthood they suffer from poor health or are deformed.

The charity bears the name of Guru Ravidass, a prominent Saint and Guru of 15th century India who tried to uplift the poorest of the poor. He was the prime exponent of the Bhakti Movement, a socio-religious programme to reform a society indulging in oppressive religious practices and caste discrimination. His philosophy and teachings encourage hard work to gain dignity and status in life. Through education, one can obtain this and Charan firmly believes that this charity will succeed in helping some of those who are deprived educational opportunities.



Dr Charan Bunger

Just two of the beneficiaries



Manmeet
Studying BSc in Computer Science. Father died, mother and Manmeet worked as servants to earn a living and

pay for her schooling before the degree course.
Scholarship awarded: Rs 22,195



Ravi
Studying for a degree in Music. He worked as a servant in his childhood because of family poverty.

Scholarship awarded: Rs 10,000