

We are happy to see the growing number of girls in the higher classes at *St-Anthony's School, Dugawar*, which was founded in 2004.



## Enrolling more girls in our schools

Bringing more girls into *St Anthony's Schools* has been one of our priorities, and we continue to work toward this goal. In rural areas, the average ratio of boys to girls enrolling in private schools is 5:1. However, at *St. Anthony's School in Dugawar*, we have successfully reduced this gap to 2:1 over the past two decades. In *Rahrai*, the ratio now stands at 3:1, and in *Jadwar*, the newest school, it is 4:1.

Despite the grassroots level work by the social workers, many families in our project areas still hesitate to send their daughters to school. Overcoming these deeply rooted beliefs requires patience, trust, and persistent effort. Addressing this gap calls for targeted interventions that promote gender equality in education and ensure every child has access to quality learning.

Our dedicated teachers from South India, along with local teachers, visit villages during the admission period to personally encourage parents to enroll their daughters. A

few of our teaching staff in *Jadwar* and *Rahrai* are former students of *St. Anthony's School in Dugawar*. They are living testimonies of how education can transform lives. Their stories serve as powerful examples for parents, showing them that education paves the way for a brighter and more secure future.

At *St. Anthony's School*, we provide not just academic knowledge but also strong values and essential life skills in a safe and

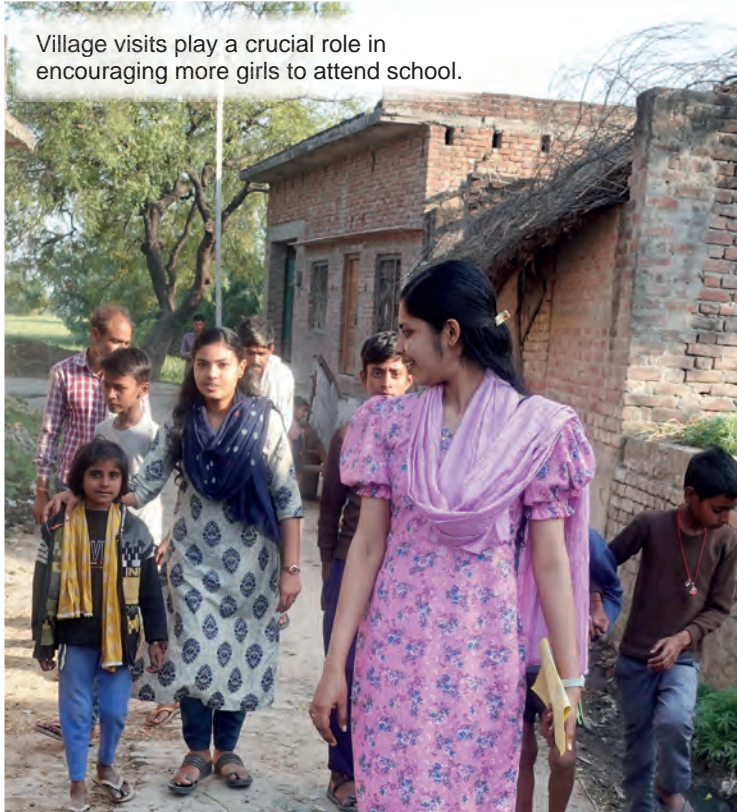
Our teachers visit villages to promote the importance of educating girls, not just boys.





nurturing environment. With continued efforts, we hope to see more girls in classrooms, building a future full of promise and opportunity.

Village visits play a crucial role in encouraging more girls to attend school.



## Updates on the schools

### Jadwar: Building work is going on!

The project in *Jadwar* is now entering its third year. After a thorough inspection of the school by government officials, we have received official permission from the state government to run both the primary and middle schools. The next important step will be to

Compound walls and gates are essential for safety in rural India and are mandatory for CBSE affiliation.



apply for affiliation with the CBSE (*Central Board of Secondary Education*) in two years' time. This will further enhance the quality of education we can offer and open new opportunities for our students.

On the infrastructure front, the construction of the compound wall around the school building has been completed. This new boundary, compulsory for CBSE affiliation, will help keep the campus secure, ensuring the safety of the children while they play and preventing stray dogs and wandering animals from entering the premises. The installation of the main gate is still pending and will be completed soon as part of the ongoing development of this important project.

### Rahrai: CBSE affiliation.

In our previous edition of this newsletter, we shared an update of the CBSE affiliation process for our school. We are happy to inform you that we have now received CBSE affiliation up to Class 10. The next step is to apply for affiliation for classes 11 and 12, and







Class 12 (2024-2025), St-Anthony School Dugawar.

preparations for this important milestone are already underway.

### **Dugawar: A Heartfelt Send-Off**

The *St-Anthony's school of Dugawar* bid an emotional farewell to the Class 12 of 2024–2025 in a warm and memorable send-off ceremony. Teachers and staff gathered to celebrate their journey, sharing fond memories and words of encouragement. The morning was filled with heartfelt speeches, prayers, and a special dinner. The event concluded with a group photo, capturing the joy, gratitude, and hopes for the future.

## **Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 A Once-in-a-Century spiritual gathering**

The distance from our project area to *Prayagraj*, where the *Kumbh Mela* is held, is approximately 500 kilometers. In January and February 2025, many of our staff and community members made the pilgrimage to this sacred event.

But what is the *Maha Kumbh Mela*? It is a especially rare event, occurring only once every 144 years when a unique alignment of sky objects (*Jupiter, the Sun, and the Moon*) determines its timing. The 2025 *Maha Kumbh* welcomed over 650 million devotees from all walks of life, each gathering on the banks of the holy

Ganges River to bathe, pray, and seek spiritual purification.

The origins of the *Kumbh Mela* date back to ancient times, rooted deeply in Hindu mythology. According to tradition, the heavenly beings and the demons once agreed to work together to churn the cosmic ocean to obtain *Amrit*, the nectar of immortality. This great churning required the combined strength of both divine and demonic forces.

However, when the nectar was finally obtained, the demons, consumed by greed, tried to seize it for themselves. In the battle that followed, a few drops of the sacred nectar fell upon four earthly locations: *Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nasik*. These sites became the blessed grounds where the *Kumbh Mela* is held, rotating every twelve years between them.

The *Maha Kumbh* of 2025 was an extraordinary spiritual gathering, reminding millions of the enduring power of faith, tradition, and devotion.



*Maha Kumbh Mela* is a massive gathering held on the banks of the holy River Ganges.



## Self-Flagellation among children

During a routine visit to a primary school class, I came across a group of children arguing. As I approached, I sensed that something was wrong. After speaking with the group, I called aside the boy they accused of being aggressive. To my shock, I noticed bloodstains on the back of his shirt. Lifting it, I was taken aback by the sight of fresh wounds and scars from healed ones.

My initial thought was that these injuries were inflicted by his family. However, the boy explained that he had been performing self-flagellation for years during the month of *Muharram*. He insisted that it was a voluntary act to please *Allah* and that it did not cause him pain. He assured me that the wounds would heal in a few days.

This revelation was an eye-opener. I began to investigate how widespread this practice was among the children from the Muslim community. A teacher from the same community informed me that many children from a particular village engaged in this ritual, which is common in their orthodox community. Despite the existence of numerous madrasas, these children attend *St. Anthony's School*, which is already a positive change.

I had heard of self-inflicted penance among adults during this holy month but was unaware of its prevalence among children. I spoke with a community leader who confirmed that while the practice persists in some areas, it is gradually fading as the new generation becomes more educated. The boy's father also assured me that his son was not coerced and that he participated willingly. The boy, only ten years old, seemed content and claimed it did not hurt him. The marks on his back indicated he had started this practice at a very young age, which has undoubtedly influenced his behavior and development.

Over the years, the community has approached us with various requests, such as special teaching sessions, early dismissal on Fridays, and allowing headscarves for girls. However, we have adhered to our school rules and principles. Our school focuses on cre-

ating a secular and inclusive environment, where religious practices are not emphasized, to ensure equality and respect for all students.

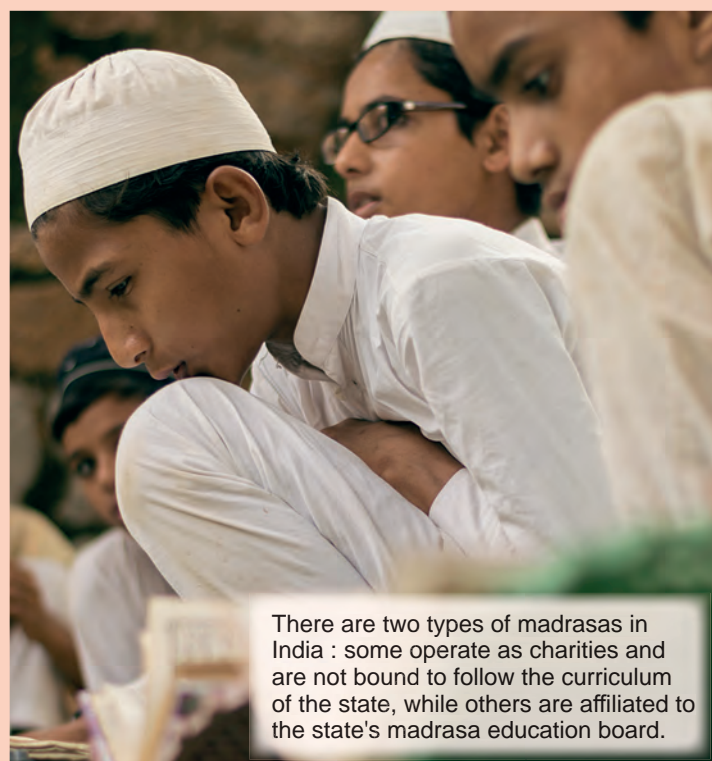
During *Muharram*, many children abstain from eating and drinking, even in the summer heat.

Self-torture rituals are still prevalent in many religious traditions in India. In *Hinduism*, devotees pierce their cheeks and nostrils with iron rods. In *Christianity*, some keep lit candles and let the wax flow over their hands, or crawl and roll on the ground. While these practices are less common today, they still remain part of some communities.

Molly Sebastian, Project manager



I spoke with the child, his parents and religious leaders who assured me it wouldn't happen again and vowed to discourage the practice.



There are two types of madrasas in India : some operate as charities and are not bound to follow the curriculum of the state, while others are affiliated to the state's madrasa education board.