



**CHINTAN**

ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH  
AND ACTION GROUP

# No Child in Trash

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*In this inaugural issue of our quarterly newsletter, some basic facts about the world that wastepicker children inhabit, and Chintan's work among them.*



Close to one per cent of India's urban population are believed to be involved in recycling. Of them, 15 lakh are wastepickers, or ragpickers, at the very bottom of the pyramid of waste handlers. Their job involves collecting recyclable trash like soiled plastic, broken glass and torn metal cans from public and private garbage and open dumping sites.

Wastepickers make a major contribution towards ensuring that our cities aren't choked with garbage. They also save the municipal bodies considerable money. (Delhi's 150,000 wastepickers, for instance, save the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and the New Delhi Municipal Council at least 6 lakh rupees daily.) But this brings them no recognition or security. Wastepickers have an uncertain income, meagre savings, if any, and live in poor-quality housing made of old cartons, thatch and plastic sheets. Most of them suffer from illnesses ranging from severe anaemia to tuberculosis, mainly due to malnourishment and the hazardous nature of their job which exposes them to toxins, infection and injury. Also, since their work is seen as a menial occupation, they are greatly discriminated against.

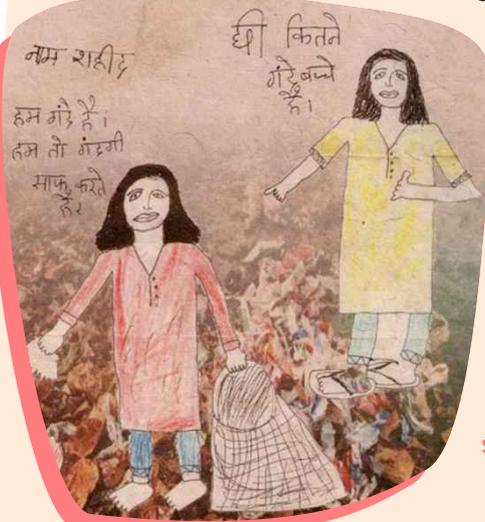
*Children, some of them as young as four, comprise about 20% of the total number of wastepickers in an average Indian city.*

In Delhi, approximately 15,000 children under the age of 14 work as wastepickers (this number includes a fifth of the city's street kids). Few of them have access to formal schooling: One, because their parents, usually lacking formal education themselves, find it difficult to get them admitted into schools; two, wastepicker families often need every able individual to work; and three, schools are hostile, unfriendly places where wastepicker children are not welcome.

Denied education, these children have no alternative to hours spent every day on the streets rummaging through garbage. This puts them at risk of disease, injury, violence and almost daily harassment. They are bullied to clean up private homes and are often abused and beaten, even sexually assaulted, by municipal sweepers, the police and the general public.



Chintan works to enable child wastepickers educate themselves and acquire skills in order to make empowering choices about their future. While the immediate aim is to help them gain literacy and enroll in formal schools, the larger aim is to ensure that no child is forced to pick waste for a living.



Chintan is headquartered in Delhi, where it runs learning centres in Nizamuddin Basti, Ghazipur Landfill and Tehkhand (near Okhla), and facilitates similar access to education in Seemapuri and R.K. Puram. Each learning centre comprises rented rooms—ideally, a set of two rooms—where classes are held through the day. Together, they cover 1300 children ranging in age from 4 to 14. Since 2003, over 5000 children have studied at Chintan’s learning centres.

< Left: A drawing by a child wastepicker that depicts how the world sees them.

## Teepu’s story

*My name is Teepu. Teepu Sultan. I’m 13 years old. I have seven brothers—Saddam (18), Harun (12), Rehmad (11), Abdul (9), Faisal (8), Ghazi and Azad (7)—and one sister, Farida (10). All of us live with our mother in the park attached to the Bhure Khan Dargah in Hazrat Nizamuddin.*

*Harun and I pick waste with our eldest brother. Sometimes Rehmad comes with us. Since our father passed away after a long illness, this kabaade ka kaam has been our source of income. When we work together, we earn Rs 150 to 200 a day. There are some days, especially in the monsoon season, when we don’t earn anything. Then my mother works in colonies.*

*When I was young, I had joined the first standard in a local school. The class teacher there did not like me and one day she beat me up. I stopped going to school after that. Later, when I left in the mornings to gather scrap, I would see children going to study and then I felt that I should, too. But it was too late, and we needed the money at home.*

*One morning, I saw a Didi teaching some children in Sundar Nursery. A boy told me that she was from a place called Chintan and she taught them for free. Some days after that, I went to meet Didi and told her about myself. She allowed me to join her class. It had children of all ages. Now I finish my work early every morning and go to take lessons from Didi for two hours. Sometimes I don’t feel like going to the class, but Saddam Bhai and my mother insist that I should go.*

*Before I started attending the class, I would spend all my time on the streets where I worked. I had made friends who weren’t good. They inhaled fluid and solution. Now I study, so I’ve stopped wasting my time on the streets. Some months back our class went on a trip to Jaipur in an airplane. It was the best time of my life.*

*I want to study further so that I can find a good job.*

*And I want a proper house of my own.*



*There's nothing green about recycling if it involves child labour. Help Chintan ensure that no child works in trash and has the chance to choose his or her own future.*

Chintan welcomes donations to help us sustain our learning centres and other programmes for child wastepickers. Every donation, however small, and whether one-time, monthly or annual, is a help. Regular donations help us plan and sustain our programmes more successfully. *All donations to Chintan are eligible for tax exemption in India under section 80G.*

If you live in India, you can make a cheque in the name of Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group and post it to 238, Siddharth Enclave, New Delhi - 110014. If you live in the United States, you can donate through Give to Asia, which has already inspected Chintan via a due diligence process. The website of Give to Asia is [www.give2asia.org](http://www.give2asia.org) (Please specify that you would like to donate to Chintan.) If you live anywhere else, please email us to ask how to wire us your donations.

## Donation details

Here's what your money can do for children in our learning centres:

- □ Rs 100 pays for three boxes of colour pencils.
- □ Rs 300 helps us replace old chatais and durries □ in a classroom.
- □ Rs 500 will buy a month's supply of pencils and □ pens for a class.
- □ Rs 1,000 pays for a notebook each for 100 children.
- □ Rs 2,000 allows us to buy educational aids for a □ single subject.
- □ Rs 3,000 is one teacher's monthly salary.
- □ Rs 5,000 pays for a one-time basic health camp for a class of 40 children.
- □ Rs 7,000 is one full-time social worker's monthly salary.
- □ Rs 8,000 helps us pay the monthly rent for one learning centre (a set of two rooms).
- □ Rs 10,000 pays for two educational outings by bus for a single learning centre.
- □ Rs 12,000 enables us to hire a specialist for a month to train our teachers and help us □□ refine our curriculum.



Any of these amounts can also help us meet several other expenses that go towards running our learning centres, ranging from hiring supervisors to organizing extracurricular activities.

We also welcome donations of unused or little used notebooks, text books in Hindi that follow the CBSE syllabus (up to class 8), PCs and laptops in usable condition, and DVD films and audio CDs of stories for children (in Hindi or in simple, beginner's English).

*Visit our website [www.chintan-india.org](http://www.chintan-india.org) for more on waste recyclers, child wastepickers and Chintan's campaigns and initiatives.*



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