

Sisters Ride to School and Away from Arranged Marriages

By Rachel Curtis - Development Manager



Murshida at a White Lotus event

When the right factors converge, even the course of longstanding tradition can be rerouted. One of the most important factors is the support we receive from generous donors like you! You make possible the Blossom Bus program, which places a new destination on the map for pious Muslim girls in rural Mewat, Haryana. Our partner and advocate for education, White Lotus, is relying on its stellar reputation with the community to bring that destination within reach.

The parents of 11 children, Farooq and Amna were planning marriages for four of their daughters – Farana, 15, Ruksana,

14, Murshida, 13, and Farzana, 12. With the girls' completion of grade 5, the highest level of schooling available in Babupur village, marriage was the safest option to ensure the girls were properly provided for. Responsible parents in Mewat don't permit their daughters to commute several kilometers unattended through empty fields, where they may be subject to harassment or attract undue attention.

Yet these young women had a taste of the upper schooling available to their brothers. Until their father found a job driving a truck that kept him away from home, he had accompanied the girls to an upper primary school in a neighboring village. Farana advanced as far as grade 8, but her father's employment signaled the end of her and her sisters' academic careers.

Murshida dreamed of reaching grade 12, like her eldest brother. When White Lotus Officer Suraj Kumar approached her mother this April about sending her and her sisters back to school, her heart leaped. Although her marriage was being planned, it hadn't yet taken place - there was still time to take another path. Her mother refused, but Murshida spoke up in support of Suraj's appeal: all four sisters wanted badly to return to school, and could travel together.

Suraj suggested a better solution. He proposed supervised transportation, even allowing for one person from the family to serve as the chaperon. Amna still balked, but Murshida and her sisters argued that their brother got to attend school eight kilometers away while four daughters were being refused even with transportation available. Amna relented, but left the final word with their father.

Suraj contacted Farooq by telephone to resolve the matter. Learning that the organization offering transportation was the same that had been working in the area over the previous three years to improve the conditions in schools, Farooq gave his consent. The work of White Lotus was esteemed in the community, and he felt safe giving its new program a chance.

Since this fall, Murshida and her three closest sisters have traveled to school together on the Blossom Bus, and feel confident they will each at least reach the tenth grade. Best of all, says Murshida, is that none of the four will be pressured to marry before she is 18. Lotus Outreach joins Murshida and her sisters in thanking you, our generous donors, for making the Blossom Bus possible.



Murshida and Babupur girls catch the Blossom Bus