

Prerana Patrika Edition 4: Sanmaan Program Insights

April, 2026



Empowering Child Victims
Navigating Justice



“Since 1986, Prerana has been intervening in the lives of children born into the brothels of Mumbai’s Kamathipura red-light area to prostituted women who are victims of sex trafficking. Prerana worked 24x7 to end intergenerational sex trafficking. In the process, Prerana evolved several pathbreaking micro-interventions by testing many ideas on the ground. There was no precedent to learn from; there were no blueprints, no theories, no master plans which could guide. Prerana’s dynamic interaction with ground-level problems and its unflinching faith in social transformation evolved insights and accumulated observations into creating a sound knowledge base. However, for each successful outcome, there was also a compelling desire to reach out to more and more such children living in agony. The children found begging at signal posts in metropolitan Mumbai and its twin city, Navi Mumbai, were one such challenge that was inviting Prerana. Our work on intergenerational trafficking into the sex trade kept telling us that it was not the right life for any child and that deeper intervention was required to correct it. We had learnt well that for a person left with no legitimate means to lead an honest life, there are only two options left to survive: steal or beg. This was the predisposing factor that drove us to intervene in this issue.

The police are often under pressure to ensure that busy and strategic traffic points on Mumbai roads are free of ‘ugly beggars.’ The presence of children among them brings considerable embarrassment to the ruling and elite class. If the problem cannot be solved, then at least the adults and children should be kept away from important traffic posts. The police personnel who had to uproot these families and throw them away had to inculcate in themselves a certain degree of insensitivity. That did not mean that there were no right-thinking officers. In the year 2016, Mr. Prabhu Patil, the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mumbai Police, got in touch with Prerana seeking social work intervention, admitting that uprooting these people, razing their roadside shelters, throwing away their belongings, and thrashing them was not the right approach, and that they needed to be handled professionally by those who knew how to do that. Prerana started working with these children. This was the precipitating factor!

Eventually, DCP Mr. Patil got transferred, as is routine with government higher-ups. Prerana continued the mission. That was the birth of Sanmaan!”

- Pravin Patkar, Co-Founder & Director, Prerana

Introduction



to Sanmaan

Sanmaan protects the rights of children found begging in public places, to restore their dignity and harness growth opportunities within their environments. The initiative began with Prerana working directly with children found begging at the traffic posts. The police used to enforce the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act (1959) by detaining men, women, and children found begging. However, a lack of follow-up meant most of them were quickly released, only to resume begging. This frustrating cycle led to occasional drastic measures, such as the destruction of habitats and belongings, in a futile attempt to deter those families from returning to these sites.

Between 2016 and 2018, Prerana conducted outreach across four police jurisdictions to identify and support these vulnerable children. Sanmaan worked closely with the semi-judicial bodies like the **Child Welfare Committee (CWC)**, providing professional services like conducting the **Social Investigation Reports (SIR)**. By consulting with children and their families, Prerana developed robust **Individual Care Plans (ICP)** for their long-term rehabilitation. Simultaneously, Prerana implemented measures to prevent children at high risk from being drawn into begging.

A large majority of these children belonged to the **De-Notified Tribes (DNTs)**—formerly legally labeled as “Criminal Tribes”—who have faced systemic discrimination and acute social stigma. Although the British-era Criminal Tribes Law was repealed shortly after India’s independence, a century of official repression and socio-political exclusion has left deep scars, often hindering efforts to mainstream these communities.

Recognizing that “it takes a village to raise a child,” Prerana committed to supporting both the children and their families and the communities to ensure safety and progress. Sanmaan’s unique approach lies in its “micro-level” ground interventions. Rather than fighting a losing battle against crime or accepting a life of repression, Prerana identified that the solution lies in improving the community’s interface with the mainstream society.

The project engages families and communities to help them assess their own resources and access their rights. Most adults in these communities work in the informal sector, a cycle of survival often passed down to the next generation. Within these circles, domestic violence and child marriage are common, and children frequently accompany adults while begging, which severely compromises their education and safety.

Following the principle ‘**institutionalization is a last resort**’, Prerana focuses on strengthening the family unit. By empowering parents to take primary responsibility for their children’s care, Prerana ensures that rescued children are not pushed back into begging or unnecessarily institutionalized. The ultimate goal remains clear: ensuring every child goes to school, receives healthcare, and remains safe.

Theory of Change





Core Focus: Protection and Rehabilitation

The heart of Project Sanmaan is the Protection and Rehabilitation of vulnerable children. Our primary objective is to systematically remove children from exploitative environments and successfully reintegrate them into society. This is achieved through a holistic framework of formal education, consistent care, and long-term developmental support.

Cross-Cutting Guiding Principles

To ensure these goals are met ethically and effectively, Sanmaan operates under four key guiding principles:

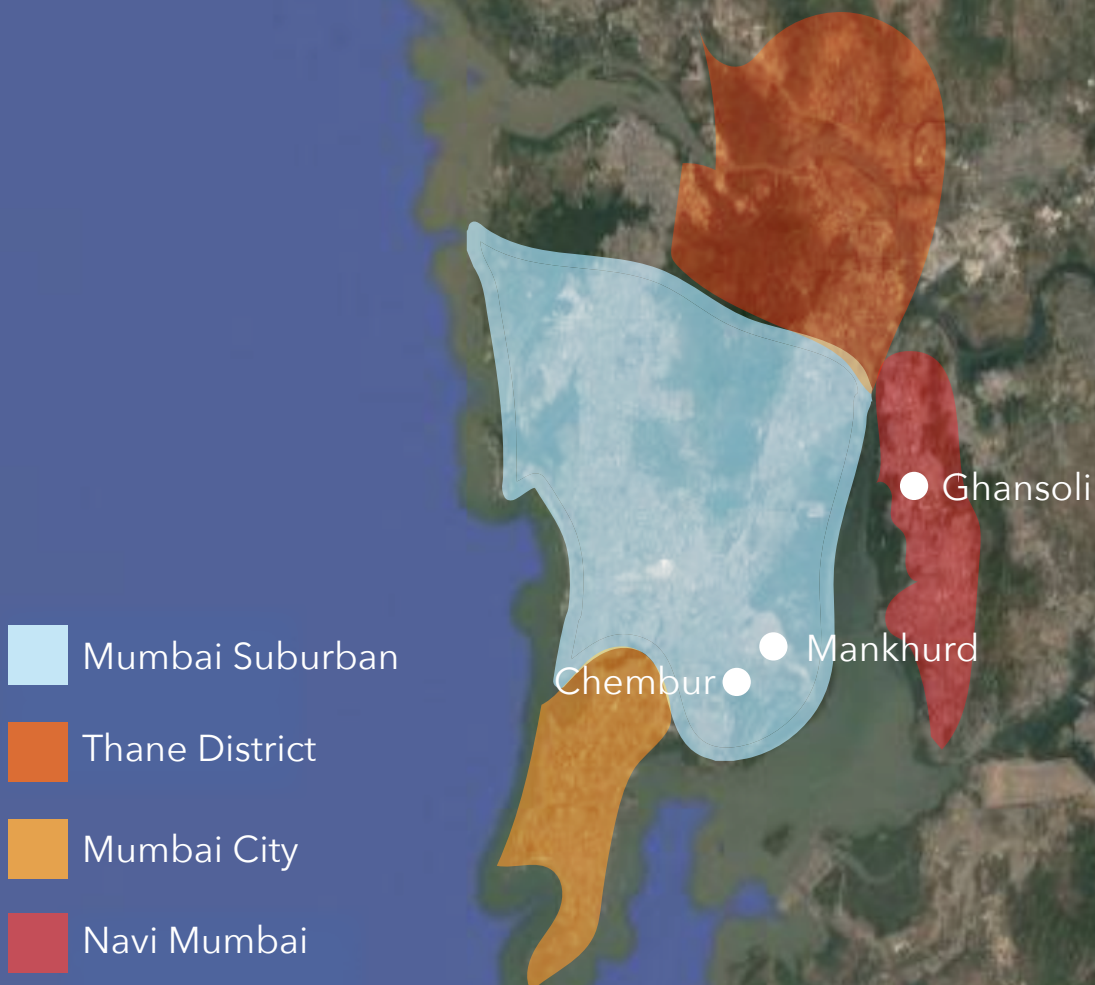
- **Child Rights Approach:** Every intervention is rooted in the fundamental belief that all children—regardless of their background—possess an inherent right to protection, education, and a life entirely free from exploitation.
- **Family Strengthening:** We recognize that the family is the first line of defense. By empowering parents through livelihood support, parenting workshops, psycho-social counseling, and direct linkages to government schemes, we reduce a child’s vulnerability at its source.
- **Community Participation:** The broader community is a vital partner in prevention and accountability. A critical component of our work involves shifting community behavior—particularly regarding the culture of almsgiving—to foster a more sustainable environment for these families.
- **Integrated Gender Approach:** Our interventions are designed with a keen sensitivity to the distinct risks faced by boys and girls. We place specific emphasis on the unique vulnerabilities of girls, who often face heightened risks of early or forced marriage.



Geographical location of the Project's field activities

From 2016 till May 2023, Project Sanmaan actively collaborated with the Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) across Mumbai Suburban, Mumbai City, and Thane districts.

The project operated in three communities— Chembur, Mankhurd, and Ghansoli—spanning both Mumbai and Navi Mumbai. Since June 2023, Sanmaan has streamlined its efforts to focus more intensively on one community in the Chembur area of Mumbai district, allowing for deeper engagement and sustained impact.



The Three Pillars of Sanmaan

Project Sanmaan is built upon three core pillars: **Prevention, Protection, and System Strengthening**. The initiative focuses on creating sustainable, child-centric solutions through a dual approach of institutional care and community-based outreach.

Traditionally, children rescued from begging were often separated from their families or institutionalized under the **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015**. However, without access to sustained rehabilitation or reintegration support, these actions frequently resulted in a violation of their fundamental rights. This systemic failure was further compounded by a lack of sensitization among child protection authorities, leaving children vulnerable within the very systems designed to safeguard them.

One of the most significant, yet overlooked, consequences of historical repression and discrimination is the "identity gap." Because these children and their parents lacked both **Identity and Eligibility Documents**, they faced a perpetual roadblock to progress. The absence of these essentials effectively barred them from education, healthcare, social protection, and legal entitlements.

Prerana's Project Sanmaan works to dismantle this barrier, enabling children to reclaim their rights to dignity, well-being, and development. By breaking the intergenerational cycle of begging, the project ensures that children and their families obtain the necessary social security documents to access schemes designed for their development.

To ensure long-term impact, Sanmaan actively collaborates with key authorities, including:

- The Child Welfare Committee (CWC)
- The Police Department
- The Education Department
- The Department of Women & Child Development
- The State Commission for Protection of Child Rights

Through these partnerships, Prerana promotes child-sensitive approaches and strengthens the discourse around child safeguarding within institutional systems.

S. No.	Name of Tasks	Number
1.	Children refer from Child Welfare Committee	329
2.	Children reach out through community outreach	348
	Total	677

ars of Rehabilitation

Pillar 1: Protection

This pillar focuses on the safeguarding and holistic development of children currently found in begging situations. It emphasizes long-term rehabilitation through consistent follow-up, educational reintegration, emotional well-being, and access to essential services. Sanmaan recognizes that simply removing a child from an exploitative situation is not sufficient. Sustained engagement, community involvement, and systemic support are crucial for a child's permanent growth and well-being.

Social Investigation (SIR) and Individual Care Plans (ICP)

When Sanmaan began engaging with Mumbai's Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) in 2016, it observed a critical gap: children rescued from begging were often restored to families without the comprehensive assessments required by the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015. Restoration was frequently granted based solely on an Aadhaar card and a small financial bond (₹1,000-₹5,000), failing to address the root causes of the child's situation.

To create lasting change, Sanmaan began supporting CWCs by conducting detailed Social Investigation Reports (SIRs) and drafting Individual Care Plans (ICPs). This involved:

- Home and school visits to assess the child's living and learning environments.
- Stakeholder interviews with parents, caregivers, and teachers.
- Collaborative planning with the CWC to identify family strengths and specific needs.

Between 2016 and 2023, Prerana provided SIR and ICP support for nearly 90% of children rescued and brought before the Committees in Mumbai Suburban and Thane districts.

No of SIR making tasks referred to Sanmaan:

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
101	84	45	44	17	14	15	05	04

Sustained Follow-Up and Community Engagement

Sanmaan ensures compassionate, long-term engagement by maintaining regular contact with approximately 110 children each month across Mumbai and Navi Mumbai. These follow-ups align with each child's ICP and involve a network of stakeholders, including women's groups, local leaders, the District Child Protection Units (DCPU), and local police.

Educational Support & Dignity

Prerana facilitates school enrollment and maintains active communication with educators to track attendance and emotional health. We focus on removing specific barriers to education through creative problem-solving:

- **Dignity in School:** In one instance, a child faced bullying because she could not bathe before coming to the class. Sanmaan worked with school authorities to allow her to use the school's bathroom facilities, restoring her confidence and keeping her in school.
- **Resource Security:** For children in street situations whose books were frequently lost during evictions, Sanmaan coordinated with teachers to provide a safe storage space in the school cabin, ensuring their studies remained uninterrupted.
- **Legal Identity:** Sanmaan helps families navigate the bureaucratic structures to obtain essential documents. For example, by assisting a family in securing caste certificates despite initial discrimination at the Collector's office, Sanmaan enabled children to access scholarships and higher education.

Specialized Care Settings

1. Ashram Schools

Recognizing the unique needs of De-Notified (DNT) and tribal communities, Sanmaan maps and facilitates enrollment in Ashram schools in their native regions like Beed, Ahmednagar, and Solapur. These residential schools provide a culturally familiar environment that respects the child's heritage while offering quality education.

Impact: 35 children were enrolled in Ashram schools, ensuring they remained connected to their peers and roots while avoiding their erosion from culture and traditional institutions.

2. Child Care Institutions (CCIs)

For children placed in CCIs, Sanmaan acts as a bridge between the institution and the child's best interests.

- **Monitoring:** The team conducts frequent visits to resolve issues of health, education, or care standards.
- **Family Linkages:** Simultaneously, we work with the families of these children, linking them to welfare schemes to prepare the ground for safe, dignified, and sustainable family reunification.
- **Impact:** As of June 2023, Sanmaan maintained regular follow-ups for 35 children residing in CCIs.



Pillar 2: Prevention

Community-Based Preventive and Rehabilitative Interventions

Project Sanmaan operates on a fundamental truth: removing a child from the street is only half the battle. To ensure they aren't pushed back into exploitation, we must address the root causes within their own neighborhoods. Since 2018, Sanmaan has focused its efforts on marginalized communities where the risk of begging is highest.

Establishing Safe Spaces: The Community Centers

Trust is our primary currency. We spent the initial years building rapport through home visits and awareness sessions. This culminated in the establishment of three Sanmaan Community Centers, which serve as safe havens for development:

Location	Established	Impact (Cumulative Reach)
Jay Ambe Nagar, Chembur	March 2020	191 children (as of June 2025)
Ekveera Transport, Ghansoli	September 2020	55 children (as of April 2023)
Sathenagar, Mankhurd,	August 2021	99 children (as of April 2023)

Outreach and School Retention

Our team conducts daily door-to-door visits to identify "at-risk" children—those missing school or showing signs of being pushed toward child marriage or labor. We don't stop when a family moves; if any family relocates due to eviction or migration, Sanmaan continues the follow-up to ensure the child doesn't "fall through the cracks." **The Classroom as a Shield** Schools can be effective preventives to begging. We visit each intervention school at least twice a month to monitor attendance and emotional health.

- **Advocacy in Action:** When children at Ambedkar School were harassed over unpaid fees, our team's established relationship with the principal allowed for a swift resolution, ensuring the children could study without fear or stigma.
- **Measurable Change:** In areas like Jay Ambe Nagar, we have seen a visible decline in begging alongside a significant rise in school attendance and a drop in early marriages.

Holistic Development & Life Skills

Our centers offer more than just a roof; they provide the tools for a different kind of future:

- **Leadership & Life Skills:** Bi-monthly sessions on critical thinking, communication, and decision-making.
- **Physical Well-being:** Twice-weekly football sessions to foster teamwork and discipline.
- **Academic Support:** Dedicated study classes to help children bridge learning gaps caused by past disruptions.

Strengthening the Safety Net

We act as a "connective tissue" between the family and the state. By collaborating with the CWC, Police, and local Child Protection Committees (CPCs), we ensure a 24/7 safety net.

Case Highlight: When a young girl disclosed she was being forced into a child marriage, Sanmaan immediately mobilized the CWC and Childline. We coordinated with authorities in Beed to halt the marriage, successfully preserving her right to safety and an education.

The "Identity Gap" and Economic Empowerment

A major barrier to progress is a lack of documentation. Without an Aadhaar card or a bank account, a family is invisible to the state. Over the past 18 months, we have turned "invisible" families into "eligible" citizens:

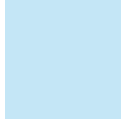

Empowerment by the Numbers:

- **80** children linked to **Aadhaar cards**.
- **42** girls enrolled in the **Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana**.
- **26** women supported through the **Mazi Ladki Bahin Yojana**.
- **6** families provided with **flour mills**, creating immediate, sustainable livelihoods that remove the economic pressure to beg.

Sponsorship: Investing in the Future

For the most vulnerable, we provide direct financial and developmental support. This sponsorship acts as a buffer against financial crises that might otherwise force a child back onto the streets.

- **Scope:** 189 children have benefited from this program.
- **Support Includes:** School fees, uniforms, vocational training for older youth, and fixed deposits for children in institutional care to secure their transition to independent adulthood.



Pillar 3: System Strengthening

While direct intervention saves lives, System Strengthening changes the future. Sanmaan recognizes that sustainable progress is only possible when the police, child protection authorities, and welfare departments move from a culture of "policing" to a culture of "protection."

1. Breaking Systemic Biases: Convergence & Cooperation

Sanmaan identified a "bias barrier" where authorities often viewed children from begging backgrounds with suspicion rather than empathy. To dismantle this, we initiated **Convergence Meetings**.

- **The Problem:** Children were often "rescued" without explanation, leading to fear and behavioral outbursts that officials then used to label them as "difficult." Some Children's Homes even refused admission, citing these children as a "bad influence."
- **The Intervention:** Between 2016 and 2023, Sanmaan facilitated **17 Convergence Meetings** between CWCs and NGOs to resolve these exclusionary attitudes and promote child-centered rehabilitation.

2. Professionalizing the Frontline: Training & SOPs

For many officials, "clearing the streets" was a task of force rather than care. Sanmaan shifted this narrative through targeted capacity building.

- **Police Sensitization:** Conducted **11 training sessions** for 339+ officers, focusing on the JJ Act, POCSO Act, and trauma-informed care.
- **The 2019 SOP:** We developed a **Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)** for child-friendly rescues. This document moved rescue operations away from "abrupt interventions" toward a step-by-step guide involving the CWC, DCPU, and specialized NGOs.
- **Total Reach:** Over **1,600 personnel** from government and non-government sectors have been reached through these sensitization efforts.

3. Policy Advocacy & Consultations

Sanmaan acts as a bridge between the reality on the ground and the policy-making table.

Event	Focus	Key Outcome
State Consultation (2019)	Forced Migration	Called for inter-state coordinaton to track migrant children at risk of begging
Round Table (2019)	Places of Worship	Partnered with MSCPCR and religious leaders (ISKCON, Haji Ali) to discourage child almsgiving.
Child-Friendly Mumbai (2021)	Urban Safety	Collaborated with the NCPCR to strengthen urban child protection mechanisms.
National Consultation	Post-Pandemic Rights	Discussed the "new face" of begging after COVID-19 and the role of family strengthening.

4. Research & Digital Outreach: The Knowledge Base

To advocate effectively, you need data. Sanmaan has produced critical research to inform the sector:

- **"Inter-sectoral Analysis"**: Explored how historical marginalization and forced migration feed the cycle of beggary in Mumbai and Navi Mumbai.
- **"Forever Unsettled"**: A COVID-19 case study research project that captured how the pandemic deepened housing and food insecurities for these already vulnerable families.
- **Webinar Series**: In partnership with the DWCD, Sanmaan hosted 6 webinars to simplify complex government schemes like Balsangopan Yojana for frontline workers.

5. The Sanmaan Model Documentation

We have formalized our journey into the **"Sanmaan Model Documentation."** This resource outlines our holistic, rights-based approach—prevention, protection, and advocacy—providing a blueprint for other organizations and policymakers to replicate this work in other urban centers.



Case Study: Karan

(Name Changed)



In 2018, when the **Sanmaan** team first arrived in the dust and bustle of Jay Ambe Nagar, Chembur, they didn't just find a community—they found an ally.

Fourteen-year-old **Karan** was a natural-born leader. While other kids his age were shy or indifferent, Karan was a whirlwind of energy. He became Prerana's unofficial recruiter, rounding up his cousins and friends, convincing them to join the dance sessions and leadership workshops. On the surface, he was a high-achiever, consistently ranking in the top five of his class.

But Karan was living a double life.

Karan was a first-generation learner from the **Pardhi community**, a tribe historically pushed to the fringes of society. As the eldest son, the "math of survival" often trumped the "math of school."

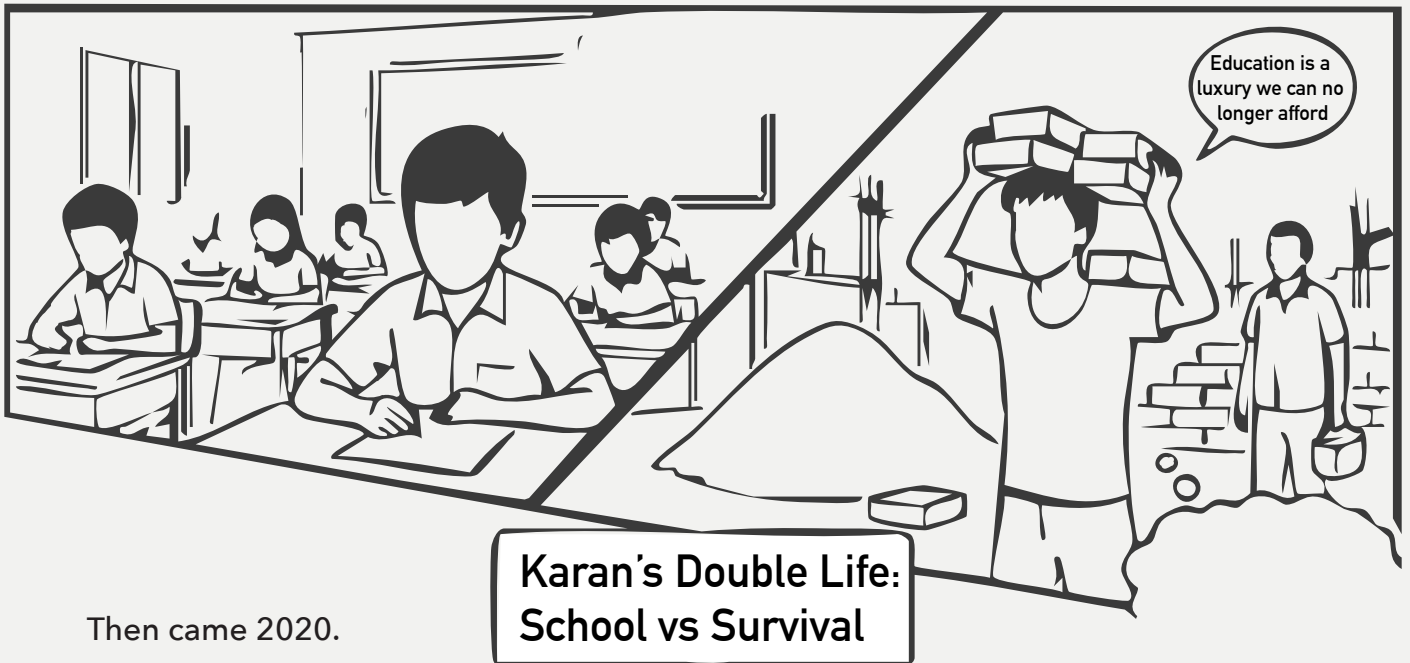
When the school bell rang at the end of the day, Karan didn't head home to do homework. Instead, he headed to construction sites. Under the blistering Mumbai sun, he hauled bricks and mixed cement alongside his father to keep the family afloat. By the time he reached the Sanmaan center, he was often physically exhausted, his school attendance slipping through the cracks of necessity.

"Education is for my siblings," he would insist, shielding them from the labor he himself endured. He was a boy standing between his family and the cycle of poverty, holding the door open for everyone but himself.

The Sanmaan team knew that to save Karan, they had to support his foundation. They spent months building a bridge of trust with his mother. By 2019, they helped his father secure work as a contractor, finally allowing Karan to trade his work boots for school shoes full-time.

2019: Sanmaan helped Karan trade his work boots to school shoes.





Then came 2020.

The pandemic didn't just bring a virus; it brought a financial sledgehammer. As debt mounted, Karan's parents made a heartbreaking, pragmatic decision: Education is a luxury we can no longer afford. Despite scoring an impressive 75% in his 10th-grade exams, Karan prepared to walk away from his dreams to pay off the family's mounting bills.

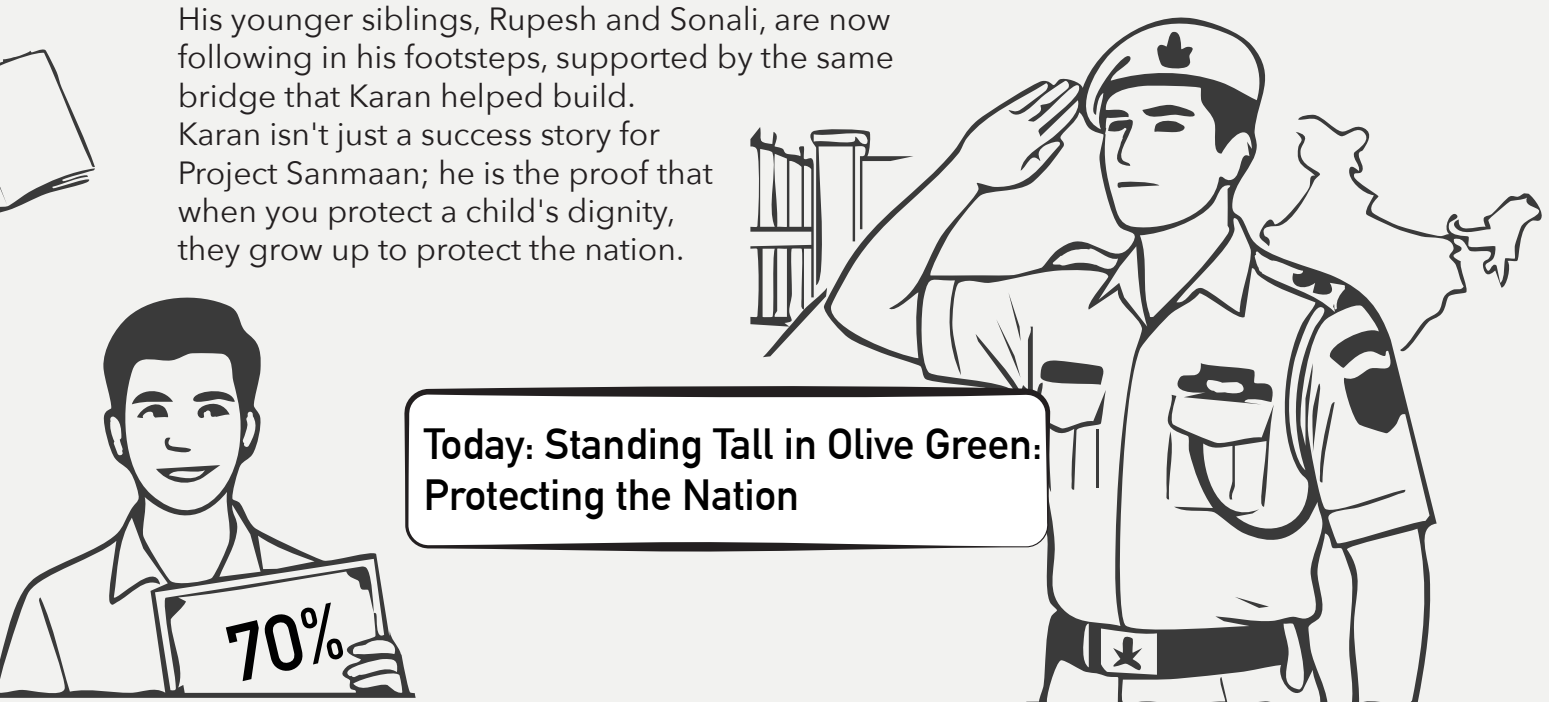
Prerana's social workers refused to let that door close. They didn't just offer sympathy; they offered a scholarship. They sponsored his 11th and 12th-grade studies at Sanpada College, giving him the breathing room to be a student again.

Free from the construction site, Karan flourished. He didn't just study; he soared. He became a star on the cricket pitch, leading his college team to victory. In 2022, he cleared his 12th-grade exams with 70%, but he had his sights set on a much bigger uniform.

Today, the boy who used to haul bricks in Chembur stands tall in the olive green of the Indian Army as a soldier in the infantry.

Karan's journey didn't end with his own success. Because he stood his ground, the "intergenerational cycle" of begging and labor in his family has finally been broken. His younger siblings, Rupesh and Sonali, are now following in his footsteps, supported by the same bridge that Karan helped build.

Karan isn't just a success story for Project Sanmaan; he is the proof that when you protect a child's dignity, they grow up to protect the nation.



Anti Trafficking Center – 414, Bhaveshwar Arcade Annexe,
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preranaantitrafficking.org
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