

EDUCATION AND SKILLING

TO ACTUALISE INDIVIDUAL POTENTIAL

21 June 2025

WEBINAR REPORT



Moderator
Shouman Jawed
Senior Programme Manager, Ritinjali



Brijesh Yadav
Founder, Doorstep Tech Solutions
Alumni, Second Chance School, Ritinjali

EDUCATION AND SKILLING TO ACTUALISE INDIVIDUAL POTENTIAL

SATURDAY, 21 JUNE 2025

Exploring how personalised learning and skill development help individuals actualise their potential, as seen through the experiences and success stories of those directly impacted.



Raghav Sonkar
Print Production & Operations Specialist
Community Development Advocate
Alumni, Second Chance School, Ritinjali



Virender Kumar
Founder, Handcrafted Accessories Label
Alumni, Second Chance School, Ritinjali

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INTRODUCTION

On June 21st, 2025, Ritinjali hosted a webinar on the theme, 'Education and Skilling to Actualise Individual Potential' in association with Pallavan Learning Systems and Centre for Escalation of Peace.

Education and skills have the power to transform lives, serving as the great equaliser in a world where opportunities are often dictated by socio-economic backgrounds. While talent exists everywhere, access to the right pathways, personalised support, and structured skill-building can determine whether an individual thrives or falls through the cracks due to a lack of opportunities. A one-size-fits-all approach to education often leaves behind those who do not fit traditional models of learning. By identifying and implementing individualised learning pathways, we can ensure that students receive the support they need to succeed. Skill-based education, vocational training, and second-chance learning programmes provide individuals with the tools to build self-reliance and employability. When combined with mentorship and community support, these initiatives can unlock potential and create sustainable livelihoods.

Ritinjali has been at the forefront of this mission, offering wholistic educational interventions through its Second Chance School and various skill development programmes. By providing tailored learning opportunities, career guidance, and industry exposure, Ritinjali ensures that young individuals, regardless of their circumstances, have access to education that enables them to break barriers and achieve meaningful careers.

This webinar explored the critical role of skilling and education in enabling individuals, focusing on customised learning approaches, individual education plans,

and the importance of creating pathways that cater to diverse needs. The discussion highlighted real-life success stories of individuals who, despite challenging beginnings, achieved remarkable progress when given the right opportunities.

The webinar also sought to initiate broader reflections on the responsibilities of institutions, educators, and society at large in ensuring that every learner, regardless of circumstance, is given a second chance to thrive. Through compelling narratives of resilience, aspiration, and reinvention, the panelists underscored that systemic change begins with recognising and nurturing each individual's potential.



ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Moderator: **Shouman Jawed**
Ritinjali



Shouman Jawed is a development professional with over seven years of experience in inclusive education, gender equity, and sustainable livelihoods. As Senior Programme Manager at Ritinjali, she leads the Second Chance School and other key initiatives that empower marginalised youth and women through skilling and education. A postgraduate in Gender Studies from Ambedkar University Delhi, Shouman blends academic rigour with field experience to design inclusive, community-driven programmes rooted in empathy and participatory design.

Panelist: **Brijesh Yadav**
Founder, Doorstep Tech Solutions
Alumni, Second Chance School



Brijesh Yadav's journey from a security guard in Noida to a tech entrepreneur is a powerful story of resilience and transformation through education. Originally from a remote village in Basti, Uttar Pradesh, Brijesh had to abandon his studies due to financial constraints. His turning point came in 2015 when he joined Ritinjali's Second Chance School, where he rediscovered his passion for learning and explored interests in technology and public service. After initial training for the Indian Army, he shifted to technical education, completed an internship at Le Meridien, and worked as a Computer Support Engineer at Micromax. During the pandemic, Brijesh returned to Ritinjali through its entrepreneurship programme and launched a door-to-door laptop repair service with seed funding. Today, he stands as a role model for young people seeking to rebuild their lives through education, skills, and determination.

Panelist: **Raghav Sonkar**
 Print Production & Operations Specialist
 Community Development Advocate
 Alumni, Second Chance School



A dedicated development sector professional with over 11 years of experience & 6 years of experience in the corporate sector. Raghav brings expertise in streamlining operations, managing large-scale projects, and leading strategic initiatives at Sesame. Raghav originally from Shravasti district in Uttar Pradesh, Raghav's mother expired when he was 9 months old and his father expired in 2004. He joined Ritinjali Second Chance School in 2004. An alumnus of Ritinjali's first batch, Raghav is committed to creating impact in the fields of education and community development, with a particular focus on early childhood education, foundational literacy and numeracy, and STEM. Their work spans diverse areas, including disaster relief during the 2004 tsunami and a UNDP-funded research initiative on the Yamuna River. Deeply community-driven, Raghav finds purpose in field engagement and travels extensively to work closely with grassroots stakeholders, ensuring that interventions are both relevant and transformative.

Panelist: **Virender Kumar**
 Founder, Handcrafted Accessories Label
 Alumni, Second Chance School



Virender Kumar's journey from a daily wage labourer in rural Uttar Pradesh to an entrepreneur in Delhi's fashion circuit is a powerful story of determination and transformation. Originally from Basti district, Virender lost his father early and worked various jobs to support his family. In 2016, a chance meeting with a Ritinjali alumnus led him to the Second Chance School (SCS), where he completed his schooling, pursued higher education, and received vocational training in fashion and tailoring alongside life skills and digital literacy. After gaining experience in hospitality and apparel merchandising, the pandemic disrupted his career, but he used the setback to pursue his passion. In 2023, he joined Ritinjali's entrepreneurship programme, Pahal, and won seed funding to launch his own bespoke fashion and accessories venture. Virender's journey highlights the power of education, skills, and mentorship in unlocking potential and redefining futures.



WEBINAR SESSION



A Journey from Guard to Tech Entrepreneur: Brijesh Yadav

The conversation opened with panelist Brijesh Yadav, who shared his journey from a small village in Basti district, Uttar Pradesh, to becoming a tech entrepreneur in Delhi, NCR. In 2015, Brijesh migrated to Noida in search of employment and began working as a security guard. With a 12-hour workday and no days off, he quickly realised the physical and emotional toll such work entailed. Feeling disillusioned, he learned about Ritinjali's Second Chance School (SCS) through a friend and decided to visit the campus. The experience proved to be transformative. At SCS, Brijesh was introduced to life skills classes, which he believed were absent in traditional schooling but essential for navigating adulthood. These sessions helped him build confidence and understand the importance of goal-setting and personal reflection.

Initially, Brijesh had aspirations of joining the Indian Army, but after not being selected, he turned to the IT sector. He shared how the guidance provided by his

mentors helped him focus his ambitions. With encouragement, he chose to specialise in operations within IT—an informed decision shaped by self-awareness and structured counselling. He completed an internship at Le Meridien, secured a role at Micromax as a Computer Support Engineer, and eventually launched his own door-to-door laptop repair business during the pandemic. Brijesh emphasised the value of personalised guidance in helping youth uncover their potential and reiterated the need for continued learning.

From Child Labourer to Fashion Entrepreneur: Virender Kumar

Next, Virender Kumar shared his experience of growing up in Basti, UP, where he started working as a labourer at the age of 13 to support his family. Though he had a deep interest in academics, the absence of child labour regulations in his village and the pressure of familial responsibilities cut short his education. A relative brought him to Delhi and introduced him to Ritinjali. Initially, Virender's ambitions were modest—he hoped to get an odd job in the city—but his perspective expanded after joining PIAIP (Pallavan Institute of Actualising Individual Potential) classes at SCS. These sessions inspired him to dream big.

Virender's journey included vocational training in tailoring and fashion technology. He interned at The Oberoi and later joined Orient Craft as a merchandiser. However, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a career setback. Instead of giving up, Virender viewed the crisis as an opportunity. Drawing on his experience in hospitality, leather, accessories, and fashion, he founded his own handcrafted fashion and accessories business. Operating from his studio in Shahpur Jat in New Delhi, he now employs three staff members and is seen as a role model in his community. His journey demonstrates that transformation is possible through structured support, ambition, and resilience.

From Adversity to Advocacy: Raghav Sonkar

Raghav Sonkar, one of the earliest alumni of Second Chance School from the 2004 batch, brought a unique perspective to the discussion. Having lost both parents at a young age, Raghav entered the programme with limited direction and resources. He expressed deep gratitude for the care and structure Ritinjali provided during a time when he had no support system. Over the years, he pursued higher education and now holds a Master's degree. Raghav currently works with Sesame Workshop India, leading large-scale development projects focused on education, early childhood learning, and community upliftment.

Raghav highlighted that while textbooks provide foundational knowledge, the mentorship he received played a pivotal role in shaping his career path. He argued that textbooks alone are insufficient to prepare youth for life's challenges—real learning comes through lived experience and practical guidance. He continues to support youth from marginalised communities, especially those migrating to urban areas, by offering career counselling and assistance with school and college admissions. His deep engagement with his roots allows him to connect meaningfully with the challenges faced by rural youth.

Migration and Social Support

The panel extensively discussed the experience of rural-to-urban migration, a journey that many young people take under difficult circumstances. Brijesh shared that his migration was not out of choice but a compulsion driven by poverty. He emphasised that while the process is often harsh, it builds resilience. Virender added that his wide-ranging work experience—in hospitality, leather, and apparel—provided him with the confidence and knowledge to start his own venture.

Raghav spoke about the limited educational facilities in villages, often ending at Class 8, and the distances children—particularly girls—must travel to access secondary education. This often results in dropouts and early marriage. He noted that many young people migrate to cities without understanding the associated challenges. Having faced similar difficulties himself, Raghav now mentors and guides migrants, particularly young girls, helping them access education and career opportunities. One of the girls he mentored is currently pursuing a degree in social work. He emphasised that while individual efforts can support a few, systemic institutional mechanisms are needed to create a sustained impact.



Q&A HIGHLIGHTS

Q1: What would you include if you were to redesign the programme?

Raghav Sonkar: I would recommend linking the programme with government skill development schemes and creating more Second Chance Schools in other cities to scale the impact.

Shouman Jawed: We should integrate education with welfare schemes so that students receive a more comprehensive support system.

Q2: How do you maintain lifelong learning?

Brijesh Yadav: I make it a habit to spend at least 20 minutes in the morning and evening learning something new. Consistent effort helps in staying updated and growing.

Q3: There is too much theoretical knowledge in colleges. How do you stay motivated to continue?

Virender Kumar: Combine theoretical knowledge with practical experience. Don't overthink—stay focused and consistent. When the two complement each other, learning becomes meaningful.

Raghav Sonkar: Mistakes and practical exposure are part of the journey. Some solutions go beyond classroom learning. Quitting is never an option; perseverance is key.

Q4: What if I feel like quitting when things get too difficult?

Virender Kumar: Avoid overthinking. Focus on balancing theoretical and practical learning. Keep pushing forward with discipline and determination. Even when doors close, others will open if you're willing to keep trying.

Raghav Sonkar: Everyone encounters challenges and setbacks, but the key is to stay committed. Progress may take time, but quitting should never be the answer. Learning is a continuous journey. Even when you feel like giving up, remember that those moments often lead to personal growth if you keep going.

CONCLUSION

The webinar concluded with a collective reflection on the broader implications of the panelists' journeys. Education must go beyond academics to include life skills, mentorship, and career counselling. The Second Chance School model exemplifies how personalised and wholistic learning environments can enable youth to overcome systemic barriers. By aligning skill development with individual aspirations, institutions can help young people achieve dignity, agency, and self-reliance. The panelists reinforced the belief that true success lies not only in personal growth but in helping others grow—a principle embodied in their own paths.

The discussion also featured several thoughtful questions from the audience, further enriching the conversation and highlighting a shared commitment to inclusive and transformative education.



SUMMARY

On June 21st, 2025, Ritinjali hosted a webinar on the theme, 'Education and Skilling to Actualise Individual Potential' in association with Pallavan Learning Systems and Centre for Escalation of Peace.

The webinar brought to light the power of second chances, focusing on how mentorship, skilling, and personalised education can transform lives, especially for those who may have missed their first opportunity at formal education or career success. Three inspiring alumni from Ritinjali's Second Chance School—Virender Kumar, Brijesh Yadav, and Raghav Sonkar—shared their journeys, demonstrating how tailored support and life skills training helped them rewrite their stories.

Virender Kumar spoke of his transformation from a labourer in Uttar Pradesh to a fashion entrepreneur in Delhi, highlighting how the programme enabled him to pursue his passion despite early setbacks. Brijesh Yadav described his shift from working as a security guard to becoming a computer support engineer, eventually launching his own laptop repair business. Raghav Sonkar, a member of the first batch of the programme, shared insights from his career in the development sector, where he has worked for over a decade. Their stories highlighted the role of education, counselling, and skilling in enabling individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to build meaningful, sustainable livelihoods.

The discussion also addressed the challenges faced by those migrating from rural areas, such as limited access to education, transport, and safety, and the importance of building support systems to help them make informed choices. Virender Kumar's experience of launching a new business after losing his job during the pandemic illustrated how setbacks can become turning points. Brijesh Yadav spoke of how a

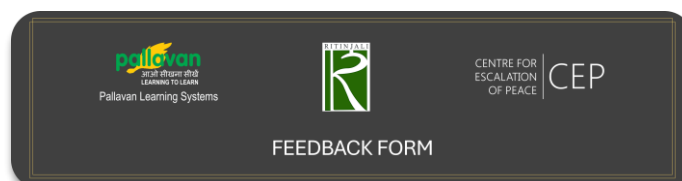
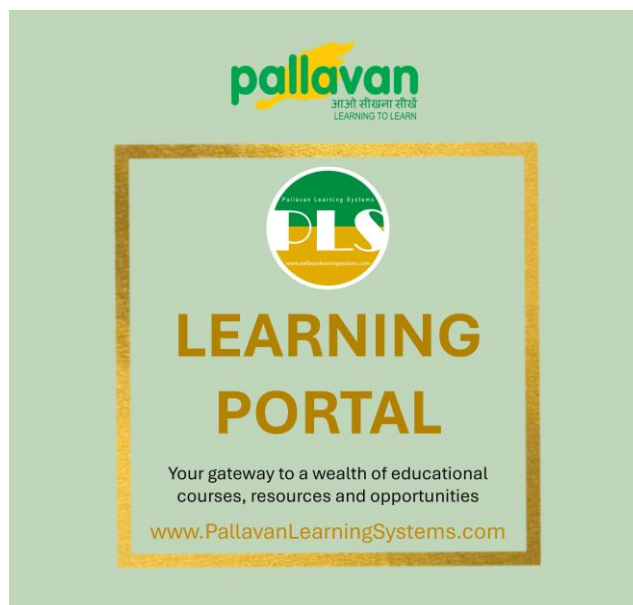
simple act of helping a neighbour with a laptop issue inspired his path into entrepreneurship. Raghav Sonkar reflected on his early struggles and how the support he received through the Second Chance School helped him build a long-standing career in the development sector, where he now works to uplift marginalised communities, proving that sustained guidance and opportunity can lead to meaningful impact.

The webinar concluded with a strong message about the importance of perseverance, recognising opportunities, and embracing lifelong learning. A lively Q&A session reinforced the idea that with the right mindset and support, it is possible to overcome adversity and create a better future.





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