

# Meet Latha and Gautam, Mother and Son in Tirrupur

She worked hard to create a better future for her son. Now, he wants to do the same for her in return.

## FAIR TRADE CERTIFIED STAFF

In July 2017, some of the workers at Bestitch Knits in Tiruppur, India, the Fair Trade Certified™ factory where Latha Maheshwari works, learned that her 18-year-old son, Gautam, needed help paying for his third semester fee for higher education to be able to stay in school. When workers brought this up at their Fair Trade Committee meeting, the group decided they wanted to help.

The Committee, which consists of management and workers elected to represent their group and collaborate on community investment projects, voted to create a scholarship for him with their Community Development Funds.

The Committee offered Gautam a scholarship fully funding his undergraduate education. It's the first scholarship created by the Bestitch Committee, but just one of many investments the Committee has implemented. Within the past several years, other successful projects have included a wholesale-price grocery store, a daily nutritious breakfast program, and medical eye exams and prescription glasses—all projects created for workers, by workers.

Gautam plans to get a degree in commerce and hopes to one day be a Chartered Accountant in the Tiruppur area serving the manufacturing industry and workers like his mother.

"When I was growing up, people talked about Chartered Accounting as something difficult, but I was attracted to the challenge," says Gautam. "I am interested in giving back to this community. I hope to return after my studies and work within this space."

His mother describes Gautam as "lucky and hardworking," which led to his earning the scholarship on a merit basis.

Gautam credits the strong work ethic he's been exposed to in his mother's factory and hopes that others can see that too and be inspired. "There's a lot of hard work that goes into making these Fair Trade garments," he says. "I hope the consumers value the product—please don't waste it or discard it—and recognize the mutual benefit in this arrangement. The Fair Trade Committee is already starting to help the worker community with health and education, which are the two main concerns. All workers could and should benefit—just as I have—through the continuing Fair Trade relationship."

As a 38-year-old mother of two, Latha works hard to give her children a future without limits. She has held jobs in several factories throughout the Tiruppur area, and says it's different at Bestitch, where she's now been working for two years.

"I'm very happy to work here, at a Fair Trade factory. The management and Fair Trade Committee clearly care for us and there is a good work-life balance. After work, I'm not too tired when I get home and I can take care of my family. At other factories, this was not the case."

She is hopeful that her younger daughter, who is studying "computers and commerce," will also work toward the scholarship when it's her time.



LATHA MAHESHWARI

*"After work, I'm not too tired when I get home and I can take care of my family. At other factories, this was not the case."*



GAUTAM, LATHA'S SON

*"I am interested in giving back to this community. I hope to return after my studies and work within this space."*