Going into this project, I honestly did not know what to expect. I had never been to the villages of Agara or Mamballi and I had no idea how the situations and circumstances in those two villages were. More importantly, I did not understand how a young girl like me could do anything to make a small difference in their lives. I heard about One Million Lights through one of my close friends, Pallavi, who is also a member here at Project LINC. I remember her telling me about her project back in 2012 and about how successful and outstanding it had been. But, I never expected that I would get this opportunity and that my experience in Agara and Mamballi would turn out to be so heartwarming and life changing.

I remember the first time Pallavi, Purvi, Shreya, Shweta, and I met up to begin discussing our ideas for our summer project in India. We agreed that we wanted to partner up with One Million Lights because we were aware of the necessity for light and all the problems that the children in these villages were facing due to the lack of it. However, we were completely unsure of what else they needed or how they would react to us donating these lights to them. After making several calls to the Headmasters of the two different schools, we were all reassured that our donation of lights would be the most helpful for these children. Over the next month, we came up with Project LINC and began fundraising for the lights that we hoped to buy for these children. At first our goal was to raise enough money to purchase 100 solar lights; however, the extremely generous donations from friends and family made it possible for us to donate 197 lights to children in both schools. We wouldn’t have been able to execute this project without our donors and are extremely grateful for all their encouragement and support!

On the day of our distribution we started off with a high school in Agara. The children in the school ranged from grades 8-10, about the same ages as our members. I found this extremely relatable because at the time I had just finished my sophomore year in high school and was just about the same age as the children in those schools. After talking and interacting with them, I realized that even though they were about the same age as me, their lives were completely different from mine. Growing up in the Silicon Valley my friends and I have access to high speed internet and excellent lighting at all times. However, the children in Agara have no other choice but to use kerosene lamps which tend to be dangerous and risky. Every single child said that they used kerosene lamps when their electricity went out and explained that having a solar light would be beneficial for their day to day life.

We explained the importance of our project to the students and told them that there are many people around the world who hoped that they had access to good education. We made sure to emphasize the importance of education and how these lights would help each child reach their highest potential. Throughout this presentation, I was extremely nervous because I didn’t know if the children would understand our intentions and if they would treat the lights with the amount of respect that we hoped they would. However, their positive response and their strong desire to
continue their academic journeys made me extremely happy and satisfied. Each of them had high goals and aspirations for their future and it made me feel so great to know that we were helping them reach their goals even if it was at a smaller level.

After our distribution, we got an opportunity to interact with each of the students and get to know them a little better. I was overwhelmed by the love and affection that they had towards us. Even though we had a huge language barrier, I was able to communicate with each of the students and they seemed fascinated to meet someone who came so far just to meet and help them. I honestly thought that after getting their lights they might just thank us and leave but they came back and shook hands, hugged us, and even took selfies with us! Our project and distribution went a lot better than we had expected and all of us were thrilled to have such a unique experience.

Looking back on this whole journey, I realize how memorable and exceptional this entire experience will remain for me. I’ve learned so much from this project and I’ll never forget how absolutely amazing this entire journey made me feel! I couldn’t have asked for a better experience or a better group, and I’m so happy that I got the opportunity to do such a heartwarming and thoughtful project. I hope that I get the opportunity to work on this project again in the upcoming years and continue to improve and make our project even bigger and more impactful.

<3 Shivani Ayalasomayajula <3