

Parijat Academy - A Site Visit Report

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It was a privilege for us to visit Parijat Academy located in Pamohi village near Guwahati, Assam. Parijat Academy was started by Uttam Teron in 2003. With a humble beginning as a learning centre with just 4 children in a small cowshed, it has now grown up to become a full-fledged school with 512 children and 25 teachers. It caters to the educational needs of around 15 villages and hamlets in the vicinity. These areas are tribal dominated with Karbis, Bodos, Rabhas and Nepalis being the major groups. Parijat Academy is affiliated to Assamese state board school with classes from nursery to Class 10. But English and Hindi language are also given due importance.



Assembly

Basic purpose of Parijat Academy can be summed up as follows:

1. Holistic education of the children from the nearby areas (tribal dominated backward regions)
2. Skilling the students with vocational training to ensure sustainable livelihood after completion of education
3. All round development of the students through focus on nutrition, extra-curricular activities and exposure through exchange programs
4. Social upliftment of the area through awareness campaigns and involvement in progressive movements like producing reusable sanitary napkins

The most striking thing of our visit was the energy and enthusiasm of Uttam in doing every activity of the Academy. This seems to inspire all others in the organisation – students as well as teachers. The picturesque location of the Academy near Deepor Beel also aids the positive environment. Uttam has been constantly supported and complemented his wife Aimoni Tumung in all his endeavours to achieve the ambitious goal of making Pamohi 100 % literate. Their passion has inspired a visible positive change in the last few years.

Activities:

A typical day at Parijat Academy begins with the Morning Assembly with a pledge in 3 languages followed by poetry recitation, songs, news etc. There a milk program for the younger students to ensure proper nutrition for holistic growth. Apart from the regular classes, vocational training (mainly sewing) is also emphasised to ensure sustainable livelihood for all graduating students. Numerous extra-curricular activities are also organised to give the students an exposure to different life skills. These activities cover a wide spectrum from Sports week, Music classes, Treks (survival camps), Self defence classes, Cultural programs to Food festivals, Manufacturing reusable sanitary napkins, Exchange programs etc. These activities have instilled a sense of confidence in the students which was easily noticeable in our interaction with them. The teachers also attend workshops to upgrade their skills and learn different pedagogical methods.



Milk Program

Residential schooling has also been started to cater to the students from remote tribal pockets near Assam-Meghalaya border. Currently 63 students, with age ranging from 5 to 20 years, have been accommodated in dormitories in the campus.



Classroom 1

Funding:

There is no regular source of funding for Parijat Academy. Donations do come in from a lot of sources, but they are mostly for one-time expenditures. Hence paying salaries to the teachers is one of the biggest challenges. Most of the teachers are paid very nominal amount (3k-4k) and find it difficult to sustain themselves. A constant and assured source of funding is the need of the hour.

Interaction with teachers:

The teachers at Parijat Academy come from the local community. The driving force for most of them is to give something back to the society. The teachers revealed how they are inspired by Uttam Teron each day. They cited his energy, humility and sensitivity as guiding principles in their own life. They believe that they learn a lot from the experience teaching here and perhaps this personal growth is what keeps them going even with the meagre pay.



Future plans:

Parijat Academy has a vision to expand its field of influence and diversify its activities, so that it can be even more successful in its mission. Some of its plans for the future are:

1. To start senior secondary classes to ensure that students can complete their entire schooling at Parijat Academy
2. To upgrade and establish a new dormitory to increase the number of residential students to 100
3. To establish a well-equipped science laboratory so that students can learn by doing
4. To establish a computer centre to equip the students with skills to be successful in an increasingly digital world



Boys dormitory



Girls dormitory

Requirements:

To fulfil the needs of the present as well as future, Parijat Academy would need the following requirements to be met:

1. A constant and assured source of funding to ensure all its teachers are paid regular salary (around 6k per month)
2. Infrastructure update
 - a. Separate rooms for each class. Now there are just temporary partitions separating different classes. This leads to noise from adjacent class disturbing the students in their own class
 - b. New desks and benches. Currently 3 students have to share the desk and bench meant for 2
 - c. A new staff room
 - d. A science laboratory with equipment
 - e. Upgradation of library with permanent racks and shelves
 - f. A new dormitory for boys
 - g. A separate vocational training room
 - h. Musical instruments and sports goods
3. Additional faculty members for Sports, Music and Laboratory

Concluding remarks:

Parijat Academy is not just an educational institute, it is a source of inspiration for the entire locality. People from all over the world have visited this place and have been enchanted by its success – be it a scientist from NASA or a Gandhian from Australia or college students from all over India. It has played a leading role in empowerment of the entire local community consisting of hitherto backward sections. It has ensured that its students become independent and sustain themselves. It has led to community awareness about various issues like environment sustainability, menstrual hygiene, religious tolerance, etc. Institutes like Parijat Academy are catalysts for positive change in the society. It is sad that due to lack of sustained funding, the teachers are paid so less (about 3k-4k per month) for doing a great job.

The authenticity of Parijat Academy is evident many small observations. The energy, humility and passion of Uttam Teron is exemplary. The love and care with which the students are treated shows that the entire organisation is child-centric. The beautiful painting on the walls of junior classes make the learning experience more enjoyable. The effort Parijat makes to reach out to high-end schools in Guwahati and use their resources second-hand like books, uniform, toys, etc. shows how genuinely the organisation tries to give best to its students despite its limited financial capacity. The affection, care, humility, energy and happiness that we witnessed in our 4 hours at Parijat Academy has left us with memories for a lifetime!

