

Education sans boundaries

‘Ensuring quality primary education in five tribal hamlets in South Rajasthan’

Plurality is not only the essence of quality; it is also our only safeguard against the juggernaut of mediocrity.

Ramchandran V

Proposal submitted by Prayas, Deogarh, Rajasthan for running innovative schools based on alternative pedagogy in five tribal villages of South Rajasthan (Pratapgarh and Dhariawad blocks)

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Introduction

In spite of numerous public initiatives, and significant improvement over the years, the goal of quality education for all children remains a distant dream in Pratapgarh. This proposal note describes an initiative that seeks to ensure quality education for children of school going age in five tribal village settlements. A number of features make these schools different from conventional schools.

Prayas is an NGO that has been working in the tribal part of Chittorgarh district in South Rajasthan for last 25 years. During this period Prayas has worked on a range of issues seeking to ensure the provision of basic services to the extremely deprived tribal population living in its field area. Ensuring access to quality education for tribal children has figured high on the development agenda of Prayas since the very beginning (see annexure 1 for a detailed note on Prayas's work in education). There also exists a high demand for education amongst the target group that sees it as the vehicle for their economic and social empowerment.

The proposal starts with an introductory chapter that gives socio economic conditions of Pratapgarh. This is followed by the rationale for supporting the project. This section explores the current status of primary education in Pratapgarh. The exploration becomes necessary in the context of the success reported by the Government statistics that claims near total enrolment of children in school going age group. The next section provides the description of the alternative model of education on which the schools being run by Prayas are based. The last section gives the output and the budget. A brief summary of the work done by Prayas in the field of education is provided in the annexure.

Socio economic conditions of Pratapgarh

Pratapgarh falls on the Southern border of the great tribal area of Western India stretching from Maharashtra to Rajasthan. It is part of the tribal sub plan area with more than 50 percent of population tribal. The region was heavily forested in the past, forming the northwestern limit of the valuable timber species of teak. However there has been extensive deforestation in the last century. The terrain is undulating with raised uplands punctuated by steep valleys. The soil is mostly black cotton. Average rainfall is around 900 mm.

Rain fed agriculture is the mainstay of tribal economy. This is supplemented by gathering of forest produce. The major forest products are *mahua* flowers in March – April and *tendu* leaves in May. The remaining tracts of forests produce a variety of other forest produce like *aanwla* and *safed musli*. There is some beginning of irrigation as well. However this is scattered and dependent on seasonal springs. The poverty of the tribal population is most visible by a look at the homesteads. The only masonry structures in the village are those belonging to the Government.

Social indicators of development are poor. Literacy rates in Pratapgarh are very low, even compared to some of the tribal area. The area witnesses seasonal migration of manual

laborers to the neighboring parts of Malwa that have irrigation and wheat cropping. This is mostly short term. There is also beginning of migration to areas further in Gujarat.

Rationale

Pratapgarh is one of the most educationally backwards areas in Rajasthan. It is a part of the Tribal Sub Plan area with Scheduled Tribes comprising 56 percent of the population in rural areas. Remote settlements and poor infrastructure add to the problems of education infrastructure. Teacher absenteeism is high. Teachers, who mostly come from outside the district, do not stay in villages citing lack of basic infrastructure. This prompted the state Government to start a special teacher-training (STC) batch for trainees from Pratapgarh.

Primary education infrastructure: The infrastructure for primary schools has steadily expanded in the recent years. Besides the Government funds allocated under normal budget cycle, Lok Jumbish¹ has also contributed funds for infrastructure. A variety of primary schools function in the block, reflecting the diversity of promotional schemes introduced at various junctures. The table below provides a breakup of different type of educational facilities that exist in the district.

Types of primary schooling facilities in the district

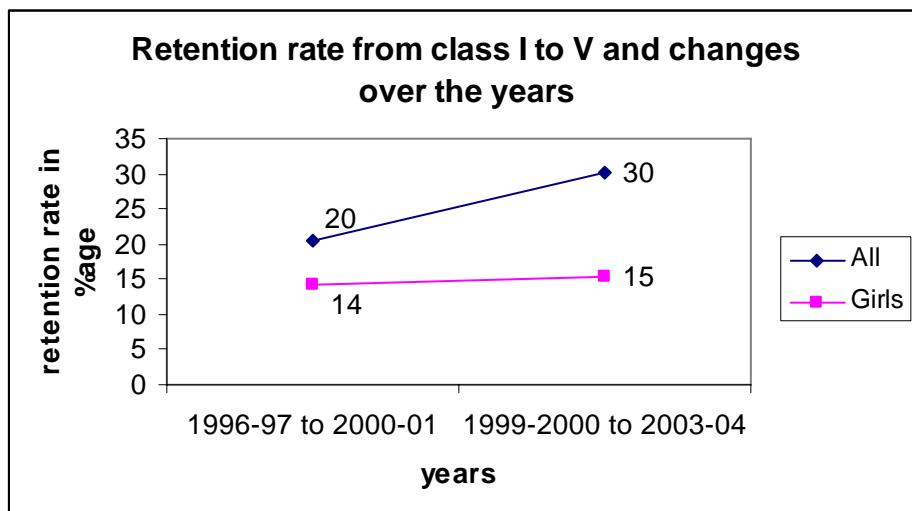
Primary schools	219
UPS	79
Rajiv Gandhi Pathshalas	43
Shiksha Karmi	30

The problems with the state education system are inadequate numbers, high teacher student ration, high teacher absenteeism, low motivation of teachers, and an alienating pedagogy. Even though most revenue villages have a Government school, there are remote hamlets where the nearest school is more than one km away. Almost 30 percent of the sanctioned posts are vacant. One hundred schools continue to be single teacher schools. Low motivation of Government teachers is another significant problem affecting the quality of schooling in Government schools.

Thus it is seen that Government claims notwithstanding, quality primary education continues to be a dream for most tribal children in the school going age group of five to 14 years. This becomes clear if we look at retention rate between Class I and Class V. This is given for two five-year periods in the chart below. It is seen that the retention rate at 30 percent remains very low for the latest five-year period, even though there has been an improvement from the preceding years. Thus 70 percent of the children who enrolled in class I in the year 1999-2000 dropped out by the year 2004. What is worrying is that the retention rate for girls is very low at 15 percent. Even more worrisome is the fact that there has been very little improvement in the girls' retention rate.

¹ Lok Jumbish is an innovative program that seeks universalisation of elementary education.

The very poor state of state primary education system in the South Rajasthan tribal belt is also shown by high incidence of child labor in this area. Tribal children enter the wage labor market early – as early as 10 years for poor households. They perform a variety of tasks – cotton pollination, herding sheep flocks for migratory herdsmen from West Rajasthan, and *saree* cutting and folding in the textile market of Surat in Gujarat. Then there are the ubiquitous roadside eateries that nearly always employ small children as waiters. Children are also preferred for household work by the middle class households. While economic conditions no doubt contribute to this high incidence, very poor state of primary schooling is also a major factor. Quality of instruction in Government schools is so poor that parents do not see much use of this and withdraw the child as soon as s/he becomes capable of performing manual work.



Source: LJ data from Prayas

Prayas Schools for Tribal Children

Prayas has been running schools in remote locations that are not served by the Government schooling system. The schools are run on a pedagogy that is radically different from the mainstream school pedagogy. The schools have been running for a period varying from 5 to 10 years under a variety of sponsorship schemes. Five of these schools are still running while five had to be closed down last year because of lack of funds. The basic data on the ten schools is given in the table below.

Sl.	Name of the school	Enrolment		
		Boys	Girls	Total
Schools that are running				
1	Kundi	21	15	36
2	Amliphala	39	14	53
3	Khajuri	19	11	30
4	Babkheda	44	20	64
5	Kundla	16	17	33

Schools that are closed at

present			
1 Nakafala	29	22	51
2 Nalakheda	26	19	45
3 Bahamaria phala	23	14	37
4 Amoda	17	12	29
5 Lambaghata	24	14	38
	258	158	416

The Prayas schools are based on a pedagogy that is radically different from the mainstream Government schools. The pedagogy and the curriculum have been developed by Digantar, a resource institution based at Jaipur. The aim of education is to develop rational autonomy², sensitivity, democratic and egalitarian values, dignity of labor and skills. It believes that the purpose of primary education is to make the child a self-motivated and independent learner. It feels that every human child is capable of learning to live in society, defining her goals for life, finding ways of achieving the chosen goals, taking appropriate action, and of being responsible for the actions taken. Every human being has a right to decide for herself and is duty bound to be responsible for her decisions. When a society denies this basic equality, exploitation and oppression become acceptable in different ways. The sharing of benefits of social cooperation and control over the mechanisms of distribution of social goods becomes tilted in favour of a few. The development of rational autonomy of each member of the society is the best way of ensuring justice. There is no way, save education, to help people become autonomous and reasonable. Sensitivity to all other forms of life that share this world with us is an integral part of rational autonomy. Human life is possible only in a social situation. Similarly, life itself is possible only in a complex web of mutually sustaining life forms. This leaves no choice for human beings other than to be sensitive and respectful to all forms of life.

In view of the above, organised learning needs to be integrated fully with socialization of the child in family and community. This however does not rule out a rational discourse. There has to be a continual interface between the child's learning and family and community's beliefs and assumptions to resolve discrepancies and arrive at universally accepted facts of knowledge. For this, it is necessary that family is carried along as an equal partner in education endeavor. Community's involvement is therefore integral to such a curricular and pedagogical approach based on following assumptions:

- (i) It is essential to know how a child relates herself to the world of her perception.
- (ii) Child's learning at school is a part of the broader socialisation/ learning which she imbibes from the environment around her when she is not in the school.
- (iii) A child learns best from activities in familiar settings.
- (iv) A child learns with comfortable ease when she goes through a process similar to the one through which knowledge is evolved.
- (v) Peer learning provides an opportunity for self evaluation, mutual support and cooperation and therefore needs to be promoted as a major activity.

² Independence of thought, speech and action but based on reason

The concept of training will be based on an obviously too simple but by many all too conveniently ignored rather misconceived, principle of 'shared learning' between the concerned three - the child, the teacher and the community. Fresh recruits will be required to undergo a three months intensive training which would seek to intellectually stir and enable them to empathise with the learning problems of child and community. During the course of training the performance of trainees will be closely and vigorously monitored and evaluated.

Activities

Students will be divided into two groups for teaching learning activities. Group I will consist of students of lower level equivalent up to standard III (It may be mentioned that Prayas follows a pattern where there are no classes and children are divided into groups according to their academic and other accomplishments for transacting the curriculum). There will be another group of children of government schools who need academic support. It will not be possible to provide academic support to all students of government schools after school hours and according to their convenience, it is proposed to start coaching classes for students of class III and IV.

Group-I

Curriculum based teaching –learning activities will be so designed that they provide sufficient space for the participation of community people. Who and how many people will depend on the nature and need of the activity planned. The medium of transaction will be the mother tongue of the child with gradual increase in the use of the Hindi language.

These activities will be conducted as close to the residence of community members as possible and the selection of the place of activity will be decided with the consent of participating members of community in the activity.

Group-II

It will consist of rest of the children of primary level. What has been said above will also be applicable to this group except that the use of Hindi language will by now, have obtained a domineering position. Activities for this group may be planned at a place and time convenient to students, school teacher and community. (It is assumed that the school will not have a fixed time schedule. It may change as and when required) There may be a greater contribution of creative community members in this group in areas of activity like handicraft skills performing and fine arts.

Manpower requirements

Prayas is seeking to restart the five schools that have been closed down. Each of these will be a single teacher school with 25 children enrolled in each school. It is expected that the number of children and teachers will increase in the second year. A coordinator level person will also devote part time to looking after the project. He will undertake training of teachers and provide ongoing resource support to the schools.

Deliverables/ output

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Output</i>	<i>No. of beneficiaries</i>
1	Quality education to children in 5-14 age group	125
2	Children passing class V	25

Budget

Sl.	Head	Unit cost	No.	TOTAL
1	Teachers salary	30000	5	150000
2	Teaching and learning material	500	125	62500
4	Administrative expenses	24000	1	24000
TOTAL				236500

In words Rs. Two hundred and thirty six thousand and five hundred only.

Annexure 1

Work done by Prayas in education and main achievements

Education has been an important activity undertaken by Prayas almost all through its 25 year existence. Work undertaken by Prayas can be divided into three distinct phases.

While these phases mark distinct stages in organizational life cycle, sometimes these also mirror the changes taking place in the state approach to ensure education for all citizens.

1979-84. Prayas started two primary schools in the villages of Raanpur and Lalpura. The objective was to build relationship with local community. Attempts were made to teach children in local dialect. An attempt was made to develop a primer in the local language. This phase closed with the villagers not very happy about the mode of teaching and the Prayas team deciding to close down schools as it did not want to substitute the state in provision of basic services.

1985-94: During this period Prayas initiated a large scale adult education program with support of Ministry of Human Resource Development. It set up 100 centers and 10 Jan Shikshan Kendras in line with the model being followed at that time. It should be noted that this period coincides with the maturing of adult literacy program and initiation of Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs) all over the country.

1996-2004: Prayas was a partner of Lok Jumbish, the state wide initiative for Universalisation of Elementary Education. The program sought to impact both the demand side and the supply side by mobilizing villagers to send their children to school and strengthening infrastructure for rural schools.

During this period Prayas also initiated a new model of education in collaboration with Dignitar, a resource center for primary education. The model was taken up in the Non formal schools run under the aegis of Lok Jumbish and in alternative schools supported by India Literacy Project. The model was based on the pedagogy developed by Digantar which focuses on child centered learning. The performance in NFEs has tended to flounder as Lok Jumbish program went down hill since coming in of Congress Government and change in top management in the year 1998. The progress in the alternative schools is a truer indicator of achievement. This is shown in table below.

Table: Alternative schools run by Prayas – enrolment and achievement

Sl	Year	No. of schools	Enrolment			Passed in class V		
			Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1	1998-99	2	61	39	100	-	-	-
2	1999-2000	5	95	60	155	-	1	1
3	2000-01	12	215	145	360	14	1	15
4	2001-02	12	210	146	356	22	4	26
5	2002-03	8	212	125	337	24	9	33
6	2003-04	8	189	107	296	31	9	40

The proportion of students appearing for class V has gradually increased – from four percent in 2001 to 14 percent in 2004. Currently eight schools are being run under this project.