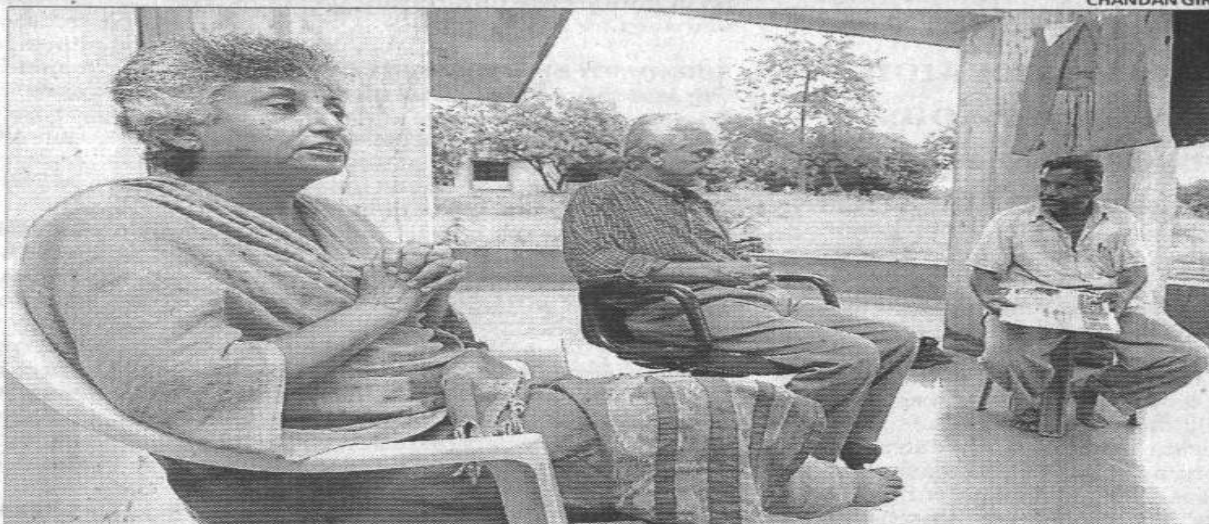


THE BIG PICTURE

A CLASS APART



CHANDAN GIRI

Aparna and Pankaj Kadikar (centre) at their school in Nagaria village

HITARTH PANDYA

APARNA Kadikar and her husband Pankaj never thought their short walks on the beach would translate into a lasting idea. Aparna, an architect from the Southern California Institute of Architecture, and Pankaj, who did his MBA in management and finance from the University of Texas, shifted from the US to Tithal in Gujarat in 1997 and today run a school that woos tribal girls back to school.

"Before we left India, we had decided we would come back and do something meaningful in life. So in 1997 we came back and bought a house in Tithal," says Aparna. On their mahy walks on Tithal beach, they became friends with a retired teacher from Mumbai, Jayant Desai, who had made Tithal his home. They had long conversations with Desai on improving education in Dharampur and Kaprada talukas and on encouraging tribal girls to study. "After we met Jayantbhai, we realised that all three

of us had something in common. We held brainstorming sessions on the pitiable condition of schools in the region. We then started travelling in the region and interacting with students," says Aparna.

After spending almost seven years studying the education system, Aparna, Pankaj and Desai set up the Kedi Residential School for tribal girls in 2006 and formed the Kaivalvya Trust a year later. Today, the school has 120 students, mostly dropouts or those who were not given admission elsewhere. The school runs classes VII to X and the first batch of students will take their class X exam this year.

"Class VII is basically a refresher course because some of our students cannot even write the English alphabet properly. We don't have marks or a grading system since we only monitor their growth. Studying here is not a burden, it's more about fun. Now the first batch of students is ready to appear for the board exams and we are sure that they will

GUJARAT

An architect and a consultant from the US woo tribal girls back to school

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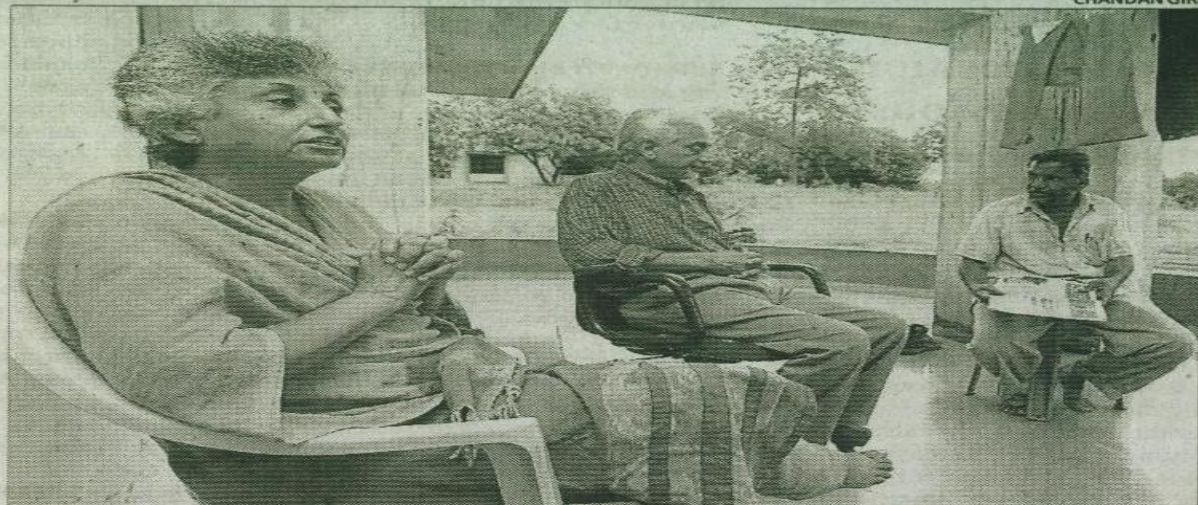
Initially, convincing parents to let their daughters study was tough. "Forget about getting their daughters admitted to a hostel, they were even hesitant in letting them continue their education. But today, the situation has changed to a great extent," says Pankaj.

"When we started the school, we would hunt for students as we took only those students who were either dropouts or had not got admission in any other school. But today, there are parents who insist we admit their daughters. However, we have restricted the students' strength as we would not like to compromise on the quality of education," says Aparna.

The students too are happy. "I like this school so much that I came back on the very day my parents got me married and sent me to my in-laws' place in a nearby village. I want to become a police officer," says Geeta Ghaudhari, a class X student.

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