
Pratirodh Sansthan

Adharshila School for Tribal Girls

Site Visit Report

Amit Sharma, Dec 26th 2017



Introduction

Aadharshila School [for tribal girls] is a unique project run by Pratirodh Sansthan in Amarpura Village nestled in predominantly tribal, and historic district of Chittorgarh. Pratirodh Sansthan and its founders Khemraj Choudhary and Suman Chouhan have a long history of activism and advocacy for tribal and women rights. Pratirodh Sansthan started this school as an intervention against [girl] child marriage and lack of education amongst girl children.

Started with seed funding from Asha for Education in 20017, the school has since graduated well over 100 first generation learners into secondary education, and has created tremendous awareness against child marriage. Besides being a residential facility for girls, this school acts as a bridge [for students] into Government tribal residential school system that traditionally suffer from lack of enrollments attributed to poor conditions of primary education. Government of India started Kasturba Gandhi Balika Avasiya Vidyalay (KGBV) scheme in 2004 under SSA to open residential schools (middle to senior secondary level) for girls of SC/ST/OBC, and minority communities and families below poverty line in districts that meet certain certain thresholds of such population mix. Aadharsila school graduates its students into KGBV, Nahargarh once they pass a grade-4 assessment therefore act as a bridge for its students for secondary education while leveraging as well as enabling the reach and efficacy of KGBV scheme itself.



My engagement with Pratirodh Sanathan dates back to 2006-2007 when I first met with Khemraj Choudlary, Suman Chauhan, and Harlal in a small house in Amarpura to discuss a concept of opening a residential school for tribal girls. I have since been witness to remarkable success story of Aadharshila school, and hard work of Pratirodh Sansthan. This is a summary report of my visit to Aadharshila school and meeting with the teachers, staff and Suman ji.

Site Visit

I reached Amarpura at roughly 11:30am on December 26th. I travelled from Udaipur and had called Susan ji while en-route only to be told that Khemraj ji is traveling to Hyderabad for a summit. Although I was a bit disappointed that I won't be meeting Khemraj ji who I was looking forward to meeting, nonetheless I was excited with a preposition of getting to spend more time with the children this time around.

I met Suman ji right outside their office and we made our way to the school which is a



short walk away. The school seemed in-session, but I quickly realized that all the girls and teachers had assembled in the main class area. I also noticed that the floor was all freshly re-laid (the floor is mud thatched, the traditional way using a cow dung and mud), and was decorated with a beautiful rangoli patterns on the floor. I was told that the girls cleaned and prepared the school in anticipation of my visit.

I found myself a good spot in the open area under the Neem tree and spoke with Susan ji for an hour or so. Omkar ji, the official cook at the school was kind enough to offer a hot chai in the meantime. The teachers joined Suman ji for our discussion, as the girls organized themselves for group study with a few serious girls in-charge.

There was one big change at the school from last time that I visited, a new teacher, Gayatri Balai has joined Premlata at the school. Priya had left the school as a teacher after she secured a job at a Government primary school in Bhadesar. Premlata has been teaching here for over 4 years and is a seasoned professional besides being a rooted activist and advocate of change. I have seen her evolution as a social worker as well as a teacher over the years, and it's heartening to see her relationship with the girls at school. Gayatri is new at this school but already seems a part of the institution. We spoke at length about the cast politics of the region, and inequalities that continue to plague the region and its pupils.



We broke for lunch at around 2:30pm, Omkar ji and Bhula (helper at school) were busy preparing the food. Girls in unison asked us to join for lunch to which I gladly agreed. We all sat in rows and ate together a simple yet wholesome meal.

I spent the next few hours speaking with the girls, and witnessed a series of poem recitals, folk songs, and dance performances from eager kids who wanted to show their talents. Followed by a group meeting were we spent some time discussing higher education.

Summary

- Most students at Nahargarh KGBV are from Aadharshila School and they continue to perform well once enrolled.
- Rajasthan has introduced board exams for Grade-5 and 8 which puts additional burden on children. Assessment processes have changed significantly under current regime and there a worry that it may increase drop-offs or attrition.
- Meera, a first batch graduate from Aadharshila who went to Jaipur on a state scholarship graduated with her senior-secondary boards (i.e. High school or 12th grade) with distinction. Meera subsequently married with her own free and relocated to Nimbhada and is pursuing Bachelors degree in Arts. Meera is a first generation learner who was rescued from imminent child marriage and was the first graduate of Aadharshila!
 - Sona another first batch student is also pursuing undergraduate studies in Nagour
 - Pratirodh Sansthan is apparebrly under some duress by Sushila Laddhha, chairwomen of Child Welfare Committee in Chittorgarh district. She has visited the school quite a few times and had complained to the office of the DM and BEO about registration of the school.

- The DM and BEO befogs other officials from Chittorgarh are regular visitors and supporters of this school. However, they had to officially visit on a complaint from CWC and were able to assuage her concerns.

- Subsequently, this CWC chairwomen allegedly took away a student Alka Nath from Aadharshila school to another school run by an NGO Aasra in Nagor. Aasra is run by Shakira under patronage and support of CWC chairwomen Laddha.

- It was alleged that pressure is being created on Pratirodh Sansthan in order to take away students to this other NGO. Aasra NGO team (Shakira et, al.) regularly visit Aadharshila to learn their methodology and operations and have replicated this in their school. Suman ji apparently is happy to share their learnings but is concerned with the pressure being created on them by CWC as well as attempt to take students away from Aadhsrahila, particularly, the brightest of the lot preparing for KGBV examination!

- Alka Nath the student taken to Nagour is not adopted by the Collector's office through Project Udaan.

- There are a large number of people to donate regularly to the school and a few school bring their students to Aadhsrshila regularly for an exchange program

- School operations continue to be a very basic, rooted and connected to the ground. The students lean an open curriculum, study against the state syllabus but continue to live their traditional practices as well.

- Pratirodh Sansthan has secured a small parcel of land next their office to secure access to the school which was booked by the earlier owner of this parcel. There is a desire to eventually construct small building with more sleeping quarters and toilets.

- Overall the school functions well, and students seem engaged, happy, and healthy