

PUNARCHITH

"RE-THINK"

ANNUAL REPORT: FIRST
MAY 2011-APRIL 2012






PUNARCHITH
"RE-THINK"

.....to rethink our privileges,
received ideas and knowledge...

.....to seek new pathways
of learning, sharing, and living,



Punarchith ('Re-Think') is a collective that focuses on evolving alternative perspectives and activities related to education, environment, democracy, and society. It will seek pathways and perspectives to facilitate ideas and learning for an equitable and just society. Its foundational premise is to evolve from a perspective rooted in the everyday life of rural India.

Punarchith's flagship program will be the development and delivery of an alternative learning program, catering to rural and disadvantaged adolescents. Going beyond mainstream education, the program will have in-built activities related to sustainable agriculture and environment, art and artisanship, construction and architecture, music and performance arts, leadership and democracy, and training in alternative technologies. It will draw on the pedagogies of 'place-based education', critical and reflexive thinking, social transformational learning, and integrated knowledge. Based on responses and needs, other programs and activities will gradually be added.

Punarchith's immediate area of work and engagement is in the Punanjur panchayat area of Chamarajanagar district (west of the Billigiri Ranga Hills), Karnataka (about 90 kms from Mysore).

A PLACE IN TRANSITION, WAYS OF LIVING, AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRENDS


SUMMARY OF A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS REPORT OF THE PUNANJUR AREA

Based on discussions, observations, interviews and interactions, a detailed study relating to the area, its people and the youth was completed.

A transitional zone with fast altering physical and social landscape, the area and its settlements exhibit both the potential and problems of being caught between: depleting natural resources and new external opportunities; the demands of tradition and the call of consumerism; a declining collective sense of belonging to the locale and the individualized angst of migrating.

Located between Charamarajanagar town and the Satyamanagalam forest range, the Punanjur panchayat is a settler territory composed primarily of 26 scattered hamlets with Soligas who have been displaced from the surrounding reserve forests, Lambanis who have settled there since the 1950s, and some households consisting of Madiga (Leather workers, Muslims, and a small number of Badaga and Lingayat families. As a new agricultural belt (where forest areas have been converted into agricultural land), which also lies in the border region between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, there are certain specificities of the area which mark it as different from the typical village. Devoid of the dominance of upper

caste and large landed families, and with a predominance of labouring households, the economy consists of agricultural production that is fast shifting from a single seasonal cropping system (August to January) towards that of perennial cultivation with the aid of tube-wells and new technologies. Cultivation patterns also indicate shifts from the mixed cropping of millets and pulses to that of commercial crops of turmeric, ginger, and bananas. While owner cultivation is predominant, new production arrangements include lease-based agriculture with outsiders cultivating the land for a fixed annual sum. The entry of contract farming with agri-business groups and their agents advising and supervising cultivation and choice of crops is also gaining currency. The slack seasons (February to April and May to July) see a large number of youth migrate to the neighbouring states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu to work in the factories, mills, and in the urban low-end service economy (drivers, salespersons, mechanics). Some Lambani households are considerably well-off with large plots of irrigated land, supplemented with non-agricultural income. Their classification as Scheduled Caste in the state has enabled some to access higher education and employment in the urban areas and in the government sectors. The Lambanis are fast emerging as the dominant caste in the area. The Soligas are the only original dwellers but are



largely displaced from the interiors of the forest and are yet to find their feet either as agriculturists or as a successful labouring class (which the Madigas are). Still retaining relationships with the forest (whose minor produce they are entitled to) but increasingly subordinate in the political-economy of the region, their households are the poorest and are marked by low income, high malnutrition, and poor living conditions. The Muslims as traders are a relatively well-off group and are also supplementing their income with new economic activities such as establishment of stores, and renting of heavy machinery (tractors, tillers and vehicles). Relationships between the castes seems to be on an even keel but the subordinate position of the Soligas to all the other caste groups is evident and there are subtle tensions between the Soligas and the Lambanis, especially among the youth.

The presence of the government through the agencies of the panchayat, the school, and the irrigation, electricity, and health departments is visible. One NGO, established and supported by a local person, has initiated training in tailoring and embroidery for women. More recently the development of the national highway (no 209), that cuts through the panchayat region, has rendered the area into

a busy transit area and a ribbon development along the highway consisting of hotels, grocery stores, agricultural produce collection centres, and a number of places of worship is now visible.

Education opportunities at the school level have improved considerably over the past decade and there are 8 elementary schools, 5 Ashramshalas (residential schools to which the Soligas and Lambanis send their children to), 2 higher primary schools, and one high school within the panchayat zone. Educational levels among youth indicate that most do come up to the high school level but many do not go beyond the Std X. Soligas have high drop out rates even at the school level and only a handful of them are now attending college in Chamarajanagar town. The availability of free hostel facilities in the towns have led to a sizeable number of Lambani and Madiga youth attending college in Chamarajanagar town or in Mysore.

But mainstream education has created several tensions within families and between the generations. Older persons rue the fact that education in many cases has only distanced their children from them and their life-worlds. Many youth refuse to undertake manual work, respect the elders, or engage with the life of the village.



How can individual capabilities and collective responsibilities be enhanced?



YOUTH: SEEKING NEW LIVELIHOODS AND IDENTITIES

Based primarily on increased access to elementary and high school education, and the impact of media and commercialism, the youth are currently experiencing the pressures of being caught between the demands of a fast altering livelihood base and that of their aspirations. Such tensions are visible in the popular culture of male youth who embody their exposure to media through their fashionable clothes and the use of mobile phones. In their ambitions and options they seek a life out of agriculture and the village and their failure to do so leaves many

embittered and disillusioned. Girls are caught in a double-bind where the prohibition of child marriage is now enabling them to reach at least upto high school level but rules of propriety and rigid familial vigilance against possible inter-caste and inter-religious alliances mean that they are withheld from higher education.

Their identities are wedged between the tensions of belonging to their primordial worlds defined by the dictates of caste and religion and that of the new pressures of consumerism and democracy.



In a fast disassembling rural world,
how must rural youth be scaffolded?



ACTIVITIES OVERVIEW

The period, April 2011 to May 2012, was an entry level phase and consisted of the following activities:

ESTABLISHMENT OF RESOURCE CENTRE, OFFICE, AND GARDEN

Starting in April 2011, a small house was rented in Mukhanpalya village, Punanjur Panchayat (Chamarajanagar district, Karnataka) and a resource and learning centre -cum guest-house was established. A home garden for vegetables was begun and seasonal vegetables grown and shared with some of the local people.



The youths' identities are wedged between belonging to their primordial worlds,...

...engaging with the promise of democracy, and negotiating the new pressures of consumerism and the market.



ACTIVITIES

Over the past year, PUNARCHITH has undertaken the following activities:

1 YOUTH DISCUSSIONS

Several discussion sessions with local youth (ages 18 to 23 years) were conducted in the Learning centre. The focus was on identifying the aspirations, needs, and expectations of youth. Sessions on understanding the local ecology and economy, trends in education and employment, decentralized administration, and on the problems of pesticide based agriculture were held between the months of September and December 2011.

2 SOLIGA SWAYAM SAMRUDDHI (SOLIGA SELF DEVELOPMENT)

In August 2011, a program for youth from the Soliga community was initiated. Eight young boys (ages 13-16 years) attended the program which ran from August 2011 to January 2012. The focus was on enabling the youth to gain self-confidence and to engage with local knowledge through experiential learning. The pedagogies drew on art and experiential learning and the focus was first on scaffolding their emotional being. Since four of them were expected to re-enroll in school, the program was discontinued and three others continue to visit the centre on their own and engage with varied activities.

3 GIRLS PROGRAM

A Program for post-school girls was initiated on October 26th, 2011 and continued until March

2012. This program sought to cater to the learning interests of girls who have passed SSLC or failed their PUC exams but have not been permitted to continue their education. Eight girls attended the course which was held every Tuesday at Dodd Mudahalli hamlet. The girls developed calendars (out of waste paper), art work, free writing (essays, poems), collected local riddles, and completed reading of several books. An outing to Mysore to visit the museums and to see the craft fair was organized on February 16th, 2012.

4 ENGLISH LEARNING PROGRAM

This program was initiated with support from the Indian Institute Of Montessori Studies (IIMS), Bangalore for members of Punarchith and for school teachers of the Deenabandu School, Chamarajanagar. Ms. Nandini Prakash is the key resource person from IIMS. The Program was initiated in November 2011 and is conducted at the Deenabandu school premises.

5 INTEGRATED HOME GARDEN PROGRAM

This was initiated in November 2011 with Ms. Sunita Rao acting as the key resource person. The objectives of the program are to integrate issues, knowledge and skills related to food security, health and seed conservation. The first training was held on November 28th, 2011 and 17 women attended the session. A survey of the key hamlet, Dodd Mudahalli, has been finalized

and seeds were distributed to the participants. Follow-up and intense support for each of the participants will be conducted during the coming year.

6 YOUTH LEARNING SUPPORT SCHOLARSHIP

Based on our assessment of needs and abilities, we have identified a few youth from disadvantaged families who require financial support so as to continue their learning. The first scholarship was given to Devaraj, a Soliga boy, aged 18 years who is particularly bright but who has not completed his Std X and who is an orphan. Since the past three years he had been employed in a bakery in Tamil Nadu. After joining the experiential learning program at Punarchith he has decided to stay back at his village and to cultivate his two hectares of land, which had been lying fallow. Punarchith will be extending support to him in his agricultural activities and a group of youth from the area is expected to join him.

7 SUPPORT ACTIVITIES FOR KOLIPALYA HIGH SCHOOL

Four different sets of activities have been undertaken at the local high school:

- An initial introductory activity was undertaken for celebrating Republic Day on January 26th 2012 at the High School. A drama relating to children's rights, posters with notes on the significance of the Indian constitution, and a few songs were developed with the children.
- Support for celebrating environmental day on January 31st,

2012. A display of key concerns related to the environment, children's responsibilities, and on plastic and pesticides in the local area were discussed and shared.

- A three-day Summer Camp for this school with a focus on civic responsibilities and social awareness was conducted between April 17th and 19th, 2012. A total of 35 students from Stds VIII to X attended the camp.

- Preparation of a list of recommended reading materials and books for the High School's library.

8 YUVA CHINTANA: RESIDENTIAL PROGRAM FOR YOUTH

A Residential program for youth (ages 18 and above) was held at the Mukhanpalya Ashramshala between May 8th and 10th, 2012. A total of 19 students (11 from the Punanjur area; and 8 from outside [Melkote, Mandya, and Bangalore) attended the program. There was one observer from Anisha Trust, Kollegal.

Themes in the residential program:

- Understanding Adolescence
- Local Ecology
- Music Appreciation
- Analysing Current Events
- Seeing, Relating, Representing: A Walk
- Art Installation with Local Materials
- Society and Gender
- Becoming Continuous Learners
- Consumerism and Identity
- The Power of Local Democracy
- Sudoku: A Japanese Game
- Interactive Games for Building Confidence



“YUVA CHINTANA” PROGRAM FOR YOUTH





How can local livelihoods and opportunities for professional development be integrated?



CHALLENGES

Over the past year, we have learnt much about the region, its people and the local trends. The stamp of mainstream education mean that many of the youth who do visit the centre expect to receive either training that will lead to immediate urban-based employment, forms of capital support, or have access to text books and guides so as to prepare for competitive exams. With little orientation towards realizing their own potential or gaining access to sustainable local livelihoods, the youth seem restless, anxiety-filled and see quick jobs (many in the low-end urban service economy) as a way to gain their economic independence. Families with some economic strength spend large sums of money to get their sons into government jobs. Getting girls into the program is particularly challenging as adolescent girls continue to be proscribed from free and open movement or attendance at institutions.

Winning people's trust has not been easy as their experiences with several NGOs and external agencies have made them wary.

The overall anti-agricultural attitudes, the rampant forms of illegalities, corruption, the dysfunctional panchayat system, and the environment of commercialization and marketisation indicate that it will take longer and much more work for ideas of alternative education, sustainable development, and progressive social relations to gain currency.

Despite our efforts we have not been able to locate land that could be purchased and then developed into a campus. The rules relating to the buffer zone, the prohibition on sale of lands by the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and the overall lack of transparency in rules and regulations have made access to land difficult.



A comprehensive learning program for rural youth requires pedagogies that integrate issues of sustainability with the abilities to engage with multiple knowledge forms, technologies, capital, citizenship, society, and labour.

RESEARCH, TEACHING, PUBLICATIONS

In addition to the activities at the Mukhanpalya centre, members of the Trust have been engaged in teaching, research and publication. P. Veerbhadranaika conducted a day-long session on social science teaching at the DIET, Chikballapur, presented a paper on education among tribals at a national conference in Bangalore on inclusive education, and also published an essay on tribal youth and festivals in a leading Kannada newspaper; B. Shivananja conducted two sessions on art and education for teachers of the R.V Educational Consortium, Bangalore, conducted sessions at ANISHA, and also wrote an essay on art and children. A.R.Vasavi completed a book, *Shadow Space: Suicides and the Predicament of Rural India*, two essays were submitted

for publication, and she attended meetings and seminars in New Delhi, Sri Lanka, and at Yale University. P. Veerbhadranaika successfully defended his doctoral *viva voce* and received his doctorate in sociology from Mysore University.

Materials Developed: Course outlines for several sessions were developed; reading materials related to 'Social Transformative Learning', 'Critical Thinking' and 'Place-based Education' were compiled and translated into Kannada. Three reports (on Society, Agriculture, and on Youth) related to the Punanjur Panchayat area were completed (in Kannada). A survey relating to the home garden practices in one hamlet (Dodd Muddahalli) was completed.



A call to make the rural an option for livelihoods and life is to critically engage with the existing drawbacks of rural India and to also revitalize its strengths.



THE WAY FORWARD

Based on our discussions and review of the past year's experiences, we plan to continue to work in the area. The small initiative related to the land that some of the youth have offered to develop on a sustainable basis seems promising, and the High School at Kolipalya has invited us to provide support for their additional programs and to develop the library, and the school garden. Since the two modules for the youth was appreciated by them, we have decided to further develop and conduct more of these modules. Discussions with a range of resource persons and with various institutions indicate the possibility of conducting modules for youth in various sites in Karnataka. Over the next two years, more materials and

resource persons, including more core members, will be added. Once the land issue is resolved, the design and development of a campus will be undertaken. More efforts will have to be made to garner financial support for on-going and future activities.

Developing a comprehensive course for rural youth requires us to focus on pedagogies that will integrate issues of sustainability with understanding the roles of knowledge, technologies, capital, society, and labour. A call to make the rural an option for livelihoods and life is to critically engage with the existing drawbacks of rural India and to also revitalize its strengths.



.....to seek new pathways of learning, sharing,
and living,

PEOPLE

PUNARCHITH CORE MEMBERS

P. Veerbhadranaika
B. Shivananja
Sheela Venkatesh
A.R.Vasavi

ADVISOR

Sunita Rao (Vanastree, Sirsi)

More Advisors from across the country will be approached and requested to join the advisory group.

TRUSTEES

Vishalakshi Padmanabhan
Harish Narasappa
A.R.Vasavi

LOCAL ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS

A local Advisory group consisting of members from the hamlets in the Punanjur Panchayat and representing different caste and class groups was formed:

Smt. Premabhai
Smt Ratnamma
Shri Mohan Meghavath
Shri Jagdish Meghavath
Shri Parasu Naik (retired Headmaster)
Shri Mahadesh
Shri Basavanna (Social Welfare Dept)

The first Local Advisory Group meeting was held on October 18th, 2011 and the members were introduced to PUNARCHITH's orientation, goals and work. Regular meetings will be conducted over the coming year.

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Revathi Sampath Kumaran

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RESOURCE PERSONS

- *Art:* Roshan Sahi
- *Ecology:* G.S. Jaydev
- *Music:* S.R. Ramakrishna
- *Decentralized Democracy:* Sham Kashyap
- *Gender Analyses:* Mallige
- *Agriculture:* Valli and Rajan Palaniappan
- *English:* Nandini Prakash
- *Design Support:* Myra Margolin



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PUNARCHITH is a registered Charitable Trust (Reg number YPR-4-00087-2009-10,
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