

Punarchith

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REPORT Number V

INTRODUCTION

Nearly five years since our journey into this endeavour – a time to take stock and review the work and ourselves. Even as the challenges seem formidable, the potential of some of the programmes appear to be realized. It is for us to now weigh the pros and cons, the possibilities and problems and to consider which of our programmes have any impact and how to cater to the gaps in the livelihoods and lives of rural youth. Given the growing complexities of India in general, and the rural in particular, we are witness to contradictions that require us to tread carefully. As educational access has increased (more rural youth are attending high school and colleges), there are new aspirations despite the fact that the quality of education is no guarantee for jobs. As the agricultural economy decelerates, the pressure on getting ‘sarkari naukari’ or government jobs seems to increase. Youth hang out in the villages, yet only a few bother to come by to use the library or for discussions. The expanding market and media mark them and the youth embody these with fashionable clothes and the latest mobile phones as markers of their assertion for distinction.

The observations and experiences from the past three batches of learners from the Integrated Learning Programme (*Samagruha Kalike Karyakrama*) indicate to us that the course has been a positive factor in their lives. But, we need to do much more to strengthen the course and to sustain our relationships with the learners so that they are able to stabilise, internalise and then engage in the alternative world which we

seek to promote. How can sustainable agriculture become a part of their agricultural livelihoods and life-world? What organisational structures, inputs and training are required to get them to form a producers’ co-operative? How can their individual interests also be supported? More specifically, we need to provide them with several types of support so as to enable them to face the multiple challenges of limited land and resources, parental pressures to get government and income-generating jobs, and to be able to work their land to a sustainable level. The formation of a network among the learners has been a positive development and their regular meeting indicates that periodic discussions and sharing will facilitate their individual and collective growth.

The programmes for children and the work on the land and the home-garden have gained momentum but these need to be sustained on a regular basis. Work on Angarike Maala, our small parcel of land, needs to be better integrated to larger out-reach and contact activities that can bring in the local community and others. We also need to link the programmes to a broader agenda and orientation in which much of the dominant ideas about agriculture, ecology, community, education/learning, being, life and livelihood are questioned and alternatives are forged.

PROGRAMMES

INTEGRATED LEARNING PROGRAMME (Samagruha Kalika Karyakrama)



ILP class in progress



ILP in progress English class



Class on medicinal plants



ILP class



Visit to BRT Hills



Singing practice



Presentation Final Day



Receiving Certificates from Trustee Kala Sunder



Final drama

This year saw the third batch of the ILP and a total of 17 students were recruited. We had taken the trouble to ensure better caste representation but somehow getting the upper caste students did not work out as we had anticipated, and the catchment of girls was limited. Two of the upper caste boys were involved with their family work (land and panchayat work) and were irregular, so were some of the girls who found it difficult to commute to Nagavalli. We requested these seven to discontinue as they were not able to keep up to the learning. As a result, the group size shrank to ten (most were Scheduled Caste, one Upper caste, and two from Backward Classes; three girls and seven boys) but they were all engaged. Most of the boys also started cultivation during the course itself and were able to implement much of what they had learnt during the course. As with the earlier batches, the ILP sessions consisted of modules on sustainable agriculture, home-gardening, ecology, social issues, citizenship and basics of English, computers, and accounts. Most of the previous year's resource persons engaged with the

classes and we acknowledge with gratitude the following persons for taking the time and trouble to make the Integrated Learning Programme an innovative learning endeavour:

P. Srinivas (Sustainable Agriculture)

Samira Agnihotri (Ecology)

Suma (Accounts)

Jude Pais (English)

Marulappa and Thippeswamy (citizenship)

Ramesh and Kirana (gender and pluralism)

Shankar Melkote (voice training and personality development)

R. Maithreyi (counselling and orientation)

Rameswari Varma (theatre)

Guruprasad Balakrishna (Computers)

Manorama Joshi and Bhanumathi (Home Gardening)

In addition to these resource persons, we had some special visitors whose inputs and engagement with the ILP course were facilitated by Sunita Rao. Linking international interns to VANASTREE (an organisation based in Sirsi, Karnataka), she was able to get some of them to take sessions at PUNARCHITH. Antonis Breskas from Greece took sessions on making

home-made soap; a skill that the learners have now honed well and are able to make soaps on their own. Aliesje King and Whitney Shervey, who had specialised in curriculum development for ecological issues, took special sessions on home-gardening and on food security issues. R. Rajappa also engaged the students in soap-making and has been our video and film documentation person.



Soap-making session

In addition to the above resource persons, PUNARCHITH team members also took various sessions; P. Veerabhadranaika (social issues and Kannada writing); Sunita Rao (home-gardening), K. Muthuraj (Agriculture); R. Rajappa (theatre and songs); and A.R.Vasavi (Social Issues).

Periodic reviews from students and regular individual feedback to the learners helped provide specific inputs to their learning process. In September 2015, we conducted home visits to all the learners' homes and the feedback from their parents about the impact of the ILP on the learners was significant. Most of the parents appreciated the course for enabling their children to be better organised, to spend more time on reading and writing and more specifically in getting interested in and engaging in agricultural and land issues.

The annual 'Open Garden Day' (Hitala Hita) was held and about 80-100 people from Nagavalli village and the learners' parents and friends visited us. The ILP learners show-cased and sold produce from their own gardens, soaps that they had made, and some vegetable seeds. In addition, they took visitors around the demonstration garden and showed them the methods of soil rejuvenation, rain water harvesting, and the making of compost and organic pesticides and manures.



Hitala Hita with village visitors



Display of seeds



Display of soaps



Display of Panchgavya and seeds

The batch also visited PIVIDHAM, an alternative school, in Dharmapuri district, Tamil Nadu. They interacted with the faculty and students there and learnt about PIVIDHAM's approach to life and learning. The closure of the programme saw the learners perform a play, 'BAKERY BOYS', which was developed by R. Rajappa. The play focussed on trends in which young persons leave agriculture and the village and the travails that they face in working in low-end urban jobs. The final presentation on the valedictory day saw a large turnout of about 120 persons from Nagavalli village and the learners' parents and friends.

IMPACT OF THE COURSE

Six of the boys have taken to agriculture full-time and are engaged in sustainable agriculture and some of them continue to work as agricultural workers to supplement their income. One boy has found a job in Mysore at an organic food/groceries outlet. He continues to live in the village and is able to make the links between the land and new distribution networks. One of the girls is preparing to take the entrance exams for higher education but has also initiated work on her parents' land. We have recruited one of the girls to work with us at the PUNARCHITH resource centre. Two of the girls are not permitted by their parents to work outside as they are expected to be married soon. The issue of parental restrictions on girls is being addressed through discussions with the parents. Seven of the ten learners from this batch have joined the ILP network and are active participants in PUNARCHITH'S programmes and activities.

LINKING THE ILP TO THE GOVERNMENT COLLEGE

Based on suggestions by WATIS (the key funding agency for ILP) personnel that we link our teaching-learning methods and materials to the state department of education, we approached the education department in Bengaluru for permission. While permission was granted at the higher levels, we faced tremendous hostility from the Principal and faculty of the local (Chandakvadi Village) Pre-University College. Not only were they not keen on knowing about a new programme, they were also hostile to any collaborative work. While they reluctantly conceded to permitting us to do a short programme on a Saturday, they insisted only boys could attend the programme and not girls. We objected to this and then decided to withdraw from any engagement with the college. While this has posed a major problem in as much as our work is seen as being outside the educational system, we have had visitors from various colleges in Mysuru and Chamarajnagar town. While the faculty express interest in new pedagogies and materials, they are not able to fully engage in any concrete program or activity.

FORMATION OF A NETWORK OF ILP ALUMNI

The ILP learners have now formed a network among themselves and fourteen of them are meeting once a month at the PUNARCHITH resource centre. Apart from supporting each other and updating themselves on

new issues and trends, they are also in discussions and preparations to form a producer organisation.

While the overall resistance (and denial of land rights to girls) continues, some of the parents of the girls from the previous batches have now permitted their girls to take to agriculture. One example has been that of Mahadevi, age about 22 years, who is from the Uppara community—a well-known 'backward-caste' group that has a strong discriminatory culture against girls. Mahadevi negotiated with her family to allocate three-quarters of an acre to her for use under sustainable agriculture. She not only made new compost but also cultivated a variety of vegetables, including winged beans, which she sold to special outlets in Mysuru. She has attended a 'youth-works' course in Bengaluru, that was conducted by SAMVADA. She is now an articulate and confident young woman who is keen on challenging the gendered restrictions that the community imposes on her.

Through the network, they have sold produce such as millets and pulses, value-added produce, vegetables, seeds, paper-bags, and soap. Plans are to strengthen these activities so that they have a steady source of additional income. Learners have now sold their produce to a network in Mysuru and have participated in the annual Malnad Mela held at Bengaluru and conducted by VANASTREE.

We acknowledge with gratitude the support that WIPRO APPLYING THOUGHT IN SCHOOLS (WATIS), Bengaluru, has provided over the past two years for the ILP and the ILP Network programme.



Visit to Mahadevi's land

HOME GARDEN PROGRAMME

The garden at Nagavalli has been developed into a demonstration plot for home-gardening. In addition to growing vegetables and medicinal plants, the site is used to demonstrate the treatment of degraded soils, rain-water harvesting, production of compost and organic pesticides etc. The year saw the team grow and use green gram, pigeon pea, finger millet, and a variety of beans. Some tubers were also planted but they were not successful. A small nursery has also been started. A one-day 'Introduction to Home-Gardening' was held for some interested persons from Mysore. Sunita Rao and two interns, Aliesje and Whitney were resource persons.



Student Jagdish with his parents

P.Veerabhadranaika and Muthuraj from PUNARCHITH have expended considerable energy in developing and maintaining the garden. In addition, they have harvested, sorted, and stored the seeds so that they can be shared with others.

SCHOOL PROGRAMME

Based on an MOU that we had signed with the Principal cum owner of a network of private schools in the Nagavalli area, we continued to provide academic and creative support to the four schools. In addition to regular teacher training in various subjects, we also visited the schools and provided inputs to the management of classes, conduct of library

sessions, display of children's work, activity-based learning, science teaching, cleanliness etc. Two of the schools held an open day for the parents so that they could see their children's art work. The parents were very appreciative of this. Republic Day (January 26th) was also celebrated in a special way this year in two of the schools and the children prepared special skits for the day.

Although the programme seemed to have made a positive impact on the children and teachers, we faced several administrative and ethical issues with the Principal and owner. Based on a review, we decided to withdraw from this programme, after conducting a final review session and appraising the teachers and the school management about the potential and problems.



Developing a garden at a school

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMME

This programme seeks to provide extra-curricular inputs and support to children in Nagavalli village. A small library functions out of the PUNARCHITH resource centre but we found that most of the children do not return books. Hence, a reading programme has been started and is part of the Saturday morning children's sessions. They not only read some story books but they also play some board games, learn new songs, and engage in art activities. We also conducted a three-day summer programme and the artist/teacher Lalitha Manjunath lead the team. Apart from painting a wall (based on discussions and preparations on paper), the group also learnt some new songs, performed a short-play, and learnt the basics of yoga. About 28-30 children regularly attend the Saturday programme

PUNARCHITH is grateful to Kala Sunder and R. Sunder of Bengaluru for their support to this programme.



Artist Lalitha with children



Summer children's program wall painting

LAND

PUNARCHITH's piece of land (6.75 acres) is in Putanpura village, about 2.3 kilometres from Nagavalli village, where the resource centre is located. Although the land was purchased in 2014, it was formally registered only in April 2015, as we refused to submit to the demands for bribes and upheld that registration be made through due and legal processes. A detailed 'green-print' for the land (called ANGARIKE MAALA or 'grazing ground of *Dodonaea viscosa* or Hopbush') was prepared by Sunita Rao and Alex Bouvard and special inputs and suggestions were provided by U. Ravi Kumar and Lalitha of Mysuru, and by Shivkumarswamy, an organic farmer from Chamarajnagar district. Hard work and persistence by P.Veerabhadranaika and Muthuraj have seen the land (degraded and abused over the years) transform into a green cultivable patch. Once the land was trenched (to hold the rain water), the two cultivating seasons of 2015 were used to grow 'navdanya' (nine grains; 3 pulses, 3 cereals, 3 oil seeds) which were mulched back into the land. Periodic testing of the soil indicates that humus, nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorous content have improved. Yet, much is yet to be done. The higher terrains consisting of rocky patches and with burnt tyre and contaminated soils needs to be developed appropriately. Water continues to be a problem as the sandy soil does not hold water or have the potential to have a water table. Plans are to assess the potential of the land over the coming two years to see if the water potential can be tapped to develop a campus for PUNARCHITH. Meanwhile, work on the land continues with many challenges. The land has been fenced (to ward off cattle and sheep grazing and unwanted visitors) and gates made. A dilapidated pump house has been renovated to make for a tool-room and the bunds have

been made over the cultivable flat land. The existing coconut trees have been pruned and manured. Plans are to develop the land into an 'agro-biodiversity conservation cum demonstration' site and to have out-reach programmes for both local and non-local persons.

Even as the land work and the question about water seemed daunting, we were recipients of some unexpected good-will. A group of workers, mostly landless, who had formed a self-help group came by to 'donate their labour' (shrama daan) for a cause. They worked on our land for a whole day, trimming the coconut trees, strengthening the bunds, and hauling contaminated soil. We were touched by the generosity of this group and later invited them to share a meal with us and to enjoy a session of singing.



Angarike Maalae before land restoration



Angarike Maalae with mixed crops

TEAM REVIEW AND ORIENTATION

In addition to monthly team reviews, internal self-reviews and sharing are conducted every six months. This year, we had Ms. Izumi Yamamoto of iLeap, Seattle, spend a day with us. She shared some ideas about individual and group development and ways to enable team building so as to realise the institution’s goals.



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We acknowledge with gratitude the financial contributions and support by the following people: Shamita Sharma and D.D. Nampoothiri (Kozhikode); Rameswari Varma (Mysore), Rahul Gowda (Bengaluru); Kala and R. Sunder (Bengaluru). Support for the ‘Integrated Learning Programme’ was provided by Wipro Applying Thought in School (WATIS), Bengaluru.

PERSONNEL

The following are currently PUNARCHITH team members:

P. Veerabhadranaika (Social Issues, Citizenship, and overall field management),

H. Muthuraju (Agriculture and Home gardening)

R. Rajappa (Performing arts, technical support)

Sunita Rao (Home Gardening, Land Development and Conservation)

A.R.Vasavi (Social Issues, Administration, Fund management)

Mahalakshmi M (Office and Resource Centre)

H.R. Manju (School support)

Puttasiddha Nayaka (Accounts)

TRUSTEES

Shri K. Venkatraju, Chamarajanagar

Ms. Kala Sunder, Bengaluru

Shri. Harish Narasappa, Bengaluru

Prof. A.R.Vasavi, Bengaluru

AUDITORS

Shri G.N. Ananthavardhana, Mysore

Punarchith Learning Centre

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Donations to PUNARCHITH qualify for deductions under

80G of the Income Tax Act 1961

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Validity Period AY 2012-13 and onwards.