

Eklavya Vision Mission

1. The Green Book

The founding document spelt out our vision and mission in 1982 thus:

The inadequacy and irrelevance in the context of Social needs of the curriculum, examination system and teaching methods in school education have been voiced so often that one need not argue the issue afresh. In fact one can strongly argue that the educational methodology at the school and higher levels inhibits the development of qualities which the Constitution has listed. The development of curriculum in an adhoc and unscientific manner, without field-testing or an analysis of already known facts, and an archaic examination system have resulted in an educational process that systematically kills the natural curiosity of the child and stifles questioning, by a total disregard for environmental differences while crating curricula and teaching methods, an Urban bias being the marked feature in this respect.

...

Perhaps the only meaningful innovations have been the ones tried by certain voluntary groups from time to time. For obvious reasons, these groups have the ability to attract motivated and creative persons and provide them with adequate freedom to experiment and innovate. However, the failure of these voluntary attempts to create a significant dent in the system illustrates the second aspect of the problem, i. e. the identification of structures and processes that can diffuse Micro-Level Innovations, while sustaining quality, into Macro -Level action programmes. In the absence of such structures, all high quality Micro-Level innovations remain scattered and unconnected. Voluntary agencies have often tried to duplicate existing structures only to discover tried to duplicate existing structures only to discover the limits of this approach. Creating a few model schools and universities, .., is in the wider context quite meaningless as the beneficiary populace is not even a countable fraction. Hence, the utilization of wider existing structures and networks for the purpose of diffusion becomes critical.

...

We believe that the following conclusions can be deduced from our experiences (of the HSTP):

- i) It is feasible to introduce meaningful innovations in Government educational structures.*
- ii) Joint ventures involving voluntary agencies and the Government are suitable set-ups for introducing such innovations. Such combined set-ups provide the academic freedom and flexibility normally absent in rigid Governmental systems, without which it is virtually impossible to create and test innovations. On the other hand, the availability of Government structures and administrative*

machinery ensures the implementation of such ideas so that they do not remain as mere laboratory endeavors.

- iii) The participation of MP Colleges personnel, TIFR scientists and the UGC/Delhi University arrangement highlights the feasibility of involving, in a formal manner, resource personnel of high quality in village level school education, thereby fulfilling the concept of a school complex envisaged by the Kothari Commission.*
- iv) Environment-based learning through the 'inquiry method' is an implement able innovation and is expandable to a macro level. Its implementation has the potential of fulfilling the objective of creating a scientific temper in society.*
- v) It is possible to create a motivated cadre of school teachers. By a process of continued interaction they can be made to realize their own potential, thereby increasing their confidence. The stagnation inherited through a methodology demanding routine lectures can thus be replaced through their dynamic and creative participation in the educational process.*

...

The work of the Institute shall chiefly focus on :

- i) The Building up curriculum and educational material on the basis of the local environment.*
- ii) Extending the 'inquiry method' to the study of all subjects at all levels of school education as a necessary step for building up scientific temper amongst children.*
- iii) Exploring new directions in both formal and non-formal education to relate their content and pedagogy to social change.*
- iv) Consolidating and further creating structures within and outside the Government to facilitate the spread of the process of educational change.*

(From Evolving Systems for the introduction and diffusion of Educational innovations - Micro-level Experiments to Macro-level Action, 1982)

2. Review of Experience

This was the framework within which we undertook a number of programmes from 1982. The apogee was reached in 1995-2000 when got an opportunity to intervene in the shaping of primary curriculum for the entire state and also try our package in one entire block in Shahpur.

However, all through we had a feeling of unease - of the system not accepting our ideas and methods. We could explain it in a number of ways - that this was not initiated by the govt, or that we were outsiders, or that these ideas do not have acceptance within the community. At the same time we explored a number of alternative ways of carrying on our work. One was what was termed as 'idea level expansion', or broadcasting our ideas but not trying to bring about change under our direction or according to our dictates. Another model was to undertake collaborations, as in Gujarat. Yet another attempt was to collaborate with an agency that effectively worked in tandem with both the community and the state, Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan. We also tried to provide academic support to state institutions from outside as in Assam.

We could see a lot of potential in all these models, but as a rule in almost all of them the process reached a ceiling after which it not only stopped but seemed to revert to *status quo ante*. As we turn back it seems that what we, or Lok Jumbish tried for purposeful change at the ground level cannot be bettered by any NGO for a long time. Does this mean that the hope expressed in 1982, that 'it is possible to bring about meaningful change in the government system' is a mere mirage? It seems that we can say today '*Yes innovation is possible within the government system, but not sustainable due to paucity of social capital and professionalism in the system.*' If we cast a glance at the entire scenario before we arrive at this pessimistic conclusion a few more dimensions of change emerge.

What we were saying in the margins thirty years ago is today the on the verge of becoming the mainstream thinking. Those striving for change like us are today a legion spread across the country and they have amassed such experience that they are exercising influence in all possible ways. Today there is such diversity in the alternative thinking in education that debates have become possible within it. The NCF and the new text books of the NCERT are an evidence of this. The methods and systems suggested by us thirty years ago have now become common. The KB-Eklavya tradition and the people associated with it can claim much credit for this state of affairs.

Certainly there is more to this change than us- perhaps the emergence of new thinking in the middle classes is also responsible for this.

3. Changes in the ground reality

We are witnessing rapid changes in the school education scenario – a radical shift from the monolithic government school system with which we started 30 years ago.

The school education system has become more stratified and also diverse. Stratified in the sense that we have a hierarchy of schooling possibilities to suit the pockets of the people: within the govt school system we have a range from the EGS, regular govt schools, Schools of Excellence, Navodayas, Central Schools, etc. Outside of the govt system we have single teacher ekal vidyalayas run by the RSS to the elite schools affiliated to international boards. Some of these are run in a competitive market context while there is also a substantial sector of schools run for larger social purposes, of both the right wing and left wing kinds. These can thus be classed into market and NGO

schools. These too are highly stratified and diverse. The market schools range from petty shops charging meagre fees and being run by the educated unemployed to the elite schools. Similarly there are elite NGO schools (like the KFI schools) to plebian schools run by BGVS etc.

While the poorest of the poor children go to the govt schools a large bulk of children hovering just above the poverty line go to the modest private schools. Thus even in the area of mass education we have a highly varied and fragmented system. The state remains a regulating factor through control over curriculum, text books and public examinations.

The elite private schools as market leaders exert great influence over the educational ideas and practices of all schools. Likewise the NGOs too exercise such influence through public debate and intervention in state policies.

There has been a spawning of civil society initiatives in education, and unlike thirty years ago we have a very large number of actors in education from the 'voluntary sector'. While technically these are civil society initiatives, in actual fact they are driven by international agencies, the corporate houses and the govt sytem which have gained a powerful leverage in this sector through large funding.

Such diversification of the institutional structure of the education is actually reflective of the diversity in the demands made of education. This perhaps is the least understood aspect of the current educational changes. Part of the reason for this is that it is still maturing and yet to manifest itself fully.

Nevertheless the result is the breakdown of the monolithic structure of public education, rendering old forms of intervention irrelevant and at the same time creating new spaces for action.

As the formal education system penetrates wider and deeper into the society there is ironically a growing sense of crises. It is generally being perceived that the govt education system is increasingly becoming dysfunctional. While on the one hand the govt system seems to be active as never before with far greater fund flows, greater professional integration of schools through the block-cluster structures, it also seems to be collapsing in effectiveness. There can be a number of reasons for this: over centralisation in a system not intrinsically committed to mass education; the conscious govt policy of decimating the traditional teacher cadre and replacing it with an ill paid, insecure and fragmented cadre; the relentless pressure of the market which has replaced the composite student population in govt schools with children of only the most deprived communities. The private schools catering to the masses too give a feeling of crises as they are only better than the govt schools only in terms of the greater accountability that the market imposes. The quality of education that they impart is very poor, with untrained teachers, curricula designed by people without qualification using text books turned out by pulp writers etc etc. The pressure of market also forces a high degree of fraudulent practices.

This sense of crises cannot just be described by the ‘quality of education’ discourse. Its roots typically lie in the conflict between the pressure of the market to universalise education (of a particular kind) and the sluggish process of democratisation in the society. There then is the need to revisit the debates on educational philosophy in order to chart the way forward.

There is a crying need to critique the dominant notions of education which seek to decontextualise it and uncritically pose it as a universally desirable goal. Being educated in whichever way it is defined is being touted as the panacea for poverty and underdevelopment. There is also an attempt to break down education into mere skill components like reading-writing-measuring-arithmetic etc. or concept or information packages. These notions are quite in tune with the dominant notions of development. There is a growing discomfort such paradigms of education and alternative thinking is emerging both at a theoretical and practical levels.

At this juncture it is useful to revisit the debates (like the Tagore-Gandhi debate) that shaped the educational agenda of the nationalist movement. Despite the differences on crucial questions there was an agreement to situate education firmly in the context of nationalism, internal social reform and integration into the modern world on our own terms. Today such moorings may seem dated. Yet the essential idea of not divorcing education from the broader agenda before the society and indeed seeing it as an integral part of that agenda is as valuable today as before. We need to see education as not only ‘aligned’ to the larger social goals but to integrate it into the pursuit of those goals. Education can be achieved only in measure with the achievement those larger goals.

Identifying that agenda today is not as easy as it may have been half a century ago. If anything we are confronted with a fragmented agenda, with the dominant section firmly aligned with forces of so called globalisation and a substantial segment of the population at the receiving end of it and struggling to come to terms with it. The movement of those on the receiving end too is highly fragmented without a unifying vision or organisation. Hence it is pointless to talk of integrating education with a particular movement as was possible in the first half of the previous century.

In a sense the search for a meaningful agenda in education can only be an integral part of the search for the larger social agenda. Despite the sense of fragmentation and pessimism that characterises the social movements today we can discern certain broad contours of such an agenda. The very market forces and electoral processes seem to have ignited democratic aspirations among people who have remained in the margins. The need to assert themselves, find a place for themselves in the new changing world, to participate in it as competent players, associate with others like themselves, seek and imbibe values, skills and knowledge in consonance with the new world, to voice their interests and feelings and demand accountability – these are the dimensions of the process of democratisation that we are witnessing. We need to situate education within *this* broader context of democratisation of the society.

The above discussion works towards a dual agenda for us: to keep afloat the flag of innovation so that people can develop commitment, faith and expertise in the process of

educational change and to search for a meaningful agenda for social and educational change. The former has to be built on liberal-democratic educational principles a sort of a broad democratic platform.

4. Goals and Strategies

Our Long Term Vision:

Meaningful education for all to build an egalitarian and just society on the path of sustainable development.

In order to achieve this goal of comprehensive change in the education system we will -

- i. generate and disseminate ideas and materials relating to meaningful education - ideas that are academically sound, consistent with a democratic values and tested in field conditions.
- ii. build a community of people in the country who have an experience of working for educational change and are committed to it.

In both these tasks we have to network with other like minded individuals, organizations, groups and movements and also engage with state structures both at the local and the national level. We need to facilitate and create spaces for them to intervene in education.

While it is true that intervention in state structures is essentially transient, we cannot ignore that space or its importance in building a network of resource persons and organizations. When working with the govt. the earlier possibility of creating islands of innovation where 'our writ runs' is not only not possible but can be counterproductive. We need to learn to negotiate, persuade and accept a mix as the outcome of collaborative efforts.

We need to constantly broaden the sphere of dialogue to include, to use a neo-liberal phrase, the various 'stake holders' in education. These are not merely the 'beneficiaries' of education (teachers, parents, etc) but also corporate houses, political movements, bureaucrats.¹

5. The Three Programme areas

I. Curricular research and material development

II. Setting up Regional Resource Centres

III. Publication and distribution of educational materials

¹ This does not mean a compromise with obscurantism but an engagement with it.

I. Curricular Research & Material Development

The *raison de etre* of Eklavya has been development of alternative field tested . curriculum package. This has provided a counterpoint to the mainstream while at the same time providing resource support for efforts for positive changes in it. Our unique position has been that we were able to bring together diverse perspectives of subject experts, educationists, state agencies, those involved in movements for social change, school teachers etc. and also provide a site for field testing ideas. The purpose of such exercises has been not only to generate good ideas but to generate ideas that are implementable in ordinary school conditions.

Our work in the past has suffered from two major shortcomings: of being piecemeal and not complete and secondly poor publication record. Piecemeal in the sense that we have left large gaps - pre-primary, middle school language and math and high school. As the country is moving towards universalizing a ten year schooling and also pre primary schooling a more complete perspective is essential.

Even in areas where we have already worked, there is a need to update and revise and try out alternative ideas.

As action researchers we have been satisfied with giving shape to effective field programmes and have largely ignored the dimension publishing our understanding with the backing of rigorous research. This has somewhat limited the impact of our work and also gives rise to the feeling that we are not subjecting it to professional criticism.

The new NCF and the exercise of preparing new text books under the aegis of the NCERT offers us a broad framework to base ourselves and also to critique and go beyond. While we have participated extensively in shaping them we also need to serve as critiques. We need to continue this dual role in the near future too.

Two specific areas for elaboration of the NCF work can be spelt out: firstly the need to develop effective teacher orientation / involvement packages to go in tandem with the new curricular changes; and secondly, the need to provide resource support to state governments to adapt state curricula and text books to the NCF.

Three major shortcomings of the exercise can be seen even as it is evolving: Firstly, even while asserting a constructivist paradigm the development of text books especially in the upper primary and secondary levels remains within confines defined by the concerned disciplines. Secondly, contextualization remains relatively ignored by such national curricular programmes. This is a larger question with both philosophical and practical import. We are in a privileged position to address this crucial question. Thirdly, for obvious reasons of time constraints the crucial component of field testing has been absent from the entire process. This has resulted in most text books assuming and reinforcing traditional pedagogies and class room processes.

These three aspects are also the ones with regard to which we are in a privileged position to intervene and make meaningful contribution.

Curriculum research would consist of situating the problem within the state of knowledge, exploring new ideas, developing materials and trying them out in the field and subjecting them to peer review by publishing. Ideally this should be done in collaboration with teachers and experts spread across the country so that it carries requisite weight and acceptability.

Curriculum development may have different meanings and dimensions. When we developed HSTP or Social Science or Prashika we had a commitment that they would be used in the govt schools. Accordingly we developed a comprehensive package consisting of text books, kit, class room organization, teacher training, evaluation, administration, revision etc. In the absence of any such commitment we are faced with the question - curriculum for whom? Also a comprehensive package becomes a meaningless exercise. Under such conditions what can be the agenda for curriculum development? We need to confine ourselves to critiquing the existing curriculum and syllabi, proposing an alternative framework, and develop some alternative learning materials, field test in a broad spectrum of schools and publish our conclusion. In the process we would have built a network of people from different professional backgrounds who would carry forward the work.

Not having to develop materials for a specific set of classes in specific schools would also allow us a degree of freedom to open a number of questions usually sidelined in formal curricula. Questions relating to the social contexts, the development age group requirements of the learners, the larger utility and role of the themes being taught etc need to inform such an exercise. Formal curriculum with its emphasis on examination and political constraints of the school seem to grossly underestimate the potentials of children and the possibilities of education. Standing outside of it would give us an opportunity to explore these new dimensions which have the potential of breaking the present curricular impasse.

The suggestion that Eklavya undertake research into educational issues has been confronted by a number of questions; do we have the capacity to do this? Why should we duplicate the work of university faculties? What research issues will we take up? Etc. It needs to be clarified that Eklavya does not intend to become a professional 'research institution'. In the course of our curricular interventions and debates we have come across a number of questions that need carefully designed investigation and study. (Can we teach rotation and revolution of the earth in class 6? What sense do children make of the idea of govt and polity? How do children understand concepts relating to atoms and molecules...) It is to answer these questions that arise from our curricular intervention that we have been undertaking research and it will remain so. Publication of such research would invite peer review and facilitate an informed debate over crucial issues. It has been suggested that such investigations may be taken up in collaboration with university departments which will provide the necessary professional input.

How do we organize a curricular intervention and research programme? This has been a subject of much debate. It seems rather mechanical to separate this aspect of our work from the others like resource centre or publication and confine it to one programme group. Likewise it seems odd to talk of curriculum divorced from field based work

reserved for the resource centers. Discussions have brought some clarity on these questions and hopefully more would be achieved during the course of work.

It is clear that all our programmes are informed by our overall agenda of curricular intervention and generation of new ideas. Likewise the programme of CRD too would be geared to scaling and publishing. However there is a need for functional specialization. Development of an alternative curriculum for high school cannot be done if the team is involved in a large number of extension activities. We need a large and specialized team doing full time work which would include reading writing, contacting resource persons, holding workshop with teachers, school followup etc. This doesn't imply that all material development or research projects would necessarily done only as a part of this programme group. For example, development of local history materials, or use of folk literature in primary education etc are matters that could be undertaken by the resource centre teams. More of this in a later section.

Given the present capabilities and priorities we have decided upon the following areas of work for the programme:

1. completion of some of the existing research/material development projects: these being the geography survey and geography curriculum review; atlas for children; modules on human body; research into conversation and class room interactions in primary schools. This would also include participation in the MA programme of TISS.
2. The whole school transformation programme which will be organized into two major components - processes by which a school can change itself and adopt a child centered pedagogy; and a comprehensive language programme which includes basic literacy, mother tongue and second language acquisition in a multilingual context.
3. Developing a math curriculum and materials from primary to middle schools (class 3 to 8)
4. Developing a framework for high school curriculum and undertaking curriculum & material development of high school science in this context. And also of Economics.

With the passage of time some other areas such as teacher education, curriculum for art and aesthetics etc can be taken up.

How do we go about Research & Material Development?

The context for this exercise has changed and we no longer have a curricular replacement opportunity. (All such opportunities as in NCERT or SCERT are basically negotiated settlements) We therefore need to adopt diverse strategies for field testing our own ideas and materials. We could consider the following steps:

- i. Building a core group within Eklavya..
- ii. this core team should bring together a larger resource team of professionals and committed school teachers etc. from other agencies

iii. a position paper reviewing existing state of affairs the need for change and the nature of change should be prepared and subjected to debate.

iv. alternative materials to be prepared by the resource group and processed by the core team.

v. field trials in schools of affiliated teachers and in schools around the core team.

vi. preparation of report etc. for publication..

II. Regional Resource Centres

The regional resource centres would cater to a large geographic area, say three to five districts and will not be merely providing services to a local population. Its principle objective will be to impact the system at the regional level by disseminating our ideas of education among - teachers, schools, bureaucrats, parents, youth etc. and to create platforms for the committed to come together and intervene meaningfully. The resource centres may also undertake short and limited research projects relating to themes thrown up by their work

Our main strategy is to work through resource persons and institutions and formal structures available in the region rather than acting as direct service providers.

This may mean an initial phase of disseminating our ideas, identifying resource persons, organizations and structures to carry them out followed by a phase of providing them with resource support to undertake action programmes.

To begin with the following programmes may be undertaken by the resource centres:

1. Libraries: to establish and make functional existing libraries in communities and schools, for children and adults alike..
2. Pitaras: to make available in the regional markets good quality educational materials - books, kit and activity materials. (there may be one nodal pitara undertaking exhibitions, traveling shops etc.)
3. Learning centres: to establish centres for children to supplement their school learning free of the restrictions of the formal system where children and youth can get together to learn, discuss and practice their skills. These also can become forums for initiating discussions, local studies, local magazines, etc.
4. Intervention in schools: to promote the use of 'good' materials and methods in the teaching of various subjects. (including bal melas) This may be done through persuading/orienting teachers, managements, bureaucrats etc.
5. Propagate democratic values: Use these forums to place issues like secularism, equality (gender, caste and class), relations between children and adults, child abuse, etc etc.
6. Development of contextualized educational materials: promote use of folklore, local history, local developmental problems, in education having taken care to review them critically to make them consistent with democratic values. To promote development and use of teaching learning materials by teachers and members of the community subject to the same process.

7. Participatory research: to undertake small scale research into state of education in the region with the participation of the 'stakeholders'. Also into matters of local concern and importance.
8. Publication of news letters/ local magazines.

(This will mean the absorption of several existing programmes like the teacher development programme, basic skill programme, *bal samuh* and PSM programme, BEREC, and SPKs. It will also mean shift in the focus of the centres from catering to a small local clientele to larger region. In case a center is closed down, provision should be made to ensure continuation of some of the good work being done - a well run library, spk centres etc.)

Geographies: Resource centers would initially focus on two regions, the Narmada Valley and Malwa. One or two centers may be set up in other states in collaboration with other agencies. It is planned to set up a centre through a collaboration with VBS and Digantar in Chattisgarh.

III. Publication and Distribution

That our publications will be the vehicle of our ideas and make available concrete alternative materials for schools, parents and children is fairly well recognized and agreed upon. We need to recognize that our sales and distribution too have a crucial function to perform in disseminating our ideas and bringing together people and networking with other organisations. Presently we have two kinds of publications- magazine and non magazine tile publications.

Magazines: There has been some debate over the use of magazine publications given their low shelf value and our problem in putting together quality materials in a defined time schedule. However there is an agreement that magazines build enduring links with readers which occasional publications do not. Thus have a mobilizing and organizing role. Presently we publish three magazines, Chakmak for class 3 to 8 children, Sandarbh for teachers and high school children, and Srote for adults (a byproduct of the feature service). In addition we have the wall paper targeting the adolescents but it has not yet stabilized.

We need to go beyond production and embrace the readers - Sandarbh etc should become our instrument of interaction with teachers and others interested in education- we should organise sandarbh readers forums and hold periodic workshops with them. Similarly with Chakmak and Srote, maybe on a different basis. Whether this will be under the magazine programme or the resource centre programme is not very clear.

How do we make the magazines self sustaining and revenue generating is a matter we have not been able to resolve.

Title Publications: We produce a mix of titles, those generated by our curriculum and field programmes, reissue of old classics, titles specially commissioned, titles generated by sister organizations. There is a range within the titles, from posters and activity materials, reading materials for early readers, modules, activity materials, to educational classics. Should we also publish titles not immediately concerned with education (like the one on Bhopal gas or sustainable development) is still open to discussion.

It is proposed to have distinct editorial teams for each of the magazines and the title publications with common design and technical facility.

Pitara: These are conceived as multipurpose outlets to be undertaken in collaboration with other organisations. They will promote and sell both materials developed by Eklayva and sister organisations and others like the NBT. They are also expected to conduct workshops for schools etc. to disseminate our ideas... in other states.

Team Structuring: It has been decided to have broadly independent editorial teams for each of the magazines and also the title publications; however there will be a production and design team common to all publications; likewise there will be a common marketing team.

C.N.Subramaniam
On behalf of Ekalvya group
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