

Annual Report

2013-2014

Pragat Shikshan Sanstha

July 2014

Pragat Shikshan Sanstha

The Pragat Shikshan Sanstha is registered as a society under the Societies Registration Act of 1860 and as a trust under the Bombay Public Trust Act of 1950.

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Preface

We are happy to present the annual report of the Pragat Shikshan Sanstha for the year 2013-14. The report primarily covers the period of one academic year starting from June 2013 to May 2014. However some important events such as the presentation of MAZA Krutadnyata Sanman Puraskar to Dr. Berntsen in June 2014 are also included in this report.

In the report we present a broad picture of our activities, programmes and achievements as well as our reflections on the future in the changing scenario of education and funding. This year for the first time the annual report is also being presented in Marathi.

We take this opportunity to thank all the donors, both individuals and institutional for their generous support which has enabled us to continue our work for quality education. Our special thanks to Sir Dorabji Tata Trust for their support in developing a curriculum for Early Childhood Educators in rural India, to Maharashtra Foundation for their support in establishing the project 'Taking education to Homes' (TEtH) and the SPA Education Foundation in continuing it. We thank Jai Nimbkar, Gladys Kothawala, Nimbkar Seeds Pvt. Ltd., Nandini Trust and M.G. Charitable trust for their generous and sustained support over the past several years.

We are grateful to our trustees, members of the governing council and friends who always support and advise us. We give our special thanks to the core team involved in writing the modules for the EC Educator's curriculum for giving their time and expertise as well as playing an active role in training our teachers and *anganwadi* supervisors from Phaltan Taluka. We wish to thank all our teachers and staff members working on various projects who are committed to the mandate of PSS and work tirelessly in the pursuit of excellence. We want to thank all the parents and students of KNB, and Apli Shala for being with us. We want to thank the school management committee of KNB for its sustained support and help in maintaining a dialogue with the larger parent community. Finally we want to thank the whole learning community who make all these efforts worthwhile.

Dr. Manjiri Nimbkar

Pragat Shikshan Sanstha

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*Our dream is of a world where no child will be deprived of education,
or be forced to attend a school that will mutilate her spirit.*

Early Childhood Education

The year 2014 has been declared the year of early childhood education (ECE) by the department of Woman and Child Development of the Government of India. For PSS however, the year 2013-14 was the year of ECE. One of the oldest components of the work of PSS is the *balwadi*. In 1978, the first *balwadi* was started in Apli Shala, the centre of PSS in the most under-privileged area of Phaltan. It was born out of the need to free the older girls from their duties of looking after younger siblings so that they could pursue their own education. In 1987, the Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan of PSS started with a *balwadi* for children of families coming from all walks of life. Both *balwadis* followed the play-way method with a focus on oral language development.



The *balwadi* teachers were exposed to the Montessori method followed at Wardha and a ten day training offered by Maharashtra Balshikshan Parishad at Gram-Mangal. With these inputs, the *balwadi* was more formalized. In 2009, Dr. Neelima Gokhale started giving inputs in the *balwadi*. In the span of three years, from 2009 to 2012, our Early Childhood Education centres were transformed into child centred, active learning classrooms. The

whole experience has been very enriching and exciting for all stake holders. Our work also confirmed the importance of well-informed, knowledgeable teachers for high quality ECE programmes. We, therefore, decided to prepare a curriculum for early childhood educators in rural India. Sir Dorabji Tata Trust gave us a grant to make this dream possible. It was a mammoth job but we are happy to inform the well wishers of Pragat Shikshan Sanstha that we have completed it with only one three month no cost extension—in a total of 15 months. Within the purview of this project, we studied six early childhood teacher education programmes currently offered in Maharashtra to understand the need for the new curriculum. We, developed a curriculum called Pragat Balshikshika Shikshan Abhyaskram, focusing on classroom practices and related theoretical knowledge as this need was revealed through our overview of the other available curricula. We also, produced sixteen supporting films at the PSS *balwadis*, and a CD of forty balgeets in Marathi, Hindi and English. Additionally, forty three posters were prepared for use in public awareness programmes.

The material has been used in a pilot programmes with anganwadi Supervisors as well as our teachers and has proved to be effective. Comments from the team of Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar University, Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development (CECED) support our findings. We now offer this training to visitors and the response is very encouraging.

Comments from Ambedkar University Team (Early Childhood Education in Pragat Shikshan Sansatha, Phaltan, Maharashtra, Case Study Report, 2013, page 73)

Pragat Shikshan Sanstha (PSS) has developed a model of preschool education with focus on free play and emergent literacy fostering learning to read and write meaningfully with all round development. It is a model that perhaps merits wider dissemination in the prevailing milieu where free play is getting increasingly marginalised in favour of formal teaching of the 3Rs and preschool centres perceived as mere preparatory schools for the next stage of education. The organization has taken some initiatives for dissemination by developing training modules and videos for *anganwadi* supervisors and workers in the block. They have also developed an effective approach to teacher training, loosely described by them as ‘supervised practical’ – a combination of mentoring and training, based on observation and site based support aimed at changing the prevalent mindsets of *anganwadi* workers. While the organization’s efforts to take their training approach to scale and of engaging with the ICDS system is still at a preliminary stage and yet to establish its proof of concept, this effort is wrought with immense possibilities.

Taking Education to Homes

This programme was started in February 2013 with the financial support from Maharashtra Foundation. It is currently being supported by the SPA Education Foundation.

This was a path little travelled upon. There are very few initiatives of this kind in Maharashtra. However the research evidence that we came across gave us the courage to travel this path. It was the first time we were going to people's houses and talking to the care givers about child care practices for children in the 0-3 age group.

During the TEtH project the trained *sakhis* visited Mangalwar Peth and Shivajinagar slum in Phaltan. We talked to many care givers and interacted with many children. We are happy to see that we were able to help many parents and children. There were several very young mothers who were happy and reassured to have our *sakhis* visit them and demonstrate to them how to interact with the children for their language development and play with them for their social-emotional and cognitive development. The *sakhis* also talked to the parents and family members about health, nutrition and immunization of the children.

We found that although most of the children were found to be treated affectionately, in some cases they were beaten and said bad words. We also found that many children were handed out money by their parents to buy sweets as a way of showing love. The *sakhis* talked to the parents at length about the lasting and negative effects of these practices on the children. Over six months, the money giving practice has dropped by 31% and that of beating and using bad words has dropped by 18 %. More parents have started spending at least some more time with the children. The increase was especially remarkable among the fathers. Many care givers became active advocates of the programme and the child care practices taught therein. The only problem where we could not make even a dent was that of applying *misri* (roasted tobacco) to the teeth and gums among women.



Nine of the children we worked with are now in our ECE programme at Apli Shala and the teacher gives a very encouraging feedback about their adjustment and behavior in the class room saying that these children adjusted very well to the school from the first day. They never cried when mothers dropped them off at school. They enjoyed all the activities and hardly ever missed school, which is very unusual for our Apli Shala Balwadi. Many more things can be taught to them as they are so eager to learn and the general impression is that their language development is far better than the children who were not a part of the project.

The core group

PSS has grown very organically over the past three decades. As a result it is a closely knit organization like a family. However with the passing of years the senior people have retired and new recruits have taken their places. Today the number of adults working for PSS is a little more than 50. However the responsibility of running the various programmes, liaisoning, networking, proposal writing and daily administration rests on the shoulders of the director alone. It was felt that it is advisable for an organization of this size to have a team to take on different responsibilities to ensure its smooth running. Accordingly a core group was constituted of seven individuals who are already a part of the PSS in various capacities. This core group has held meetings, identified strengths and weaknesses within the organizational structure, identified key people and is preparing a plan for effective administration. The plan will be launched in August 2014.



Self Organized Learning Environment (SOLE)

Last year, we were introduced to an educational programme, Granny Cloud. It is a programme in which a group of 6-7 students interacts with a granny or grandpa from the US, UK or Australia on Skype. It is called the granny cloud because of the grandmotherly approach of the people on the other side of Skype contact. They are very supportive and encouraging. During a typical session, the students and the grannies and grandpas talk

about themselves, their families, their work, culture and the happenings around them. They read stories to one another, sing songs, use the Internet to find out information, quiz one another and share a good laugh. Children discuss questions among themselves for clarification before answering. A teacher may be present at a Skype session but never intervenes. The children have to negotiate the problems- from granny's accent to difficult words- on their own. It is important to note that the participating children are non-English speakers while the adults are mainly English speakers.

We contacted Dr. Sunita Kulkarni, the Research Director of the programme in India. She helped us set up the routine of the programme within the school time table. She also carried out a pre-test for reading comprehension for the participating students. We began the programme with students of 6th and 7th standards. This year, we plan to offer it to the first and second standard students as well.



Students showing the annual project to granny in UK.



Children talking to Sugata Mitra.

Last year, each participating student got a chance to interact on Skype for 45 minutes every week for seven months. This came roughly to 28 days or 21 hours of meaningful use of the English language for the students. The teachers observed a marked change in the level of children's confidence in speaking in English, initiating and continuing conversation in English with unfamiliar people and reading comprehension. Sunita Kulkarni tracked the children's progress. She carried out a systematic study with pre and post tests for reading comprehension using material from ASER. She says, *'During the second assessment session, children greeted us with enthusiastic "hellos", initiated conversation, quickly chose a task; almost all went straight for the 'story' which was the highest level and responded to questions quickly and fluently in English, even asking several of their own in the process. My favourite was, "This question has 2 answers. Shall I give you both, or just one?"*

..... the marked change in confidence was backed up by subtle quantitative changes. Out of 35 children, 24(68%) children attempted level 4 [The Story] the first time around. This figure climbed to 31 (88%) children when the exercise was repeated in March 2014. 8 of the children had moved up a level [6 of them 2 levels] from the task they had attempted earlier [Words - Level 2, to Story – Level 4].

Even though the ASER task assumes that children understand if they are reading 'fluently', it wasn't an assumption we were willing to make based on our own experience in these settings. And this was borne out. A comparison of Reading Comprehension scores told a slightly different story. 15(43%) children scored 100% on the comprehension questions during the pre-test. This went up to 23(66%) children scoring 100% during the post-test. 11 (31%) children had scored 50% or less the first time around; this dropped to only 6 (17%) children scoring 50% or less during the post-test on the comprehension questions. And the mean reading comprehension score jumped significantly from 74% to 84%.'

This programme will continue this year with the addition of another component, that of SOLE. SOLE is the brain child of Prof. Sugata Mitra, a professor of Educational Technology in Newcastle University, UK. A SOLE room is being built at KNB in partnership with TED Microsoft Newcastle University Made by Many. Once this well equipped room is established, it will enable teachers to use the 'self-help' approach for other subject areas as well.

Developing reading culture, library and book exhibition

PSS has very systematically tried to cultivate a reading culture among students by holding book exhibitions at the school, having one period a week dedicated to library, issuing books to children right from balwadi, keeping the library open from 7 am to 6 pm with free access to books, starting a library for parents, encouraging use of books other than text books in daily teaching and setting up Yashawant vachanalayas in 25 Zilla Parishad schools from Man Taluka through community contribution.

Both our librarians successfully completed the newly developed capacity building course called 'Library Educators Course' under the able leadership of SRTT and Vidya Bhawan Education Resource Centre. The contact periods were held at Vidya Bhawan Education Resource Centre at Udaipur. The course helped the librarians to gain an understanding about the role of books as well as the scope of the library and books in a child's literacy and language development. As a result they have initiated many new book related and reading-writing activities in the library.

In February, we arranged a book exhibition by 'Ecologic' at the school. Ecologic brought a good collection of children's books especially the low cost books by NBT, CBT, Pratham and Room to read. A book exhibition gives the children the rich experience of looking at, handling and going through many and varied books. All the children bought at least one book and many bought several books. The topic of personal libraries was discussed during assembly and many youngsters have started building their personal libraries by buying ten books from the exhibition and have resolved to buy at least as many each year. Some children who had fairly good sized libraries shared information about how they maintained the library registers and also how they lent the books out to neighbours in

the holiday for a small fee. Some classes put one book per child in a box to have a classroom library that could be accessed any time of the day in the class itself.

Dr. Berntsen gets the ABP Maza Krutadnyata Sanman Puraskar in Mumbai



In the year 2012, ABP Maza had done a documentary film called 'Maxine Maoshinchi Shala' that had become tremendously popular. This year they nominated her for their annual Krutadnyata Sanman Puraskars given to people for their contribution in various fields. Dr. Berntsen was given the award for her outstanding contribution in the field of education. The programme was held in Mumbai. Several of Dr. Berntsen's colleagues and former students from PSS attended the programme. Our heartiest congratulations to Maxine!

Networking

Several groups visited PSS last year. Shashwat, an organization from Ambegaon near Dimbe dam in Pune district visited with seven students from their school. These students were from the tribal areas and had many interesting life experiences to share with our students. They sang some traditional songs for us. This was an interesting experience for our students, which gave them some insights in to the lives of the visiting students.

Two groups of 15 and 13 teachers from OELP, Rajasthan visited our balwadis. This was an enriching experience, as they had many songs and stories to share with our teachers. Keerti Jayram, Kiranji, Pukhraj Mali and several others had visited us in the past. They chose to return with a larger group of teachers because , Keerti, the director of the programme had this to say, **"After exploring existing programs all over the country, we decided that exposure to the PSS Balwadi Programme will provide us with the learning opportunity that we are looking for."**

The OELP team shared their experiences with us and our *balwadi* and primary teachers talked to them about our experiences. They observed our balwadis and primary classes in the morning and Dr. Neelima Gokhale held workshops for them in the afternoon for 4 days. Later Dr. Gokhale visited Rajasthan to get a better understanding of their work conditions in order to help the OELP team to make the programme more relevant to their

context. Dr. Gokhale was also invited to Kolkata to conduct a four day workshop for ECE teachers in Vikramshila working with many under privileged young children to improve their basic literacy skills and to provide support for their school work. They do this work in 20 centres in collaboration with the local police.

A team from Palakneeti khelghar visited KNB primary and secondary school. Khelghar has 150 students coming from the poor areas around Pune. The khelghar team wanted to observe classes and talk to the teachers for some teaching ideas and activities for their after school programme. The Khelghar team also works with teenagers. They offered to help out with school counseling at KNB.

We have been working with The Quality Education Support Trust (QUEST) of Thane in various capacities. Three of their resource persons from the *anganwadi* programme attended the workshops held by PSS for the *anganwadi* supervisors. They helped us do testing for reading and writing of students from first and second standards. They also carried out pilot testing of the tools they have developed for testing school readiness of pre-school children. They shared with us the tools they have prepared for the assessment of *anganwadis* and *anganwadi* workers. We are hoping to develop a reading programme with them in the near future.

The organizations we will be working with in the near future and the capacity in which we will be working is given below.

- i) Working as a resource agency for training the ECE personnel of the partners of Sir Dorabjee Tata Trust.
- ii) Training the additional *anganwadi sevikas*, specially appointed by the Government to look after the children in 0-3 year age group with UNICEF. We are at present working on the development of training material with UNICEF for this project.
- iii) Shri Ekveera Dnyan Prasarak Mandal from Kandivali, Mumbai have approached us for sustained inputs in their pre-primary programme. The concerned people would be visiting us sometime in August to finalize the project.
- iv) We will also be working with Vishwa Vedant School, Kumhari, Durg of Chhattisgarh. We visited them for a two day workshop in English last year. This year, two of their teams will be coming for short workshops in ECE and English, to be followed by another visit to Chhattisgarh by our team

We feel confident that we will get opportunities to share our understanding of the constructivist model of ECE education and methodical teaching of early literacy in children's mother tongue as well as English with many other organizations through such collaborative work. Besides the sharing of ideas and experiences helps us reflect and grow.

Other Achievements and Activities

Apli Shala

Unlike KNB, the student population and their school attendance fluctuates greatly at Apli Shala. The reason for this lies in the culture of poverty explained by Dr. Berntsen. This year the enrolment in Apli shala balwadis has declined a lot. In the year 2013-2014 the enrollment was only 71 as against 80 in the previous year. There seem to be two reasons for this. One is the opening of an *anganwadi* across the road where food is provided and mothers find this convenient rather than cooking in the morning to give tiffin in school. So many children are sent to *anganwadis*. The second reason is that many parents aspire to send their children to the oldest and famous Marathi medium primary school. Previously the children attended our *balwadi* near home for three years and enrolled in the first standard in this school. However this school has recently made a policy of admitting only the children coming from their own *balwadis* into the first standard. This has made many parents take the decision to send their children to that school right from *balwadi*.

The enrollment in the supplementary classes from std. 1-7, on the other hand is steady at a 120. With the khel ghar activity restarting from June, more children in the age group of 6-12 are attending the support classes as well.

Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan

In the year 2013-14, KNB had 437 students, of which 225 were girls and 212 were boys. The caste category wise enrollment showed the usual pattern of 43% non-backward and 47% backward. Among the backward class, the number of OBC (Other Backward Class) students was the highest at 25%, followed by 16% scheduled caste and 14% VJNT. There were only 2% Scheduled Tribe students. Of the 437 students, 11% had freeship. Another 20% had some concession while 69% paid full fees of Rs. 10,000 per year.

SSC results

All the 29 students passed the SSC examination of 2014. It is the 14th running year of 100% result. Eeshan Ranade stood first with 94.60% marks. A total of 18 (66%) students got distinction with 5 students scoring above 90% marks. 10 students got first class and one got second class. Eeshan Ranade got cent percent marks in Algebra and Rushikesh Bankar got cent percent marks in Geography.

Annual project

This annual event is a kind of signature of KNB as it has successfully contributed to the knowledge and data collection about Phaltan, its history, geography, people and culture as well as important environmental issues affecting the life in Phaltan over the past 19 years. This exercise has definitely taught children important life skills.

The topic of the annual project in the year 2013-14 was 'public places'. The public places were classified by their type as belonging to the central government, state government, corporation, municipality and private trusts and individuals. Students studied roads, their condition, safety, traffic and parking. They studied government office buildings, the police station, banks, wedding halls and bazars. They studied places like the swimming pool, temples, gym etc. which, though public, have restrictions on entrance. Market yard, S.T. stand, vegetable market were also studied.

The students looked at these places from a user's perspective as well as Government's or owners'. They asked people about their expectations and interviewed the officials to ask about their problems. The children became aware of many issues regarding the public places that we take so much for granted. They also realized their responsibilities of keeping the places clean and pollution free.

Environment projects

This has been an ongoing project over the past six years. The project started with the introduction of the subject 'Environment Science' in the syllabus at the secondary level. At first it was mandatory for the students to write a 40 page project about any environmental topic of their interest. Two years later, the SSC board reduced the write up to 10 pages including summary and contents. The topic was altogether excluded from the syllabus after one more year. However we had found it to be a very good opportunity for self study and for increasing awareness about environmental issues among the students, so we decided to continue the programme.

The students from the ninth standard select a topic each and start work on it towards the end of the year. They complete the work individually and prepare a Power Point presentation for the school assembly and a full 40 page report with photographs, graphs and tables of their findings by next June. They have to do presentations in the month of July and August at the assembly. All the other children watch the presentation and ask questions. The selection committee also observes the performance of the speaker at the question-answer session. The best three studies are awarded the Leela Maheshwar Karmarkar and Maheshwar Ganesh Karmarkar Environment Awards of certificates and cash.

Last year Sayali Ganbote received the first prize for her project on 'Use of Peels and Seeds of fruits.' Rushikesh Bankar got the second prize for his project called 'Ran Badake' or

wild ducks. The third prize went to Eeshan Ranade for the project 'Awakasheey Kachara' (Spatial garbage).

Balsansad and Balkridotsav

The annual gala event of *balkridotsav* takes place in the month of June. It is planned and conducted by the *balsansad*. The utsav lasts for two days. There are funny games and team sports. This year there was a treasure hunt that was enjoyed hugely by the whole school and won by the eighth standard. The *balkridotsav* gives students an opportunity to learn to plan and carry out programmes. It builds up their administrative and social skills and makes them confident.

The election for the next *bal-sansad* is held in July. All the children from 4th to 10th grades vote in the election. The previous *bal-sansad* conducts the election right from preparing voters' lists to counting. Teachers are only in the role of facilitators.

Navneet

The annual publication brought out by Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan featured three English essays about 'cloud grannies' along with other stories and poems. The cover also paraded a picture of the 'granny cloud' with grannies and children sitting in clouds connected with each other on the Skype. The cover is featured on the home page of the website of Self Organized Learning Environment (SOLE) and the essays in the blog section.

KNB bulletin

KNB bulletin is a bimonthly periodical brought out in English by the eighth standard students. It covers all the big and small events in and around the school and town. It is a very effective way of bringing children's lives and viewpoints into their class as well as to motivate them to write in English. The students work in groups discussing and writing news items, typing it, adding photographs, and displaying it on the board for everybody to read. They read one news item every day at assembly, translating it for the younger students. They also present a short drama in English to bring the news item alive. The KNB bulletin is used as text that the eighth standard has to study for examination.

Science exhibition

KNB students took part in the Taluka level science exhibition of the Satara Zilla Parishad education department. Four students from the 8th standard had made three models. They were—a water pump running without electricity, low cost chemical night light bulb and hydraulic parking system. The water pump model got a consolation prize. There was a quiz at the exhibition and our team won the first prize.

Students' work experience

The real work experience of the eighth standard students is a unique feature of KNB. The eighth standard students go to do real work at various places like goat farms, poultry farms, nurseries, farms, fruit orchards etc. There they work the whole day for a week. On Saturday they come back to school and write their reports. No teacher accompanies them. Working, negotiating with other workers, reporting and taking care of their own transport has to be carried out the students themselves. We feel that this helps the students to think appropriately as it introduces them to the real world of work and responsibility.

New play equipment

Last year our passed out student Tahir Maner with several of the eighth standard students and a carpenter erected a jungle gym, a slide and a see-saw for the students. The team worked for over 2 weeks for half a day each so as not to miss too much of classes. It was a good experience for the students to be involved in creating something big from designing and planning to execution and implementing to finally using. All the play equipments are very popular among the students and little children refuse to leave school unless they have had a round of playing on the see-saw or the slide. Red soil is spread under the jungle-gym to offer cushioning and that makes a cozy place to sit for group study as well.

Yoga

Children at KNB are taught yoga from the first standard and many appear for examinations held by Yogsadhana institute of Pune. Last year 107 children appeared for various exams. All the children did very well. Last year the demonstration of human pyramids performed by the yoga team on the occasion of the Republic day was truly amazing.

Financial matters

In the year 2013-14 we had two big grants for two projects. Tata Education Trust gave us a grant of Rs. 33, 30, 000 and Maharashtra Foundation, USA gave a grant of Rs. 7, 23, 000. We received Domestic Donations of Rs. 11, 28, 000, of which individual donations were Rs. 4, 36, 000, institutional donations were Rs. 5, 78, 000 and donations from parents were Rs. 1, 14, 000. The Foreign Contribution was of Rs. 3, 19, 000.

We received Rs. 47, 000 as royalty from Jyotsna Prakashan on various publications developed by PSS. An income of Rs. 11, 31, 000 was obtained as interest from securities.

The fees received from Kamala Nimbkar balbhavan were Rs. 24, 75, 000. If we had charged the same fee to all the students, our income would have shot up to Rs. 39, 560,

000. In other words we have done charity worth Rs. 14, 81, 000 or 37.5 % of our students receive fee concessions to some extent or other. The Apli Shala *balwadi*, supplementary classes and sewing classes are not charged any fees.

Our corpus however has not changed as the big grants were meant for running specific projects and the income from fees and interests on securities was needed to run the regular programmes of PSS.

Winding up

To wind up the Annual Report, we feel that we are closer to our dream than ever before. The changing scenario of education in India, the framing of the Right to Education (RTE), the opening up of the whole world due to technology and our own sustained efforts in the direction of our mandate of quality and outreach from the inception of PSS are all contributing to fulfill our dream that is a dream for the whole mankind.