

The Problems

Many families in the area lack basic education and skills, and suffer from various cultural and social problems, which keep them locked in a continuous cycle of poverty. Like many rural villages in India, Purkal and the surrounding villages struggle to survive on a low, single income and have little capacity to improve their situation. Parents are poorly educated and children are often first generation students, and schooling is disappointing.

1. When we started, we were part of a BIMARU State, deeply sick with poverty, education and health numbers. The economic bitterness had high social costs and needed address.
2. Subsistence agriculture was the mainstay. There was the compulsion of poor parents to send their children to work and reluctance to give up money that working children earned.
3. There were insufficient opportunities for work and income. The bulk of the labour force was in the tenuous unorganized markets. The choice of most lay between everyday urgent needs verses healthcare or school books and uniforms.
4. The women had no opportunity to contribute to the family income; felt ignorant.
5. The broken down public educational system encouraged unrecognized and badly managed private schools over government ones. Even building infrastructure was missing - leave alone qualified and inspired teachers, updated curriculum and effective testing methods. As a cumulative, education of real and tangible value was not available; certainly not to the girl child.
6. The balance of power for women in the work force needed address. The idea that educating the woman was an effective means of improving social indicators such as fertility and health was absent.
7. The lack of transparency in the government failed to trigger aspirations across class and caste. There was no sense of possibility. A respect for achievement and yearning for a better life needed generation and a belief that such a life was possible regardless of one's social and economic status needed to be instilled.

It is recognised that economically disadvantaged communities have suffered discrimination and inequality and that this has led to inequality in opportunities and a sense of inferiority. Being convinced of their inferiority, the villagers experience a sense of frustration and helplessness. Lack of opportunity has resulted in outcomes hurtful to generations beyond the present.

Parents are poorly educated and children are often first generation students. They do not have access to properly managed schools, good role models or support services and as a result, lack the motivation and opportunity for a better life. The community understands the value of schooling and enrolment is near 100%, but substandard government education and intellectual deprivation ensure continued backwardness. The system leaves them without basic language, math and science skills. Therefore, they cannot survive within the competitive job market of India's rapidly expanding economy.

Poor children have also to accept learning in Hindi, while the children of the elite of the country, including those who argue in favour of Hindi, send their children to English medium schools. Hindi medium schools are often poorly managed and children leave with little skill and knowledge to compete for good jobs. This policy has hindered upward mobility and denied access to good education for these children.

The fact that the possession of certain skills is the basis of one's ability to earn is not well understood. Skill building by individual members is therefore not targeted. Growth of the physical and the emotional happens in an aimless, pointless manner and as a result there is underachievement in the case of most individuals.

Another significant problem these children face is poor nutrition and medical care to enable them to concentrate and physically develop properly. Children are also deprived of necessary immunizations and are prone to disease. Some of these village families are so poor that they must take turns eating every other day; families often survive on rice and bread, which is hardly nutritious. Due to poor education on part of the parent, there is lack of quality care to a child in its early years of schooling and poor stimulation of the senses of imagination, curiosity and enquiry among the young. Many children suffer from malnutrition and poor early childhood development.

Problems for Young Adults

Locally there is no scope for further education, and very little work. Children have limited prospects, and become further locked into lives of mediocrity. They become dependent on government jobs, like casual labouring. To get better work, it becomes essential for young adults to migrate to the city, often with low paid or with no future. This undermines the family structure and depletes the local talent pool. Often the brightest children never return and their role modelling is lost to their families. The young people lose their strong family ties and support.