

# PRAJAYATNA



India's growth in the past two decades has been phenomenal. We are one of the fastest growing economies, yet we fare very badly when it comes to social indices such as that of education, health, gender equality, and employment etc. India dropped one spot to 131 among 189 countries in the 2020 Human Development Index, according to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Clearly, development is about improving the well-being of every individual in society so they can reach their full potential and the success of a society is linked to the well-being of each and every citizen. Hence it will not be wrong to say that, India's economic successes have failed to ensure an improved quality of life for all especially for the disadvantaged and marginalized communities, of which even today, nearly 25 percent of India's population lives below the poverty line.

Economic development hinges on education. Education enables people to take advantage and participate in the political, socio-cultural and economic structures of a democracy, also ensuring the sustainability of the current economic growth. Leaving aside the rhetoric of the current economic growth success, it is the education level of its population which will determine in the long run India's democratic credentials and its commitment towards tackling poverty.

For this, education cannot be just a process where children are equipped with the basic mechanics of reading, writing and arithmetic which they learn by rote and do so to just pass their exams, but rather there is a need for the children to be equipped to live in a dynamic world which is constantly changing by developing their abilities and skills to lead a meaningful life.

This is a distant dream in a scenario, where children, especially from the marginalized communities, suffer from multiple deprivations both socially and economically. Altogether 65% of the children in the country go to government schools, which are rife with many problems of poor school infrastructure, lack of teachers, social exclusion, etc. The lack of a quality early childhood education which has an impact on lifelong development and learning further compounds the problem. Though schools are meant to be harbingers of change by being instruments for bridging inequalities yet the myriad problems of the system has led to poor attendance and retention, low learning outcomes, thereby perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Our earlier experiences of working with child labour/out of schools children and communities helped us to understand the key reason for not being enrolled in an early child care facility or dropping out of school was more the lack of engagement of the primary stakeholders with the existing education system alongwith an irrelevant pedagogy.

Prajayatna which means the 'citizens' initiative', began its journey in 2000 in Karnataka with a mission to ensure that all children have access to an inclusive and quality education thus started its work to strengthen public schools and anganwadis which serve as important centers of learning at the pre-school stage.

In the past 20 years of its work, Prajayatna, through its various interventions, has tried to create structures that enable engagement with the community, initiate a meaningful dialogue with various stakeholders, and address the concerns that plague the education system for years. Prajayatna through its interventions wants to ensure that every child is not just going to school but also learning. For this, it aims to facilitate systemic reform toward quality education by institutionalizing processes of community ownership and developing a abilities-based approach to learning.



## Perspective and approach

Historically, learning has been understood in various ways and various contexts. Is it to do with skill training? Is it to do with conceptual understanding? Is it to do with qualifying for jobs?

At Prajayatna, it is understood that there is a need to design educational practices towards developing innate capabilities in children in order to address the constantly changing needs of the community. In this context it is imperative to relook at the essential abilities that a learner must develop to live and adapt oneself to the milieu that one is living in. School being the space for structured/formal learning must play a role of creating a conducive environment to provide for such opportunities. With this understanding, Prajayatna raises the following questions?



Do schools support learning? Or, do they end up inhibiting curiosity and innate abilities found in all children, so necessary to build anything? Prajayatna through its myriad interventions seeks to find and implement solutions to improve learning in schools and thereby ensure quality education for all children. As Oscar Wilde rightly puts it: “Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth learning can be taught.”

For answering the above questions, Prajayatna hopes to bring about systemic change by

- Empower teachers to become facilitators of a holistic and inclusive learning process which will build the abilities of children.
- Empower the communities - to create well governed schools and anganwadis
- Enabling the education ecosystem to bring about change in practices and policies

### **These are implemented through:**

- Quality Learning Programme (Kalikayatna): wherein we develop children’s abilities and include every child
- Early Childhood Care and Education: wherein we cater to the developmental needs of the children between the age of 3-6
- Education Governance: wherein we seek to solve the problem of ownership of the schools and anganwadis and create a conducive learning ecosystem.



## Why the role of community is significant in the education process?

Prajayatna believes that such a dynamic learning process can only happen with the active engagement of the community in the entire education process. This requires for the community to become partners in defining their educational goals and core to the decision-making process rather than being consulted for their opinions with the final say being with the 'experts.' This requires a paradigm shift in the perception of the community and a redefinition of their role vis-à-vis the State, resulting in a community articulated vision of education that is based on the needs and expectations of the community.

Prajayatna also emphasizes the need for linkages between various structures to allow them to dialogue with each other. This ensures the participation of primary stakeholders at all levels, giving them a platform and space to participate in their own development (education). When communities 'own' the schools and the vision for education they are naturally driven to change it.

### The main strategies with regard to the governance of the schools are:

- Creating a structure for communities to participate – finding a means of engagement
- Institutionalise these structures and in the process build their capabilities to engage with issues of learning.

**Local Education Governance Data** is collected at an anganwadi/school level, forms the basis for engagement with the stakeholder at various levels. This includes information ranging from infrastructure, retention, lack of teachers, aspects of learning to community participation structures and their efficacy.

**Shikshana gram sabha** is a primary and powerful form of enabling local level direct democracy. This process sees to the participation of all stakeholders. These open discussions include not only presentation and verification of information, but also a community level dialogue on critical areas of concern pertaining to the local school and children's education, necessary action to address these concerns and identification of responsibilities for ensuring the same. A plan is made which encompasses the vision of the community vis-à-vis education.

As a primary step towards influencing education governance, the Shikshana Grama Sabha contextualises the roles, responsibilities and work of the school committees, teachers and elected representative, thereby ensuring a mechanism of accountability of the SMCs to the



parent community and most importantly helping strengthen the SMCs to function better with the support of the community. This is enabled through the follow up meetings held with the SMC to enhance their institutional capabilities

**Institutionalise these structures** and in the process build their capabilities to engage with issues of learning. Joint meetings of SMC and Standing Committee of Education in the Gram Panchayat. In order to institutionalise the education governance structure at the Gram Panchayat level, joint meetings between the Standing Committee of Education in the Gram Panchayat and the SMC are held at the GP level.

This process builds on the actual strength of these two key stakeholder groups (GP and SMCs) and supports institutional building in terms of planning, resource mobilisation, budgeting, sharing of responsibility and also working together as a group.

## Kalikayatna - Quality Learning Programme

Kalikayatna is a Kannada word that means 'a learning initiative' signifying the holistic approach to learning.

The learning approach was developed in response to the low learning levels, low levels of enrolment, and high levels of absenteeism experienced in the traditional system of education. The approach arose from working with children who had dropped out of school or were irregular to school and drew from various other programmes that were conducted to increase retention and interest of children in schools, where it was recognized that the needs of the children within the school were not being met. Therefore, for education to be meaningful, Prajayatna felt that the teaching-learning approaches needed to be altered in schools.

The approach places greater emphasis on 'how' children learn rather than on 'what' they learn. The objective of this approach is to facilitate the development of learning skills in children and allow them to internalize a concept, based on their abilities, life experiences, and surrounding environment. Less importance is placed on the ability of a child to reproduce a certain interpretation of a concept for a particular assessment or evaluation.

Did you know?

*The Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002 inserted Article 21-A in the Constitution of India to provide free and compulsory education of all children in the age group of six to fourteen years as a Fundamental Right. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, which represents the consequential legislation envisaged under Article 21-A, means that every child has a right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards.*



It advocates for learning methods that

- ❖ Helps a child build on their innate capabilities and
- ❖ Helps in achieving capability-based learning outcomes.

This approach believes learning should happen in a manner that children can apply what they learn in school to real-life situations. **The key features of this approach are as follows:**

- Integrated and theme based curriculum - learning takes place in an organic manner in one's daily life. The information gets processed in the brain in an integrated way. When information is introduced in isolation, this takes time for the child to organize/collate in the thought process. Therefore, integration is one of the aspects of the programme and facilitates learning through the integration of subjects and through broader themes/concepts.
- Fleshing learning outcomes from across subjects which looks at the development of overall abilities – thereby ensuring the development of life /socio emotional skills as well.
- Peer learning - This classroom structure enables and encourages peer learning where children of different age groups and levels understand each other and interact accordingly
- Continuous and comprehensive evaluation- the purpose of evaluation is to provide individual feedback to the learner

The strategy is given below



### Making education inclusive for all children

In the process of working with the schools, Prajayatna has found that a majority of the children being left out of the education system in the present scenario, were mostly children with disabilities and there was a need to ensure their inclusion. Issues of children with disabilities have been addressed by Prajayatna in its various community processes by enabling infrastructure development for the children. Attention is being paid to ensure inclusive education for all. These are being done by creating an ecosystem that is sensitive to the needs of the children with disabilities and ensure that their needs are addressed in a manner that nurtures and enhances their capabilities.

## Early Childhood Care and Education

The first six years of an individual's life are critical since the rate of development in these years is more rapid than at any other stage of development. Research in neuro-science iterates the importance of the early years in a child's life particularly since 90% of brain development has already taken place by the time a child is six years of age. Research also indicates that the development of brain is influenced not only by health, nutrition and quality of care but also the quality of psycho-social environment the child is exposed to in these early years.

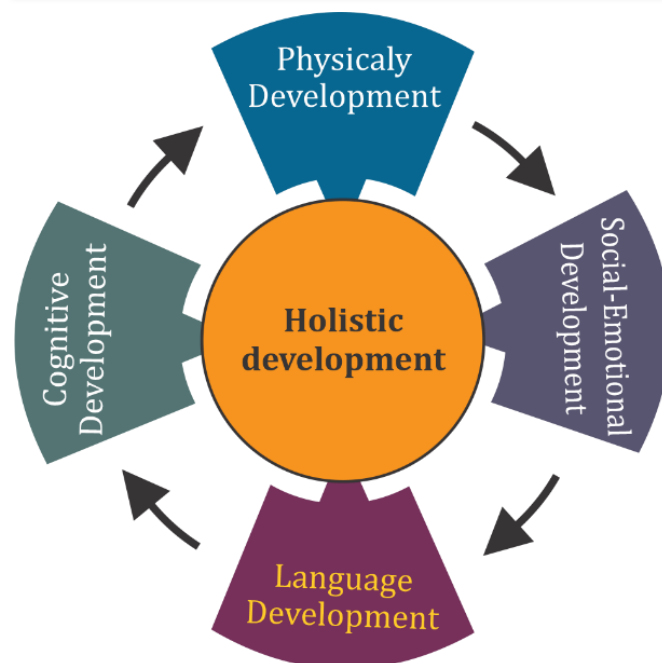
A psycho-socially deficit environment or emotional neglect can lead to negative consequences for a child's development, which may even be irreversible. This places a very large percentage of children from poorer or marginalised families, 'at risk', in terms of their life chances and opportunities.

Supportive ECCE services enable to bridge the gap that can lead to more positive long-term outcomes for individuals and society than later interventions. Early childhood is therefore an exceedingly vital phase in the life of a child and needs to be nurtured through appropriate care.

An Anganwadi aims to provide for basic healthcare activities, nutrition, education as well as preschool activities. ECCE is a balanced play and activity based programme which provides a stimulating environment for the language, cognitive, social emotional and physical development of the child. ECCE rests on the premise that a well-functioning anganwadi would significantly impact the future of a child and ensure lifelong development for him/her in a positive manner.

### The key strategies of this approach are as follows:

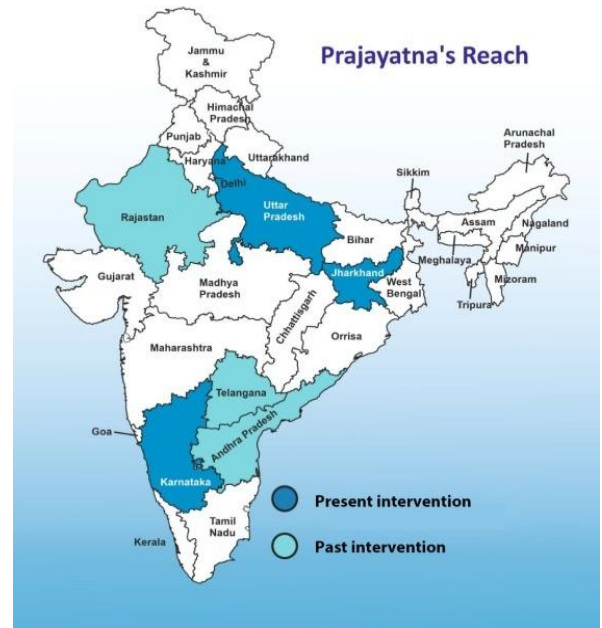
- enhancing community ownership – impacting how anganwadis are run and managed
- redefining perspective of Early Childhood Education- impacting what anganwadis deliver by empowering the anganwadi teachers.





## Conclusion

Over the last decade, Prajayatna has tried to reform the public education system through multiple interventions and strategies. Primarily the initiative has focused on enabling communities to build a vision of education, engage with the schooling system, the education bureaucracy and impact the qualitative functioning of schools. The focus of the organization has clearly been on impacting the design, functionality, effectiveness of Government schools so as to enable all children who go to these schools have access to high-quality learning.



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