Why Can’t Children Read & Write?
Building Blocks of Early Literacy

Initiatives in the Indian Context
Early Literacy as a knowledge discipline is still in a fledgling state in the Indian context. Understanding the subject area requires academic orientation and a range of experiential assignments. We were lucky to have the guidance of Nilesh Nimkar, Director, Quality Education Support Trust (QUEST), NGO active in addressing the issues of Early Literacy in rural areas of Maharashtra. He is an educationist par excellence. His profound experience in the field of Early Literacy, his devotion and impeccable understanding of the field has helped ORF Mumbai to navigate intricacies of the subject. ORF Mumbai thanks Mr. Nimkar for his guidance as a peer reviewer.

Radha Viswanathan, Fellow and Editor at ORF Mumbai was a constant support, who accompanied me for all the field trips in the rugged terrains of interior Maharashtra. I am grateful to my colleagues Shubha Srinivasan, Dhaval Desai and Sana Ghazi for giving valuable suggestions that helped in improving the final draft. I also thank Dr. Leena Chandran Wadia, Senior Fellow for her encouragement throughout the project. I thank Riddhi J Chokhawala, Research Fellow and Creative Communications Expert at ORF Mumbai, whose creative designing gave ‘a sense of completion’ to the whole document. Finally, I owe my sincere thanks to Sudheendra Kulkarni, Chairman of ORF Mumbai, who has always inspired researchers to take up challenging topics and contribute towards the betterment of communities.

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Pablo Picasso, one of the greatest painters of the 20th century, once wrote: “It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child.” This is a heartfelt and truthful tribute to the immense reservoir of pure and spontaneous creativity that God has blessed children — each and every child in this world — with. Unfortunately, our school system interferes so much with the true education of our children ("I have never let my schooling interfere with my education." — Mark Twain) that this divine and bounteous blessing slowly shrinks as children grow into adulthood, their thinking faculties largely regimented, their sense of curiosity significantly impaired, their imagination curtailed to joyless patterns of rote reasoning, and their ability to act and create in original ways thwarted. As a result, many human beings merely become standardised objects in a soulless society.

This short study on what is called ‘Early Literacy’ or ‘Early Education’, authored by my colleague Rammohan Khanapurkar, casts the spotlight on a much neglected aspect of the broken school education system in India. One of the most profound — and, rather, self-evident — thoughts he introduces is the myth that underlies the content and methodology of teaching in our elementary schools: that all children learn, and can be taught, in the same standardised way. Instead of activating the curiosity of children to explore their natural and social surroundings, and giving free play to their creativity to relate to these surroundings with their Hand, Heart and Head — with tools, words, alphabets and numbers serving as friendly guides to doing and learning — children are made slaves of a set mould of teaching. As if this were not bad enough, the socio-cultural diversity of the family and community backgrounds of children is also largely ignored. Thus, what is taught to pre-school children and early learners (standards I and II, in particular) from tribal or agricultural backgrounds, for example, bears little correlation to their learning environments at home and in the community. Not surprisingly, many of these children become misfits as they grow up in the school system — or, rather, are pushed out by it as “dropouts”.

How do children learn? Simple though this question may appear, the answers to it provided by great philosophers and practitioners of education find scarce attention or application in our formal school system. There is little continuity and coordination between what children absorb experientially, and the highly instructive or prescriptive way in which they are taught in the formal educational establishments. Teachers are rarely trained in child psychology — especially, in the children’s hunger for love, caring and freedom. They are mostly ignorant of innovating ways of contextual and values-oriented pedagogy. Indeed, our system deters and disincentivises even good teachers when they try to deviate from the set rules of teaching and evaluation. Most schools, where children from disadvantaged backgrounds learn, lack access to good books, toys, games, and other creative culture-specific learning aids. All in all, a lot of research, policy-level priority, and ground-level experimentation is urgently needed to improve the sad state of Early Literacy in India.
The title of this series of short research-based publications by ORF Mumbai is ‘THINK ACT CHANGE’. Our purpose is not merely to highlight a problem, but also to present some action-oriented thoughts on how the situation can be changed. Here, I would like to commend Rammohan for hitting upon the idea of this particular study by visiting, along with his senior colleague Ms. Radha Viswanathan, some tribal schools in one of the underdeveloped districts of Maharashtra, where a socially committed NGO called QUEST has been doing innovative experiments in Early Literacy. As he says in his Executive Summary: The real challenge lies in making the ‘Right to Education’, the ‘Right to Quality Education’ at the early stages of schooling for all children in India, irrespective of their social, economic or geographical backgrounds.

Your comments and suggestions are most welcome.

Sudheendra Kulkarni
Chairman, Observer Research Foundation Mumbai

By education I mean an all round drawing out of the best in child and man, body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education or even the beginning. It is only one of the means whereby men and women can be educated. Literacy itself is no education....I would begin therefore the child’s education by teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training. I hold that the highest development of the mind and soul is possible under such a system of education. Every handicraft has to be taught not merely mechanically as is done today but scientifically i.e. the child should know the why and where from every process.

Mahatma Gandhi, Harijan, 31.7.37
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Pic 1. Early Literacy - The Foundation of Life-long Learning
Executive Summary

An assumption that all children learn in the same manner is detrimental to the understanding of the complex field of child education. Children, particularly first generation learners, need to be supported in learning in a joyous and creative manner by trained teachers. This is unlike higher education, where creative and fun-filled activities are generally cut short for intensive academic pursuits. At the early level (i.e., Stds. I and II) the foundation needs to be created from scratch, which involves making and unmaking of a child’s comprehension skills- speaking, reading, listening and writing. The onus of effective teaching of these basic building blocks of learning is on the elementary education teacher. The beginning of learning to read and write is called the process of Early Literacy. It is the way language and its various components are introduced to children in the Std. I of school and include its preparatory process at the preschool stage. Experts call this as the first step toward progressive literacy. If taken hastily or incorrectly, it can irretrievably hamper the learning curve of a child in the later schooling years.

The genesis of this essay began with the field trip of ORF Mumbai researchers to the tribal schools in the Nandurbar district in Maharashtra. It was complimented by discussions with experts, understanding best practices and aided by literature review; both online and offline. One of the driving aims of this essay was to collate quality initiatives on Early Literacy by various institutions in India. Despite the absence of a coherent system nurturing Early Literacy, the remarkable devotion of these institutions offers a glimmer of hope. This essay also highlights their committed efforts by acknowledging their work and academic contributions at appropriate places.

The essay raises an array of critical questions; such as, why is the Early Literacy phase so important in elementary education? What are the intricate processes of ‘beginning reading and writing’? What are the challenges involved in making children read and write efficiently and thoughtfully, especially the children from disadvantageous backgrounds? As a nation, have we realised the negative impact of not treating Early Literacy as a distinct subject of educational planning and policy? Why is the subject not being given due importance in research? Along with these high-pitched questions, the essay also makes a strong case in favour of contextual teaching of ‘beginning reading and writing’ and its importance for lifelong learning.

To answer these questions, the essay begins with the brief introduction of India’s school system and the trends that have been established in it over the years. In the next chapter, theoretical perspectives are presented, along with academic debates in the field of Early Literacy. The essay also presents a case study of initiatives taken in the United States in making Early Literacy a national mission. It then attempts to explain Early Literacy in the context of India’s multilingual federal system. There is a specific case study of tribal education in India and discussion on the problems faced by tribal children in shifting from their mother tongue to the language of formal instruction in schools. Building upon what is established by the case study, some educational models and practices in India are presented. These approaches are supplemented by action-research work of an NGO, Quality Education Support Trust (QUEST), which
is working for qualitative Early Literacy initiatives in tribal areas of Maharashtra. The essay concludes with specific key suggestions to make Early Literacy a priority in our national mission towards universal literacy, with collaborative and participative efforts from various stakeholders in the field.

A holistic view of education also lays emphasis on children with special needs, such as physically and mentally challenged children. Though not a part of this study, we acknowledge the importance of developing learning material for such children and their inclusive growth in the mainstream education. A similar study can also explore dimensions of gender differences, class, culture and other sociological factors and its impact on learning Early Literacy. This essay cannot accommodate multiple points of views for want of space, but it certainly encourages others in the field to explore them.

A strong appeal emanating from this essay is to go beyond the rhetoric of criticism. Profound debate and sustained action is required, rather than mere remonstration. The real challenge, in fact, lies in making the ‘Right to Education’, the ‘Right to Quality Education’; and this can be actualized at the start of schooling...i.e. at the Early Literacy stage.
The schools system in India is fragmented, giving scope to both state and non-state players in the educational process. ‘The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009’ (popularly known as RTE) has accelerated the wheels of universalisation of Education in India on an unprecedented scale. In the absence of a ‘Common School System’, school education is greatly influenced by the socio-economic factors; giving different experiences of education based on ‘affordability’ and ‘curriculum’. Public or state-funded education still plays a significant role as a low-cost model of education, mainly in the regional languages. However, over the years, it is perceived by commoners as a model short on learning. The enormous network of the government schools is still the trump factor on the side of public-funded education. Still, the steady march of non-state schools (especially the English medium schools) in the education system cannot be overlooked.

Providers of education in India are distinctively divided into government-run and private schools. Government-run schools are further classified as those entirely owned by the government and partly-aided schools. Government schools and aided schools follow curricula designed by the respective state education boards. Despite the mushrooming of English-medium schools in urban areas and to an extent in rural India, regional languages of the respective states still constitute the dominating medium of instruction in government schools. After the post-independent linguistic reorganization of states, each state was bound to provide school education in the language of the state. It explains the strong tradition of government-run schools providing education in the official language of the state. The scenario started changing after the economic liberalisation in nineties, when economic prosperity through higher education got inextricably linked to English medium education. Though, even today, the total enrollment by Medium of Instruction for 2010-11 (provisional) from std. I-VIII for all schools in India, except English is 89 per cent. The figure is derived from the total enrolments from all official languages of India in the various states. The last eight years have seen a steady rise in the number of children studying in English-medium schools across the country.

Data on school enrolment for 2010-11 shows that, the number of children enrolled in English-medium schools from Stds. I to VIII has crossed the two crore mark- a 274 per cent rise since 2003-04. This indicates an alarming trend for regional medium schools. A newspaper article cited in this context, says that the declining standards at government schools have resulted in parents increasingly

1 District Information System for Education, ‘Enrollment by Medium of Instruction: All India, 2010-11 (Provisional)’, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi, 2010 viewed on 10 June 2012, http://www.dise.in/misc.htm
2 A Mukherjee, ‘2 crore Indian students study in English medium schools’, The Times of India, 2 March 2012, viewed on 8 June 2012, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-03-02/india/31116237_1_english-medium-enrolment-district-information-system
enrolling their children in private, English-medium schools; even in rural areas. Even then Zilla Parishad (District Council) schools run by the local self-governance bodies in rural areas play a critical role in providing school education. The tribal, ethnic and caste diversities in rural India pose a unique challenge to the standardised government designed process of instruction. Unfortunately, school textbooks don’t contextualise this process; for instance, children in locations with varying degrees of urbanization meet with the exact same curriculum.

Despite its egalitarian outlook, Common School System\(^3\) has been overlooked by the policy-makers as a solution for unequal education system in India. Instead, the legally enforceable ‘Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2010’ (RTE) has mandated 25 per cent seats of private schools to be reserved for the disadvantaged children. It is a step towards extending ‘quality’ education of private schools to disadvantaged children. Though, it also qualifies as government’s tacit admission in not providing ‘quality’ education in public-funded schools.

On the other hand, unaided private schools have wide affiliation options when deciding their curriculum. Cities with their ‘global’ aspirations and cosmopolitan make-up are a haven for non-state board schools. These are schools run by pan-India education boards; such as the Indian Certificate of School Education (ICSE), Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) or international presence like The International Baccalaureate (IB), International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE).

The cost of education fluctuates as per the ‘choice’ of education; education provided in public-funded schools is virtually free, whereas private schools come with varying levels of price-tags. This divides the whole system into variants of educational options, based ‘affordability’ and ‘accessibility’. Since the education in government schools is nearly free, they continue to be a last-resort for people with limited choice. Thus India has an education market that perpetuates inequities in quality of education, based on affordability. This is in sharp contrast with the objective of a welfare state, where quality education is primarily the state’s responsibility. However, this researcher also notes with admiration the running of government schools in the impoverished and least developed terrains of the country, such as Nandurbar\(^4\). This factor is instrumental in defining the role of government schools as essential for the economically weaker and physically and socially marginalised sections of the society.

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\(^4\) The State Government of Maharashtra in collaboration with United Nations Development Programme and Planning Commission, India, ‘Human Development Report- Maharashtra’, 2002, Viewed on 11 May 2012, http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/stateplan/sdr_pdf/shdr_maha02.pdf As per the Human Development Report, Maharashtra, 2002, Nandurbar was one of the five most backward districts in Human Development Index (HDI) as compared to other districts in Maharashtra. HDI is a composite index that includes dimensions of development beyond income levels. It considers various indicators in the realm of population, poverty, education, health and nutrition.
Scale of School System in India

10,48,046
Number of government schools in India

80.37%
Government’s share in total schools

58,16,673
Number of teachers in all schools

13 crore
Enrolment in classes I to V

(Source- District Information System for Education- DISE, 2009-10)
Hidden within large-scale school performance surveys and aggregate data are important issues of quality that often slip unnoticed through the net of quantitative data. One such issue of concern is that a large number of school going children, especially from neo-literate or oral backgrounds are not able to read with understanding at the end of primary school. The ground reality suggests that there are several primary school children who read mechanically, and without any understanding, at end of Class 5 in both urban and rural schools. Quantitative surveys based on learner achievement scores and other forms of aggregate data do not always catch this phenomenon, since a number of such children manage to somehow rote learn their way through exams or reading assessment surveys. For all practical purposes however these children are not independent readers and writers.5

In general, the approach to measure effectiveness of elementary education system is infrastructure-centric. Basic infrastructure like sturdy construction, well-ventilated class-rooms and clean toilets do matter. However, Infrastructure is just a mean to attain education and not an end in itself. Additionally, media coverage berating the authorities over the ‘revelations’ in various surveys on lack of infrastructure has become a repetitive affair.6 No doubt, such criticism exposes cracks in the system, but very often, it stops short of giving concrete solutions to improve ground reality. Inadvertently, such rhetoric becomes detrimental to the relatively newer areas of educational research like Early Literacy, which is still at a nascent stage in the Indian context. Children unable to read or write, despite reaching the std. IV certainly indicates a crisis; but it cannot be seen in isolation and generalised as the failure of the system. There is something more intrinsic, organic and embedded in the idea of education itself, i.e. the ‘teaching and learning processes’. Day-to-day classroom teaching still holds the key to the ultimate outcome of education, with infrastructure supplementing the process. Improving quality of classroom transactions is a rigorous, longitudinal and methodical process. It requires tested pedagogical interventions, a robust teacher education system, along with a paradigm shift in the teaching-learning process. Teaching-learning is also a social process, riding on cultural realities; it is hugely influenced by the purpose and objective of the teachers and learners, content, instructional strategies, evaluation techniques and ever-changing government policies. Taking into consideration such complex factors, measuring learning outcomes needs to become a systematic process. Only if we go beyond rhetoric, will there be a paradigm shift to evaluate school education as a continuum of several processes and not just as a brick and mortar entity. What we need then is setting a positive tone to work on the re-development agenda of quality in elementary education.

Pic 3. Teaching Reading and Writing IS a Rocket Science
Early Literacy is the first stage of formal language learning for a child at the pre-school level and in the founding academic years. Effective Early Literacy initiatives hold the key to his lifelong learning. By its very nature, this process is embedded in the linguistic profile and cultural context of the child’s surroundings. Early Literacy is a complex interdisciplinary phenomenon touching various aspects of childhood development. With its own theory and knowledge base, it is a significant academic subject in the western context. Some key findings of external research projects, mainly in western countries, as well as the evolution of certain Early Literacy theories are presented here in a nutshell.

“I struggled through the alphabet as if it had been a bramble-bush; getting considerably worried and scratched by every letter.”

— Charles Dickens, Great Expectations

Within a socio-cultural framework, literacy is viewed as a complex interactive and interpretative process whose development is determined by its cultural and social factors.

Understanding Literacy

- According to provisional data of the 2011 census, India’s effective literacy rate has recorded a 9.2 per cent rise to reach 74.04 per cent.  

- In 1978, the UNESCO General Conference agreed upon a definition of functional literacy – still in use by educators today – which states: ‘A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community’s development.’

Nearly three decades later, in its report of an Expert Meeting on literacy assessment, UNESCO published a working definition of literacy which reflects the emphasis on context and use:

‘Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential and participate fully in community and wider society.’

- Literacy as defined by the National Literacy Mission, (NLM) India

The National Literacy Mission defines literacy as acquiring the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic and the ability to apply them to one’s day-to-day life. Thus the goals of the National Literacy Mission go beyond the simple-achievement of self-reliance in literacy and numeracy of functional literacy.

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The achievement of functional literacy implies:
- Creating self-reliance in 3 R’s, i.e. Reading, Writing and Arithmetic
- Becoming aware of the causes of deprivation and moving towards amelioration of their condition by participating in the process of development
- Acquiring skills to improve their economic status and general well-being
- Imbibing values of national integration, conservation of environment, women’s equality, observance of small family norms, etc.

The acquisition of functional literacy results in empowerment and a definite improvement in the quality of life. It helps to ensure the participation of the masses in sharing the benefits of the information era.

- NLM has certainly made a remarkable shift in defining literacy as a functional tool to a transformative one. Considering this transition from minimalist to maximal, the onus is on various stakeholders to provide a supportive setup for attaining literacy as per the specified norms.

The policy framework of literacy in India is equated to adult literacy, with a conspicuous omission of Early Literacy. Due to implementation of the Right to Education Act, Early Literacy becomes more indispensible for the success of NLM.

**Shifting debates and perspectives in Early Literacy (in the Western context):**

- During the ‘70s and ‘80s, Early Literacy studies were influenced by research on children’s oral language acquisition. They began to look at the implications that the natural processes of acquiring oral language have for learning to read and write. They maintained that, children are no longer seen as passive recipients who need to be “taught reading” by an expert, but are thought to be naturally motivated to understand make sense of the written texts they encounter, provided that these have a meaningful purpose for them. The authors contend that reading is a constructive process, in which the meaning of a text is not contained in the written words on a page. Instead, the meaning is constructed by readers through a process of integration of the written text with the prior background knowledge. It is through this knowledge which they view these texts. The **background knowledge and experiences of readers thus came to be regarded by researchers as crucial elements in the process of understanding written texts and in giving them meaning.**

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11 Text from the report of the *Consultation on Early Literacy*, Sir Ratan Tata Trust has been used generously for this chapter. Dr. K Jayaram, *op. cit.*
• During the ‘80s and ‘90s, among researchers ‘Emergent Literacy’ became the dominant theoretical perspective in the field of early reading and writing. Children begin learning reading and even writing at a very early age by observing, interacting and actively participating with adults and other children in a variety of everyday literacy activities. On the basis of their engagement with the world around children construct their own concepts about written words. Eventually, through facilitated opportunities to engage in meaningful literacy activities, these children develop reading and writing skills. Reading is viewed as being akin to speaking and listening and does not need to be taught explicitly. 

A major influence in this movement has been the work of Ken and Yetta Goodman, which proposed that human beings are “wired” to acquire the language of the community into which they are born.

• First introduced by Marilyn Adams, during the ‘80s and ‘90s, a new perspective in the fields of educational psychology and special education strongly supported the idea that children’s natural literacy development needs to be supported with explicit instruction for skill development. The underlying belief, as expressed by the proponents of the view, was that that skills required for interacting meaningfully and independently with a written script, are naturally not picked up merely by exposure to spoken and written language. In this sense, the processes of learning to read and write are not the same as learning to speak. Rigorous research has been undertaken by Early Literacy researchers to identify the skills and concepts that children require to become proficient readers and writers. A valuable contribution of this movement is that it has identified what comprises the core knowledge and skills that young children must develop to become successful readers and writers.

• A new set of debates have now brought a shift in perceiving reading and writing as individualised cognitive processes, acknowledging that young children’s early understanding about literacy occurs within their social, cultural and linguistic communities. Within several social settings including school, the context is not a neutral space. Therefore literacy practice cannot be viewed as the acquiring of a set of neutral, and de-contextualised cognitive skills. Based on constructivism, this view highlights the active role of a reader in the process of constructing meaning, while engaging with written texts. As opposed to non-constructivist approaches to learning that focus on transferring knowledge to learners, constructivism positions the learner as an active seeker of knowledge and meaning.

Few theoretical premises in the Early Literacy (in the context of research in the USA)

- Large-scale studies in the USA have shown that young children—those entering kindergarten and first grade—vary greatly in skills that provide the launching pad for later literacy learning.\(^\text{13}\)
- Success in literacy during the primary grades is even more indicative of later literacy achievement. Seventy-four percent of children in the USA who perform poorly in reading in third grade continue to do so into high school, further underlining the importance of preparing children to enter school, being ready to learn.\(^\text{14}\)
- Before children enter elementary school, they develop linguistic and cognitive skills that later makes academic learning possible. This process, until the age of five, comes with significant individual differences. Children differ markedly in reaching these developmental milestones. These early differences reverberate throughout a child’s schooling, limiting or amplifying learning successes.\(^\text{15}\)
- Several research studies have demonstrated that early cognitive and linguistic development predict later achievement—even much later. Various measures administered at the preschool and kindergarten levels reveal that patterns of preschool learning in the USA are closely linked with reading achievement in the primary grades.\(^\text{16}\) Young children who demonstrate oral language proficiency and early abilities in processing print do better in learning to read in first, second, and third grades.\(^\text{17}\) This means that learning achieved during these early years is likely to be sustained throughout the primary-school years and is an important basis for successful performance in school.
- Some research studies in the USA suggest that children from homes in which parents engage them in elaborate conversations, model the uses of literacy, and engage them in activities that promote basic understandings about literacy (for e.g. shared book reading) will have better-developed language and literacy skills than will children from homes wherein these activities are less frequent.

\(^\text{14}\) J Fletcher, G Lyon, ‘Reading: A research-based approach’, in What’s gone wrong in America’s classrooms, W Evers (eds), Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, CA, 1998, pp. 49-90
• It is well documented that in urban schools, because of the poor reading achievement, African-American children are at increased risk for reading failure than their non-minority peers. African-American children from low-income homes may be at a particular risk for reading difficulties, although middle-income children often fair poorly as well. A research by Julie A. Washington on ‘Early Literacy Skills in African-American Children’ suggests that intervention efforts must begin prior to kindergarten entry. Several variables influence young children’s performance, such as, poverty, dialectical variations, home literacy practices, general oral language skills, standardised testing bias and teacher’s expectation etc. The research puts forth an argument that ‘prevention of reading difficulties in our highest risk populations should be a national research and educational priority’. 18

• If a child’s home language and the world that it encompasses, does not find acceptance within the classroom, it is unlikely that she will participate meaningfully in the classroom processes. Instead, it is more likely that the child will internalise rejection, and adopt the role of a benign spectator or non-participant who does not want to risk failure. 19

(A corollary of this theory in the Indian context of tribal children’s education is presented later in the essay)

• Children born into low income, average literacy and immigrant families discover that learning to read and write is not as “natural” for them. The process requires much more attention, effort and time. Their adverse social and cultural lives do not support efforts required for proficiency in Early Literacy. The vocabulary is too hard and removed from their daily lives; the convoluted syntax of exposition and complex fiction is unfathomable. Without a great deal of support, motivation and effort, their level of literacy skill attainment is bound to be low compared with that of their peers who are natives of the more educated literate world. 20

• Gordon Wells, based on 15 years of longitudinal research 21 arrived at the conclusion that knowledge cannot be transmitted, but has to be constructed afresh by each learner on the basis of experience and strategies, which are not limited to the classroom. This research indicates that any unilateral definition of what is to be counted as knowledge undervalues the contributions that learners can make, in terms of their own experience, interest and methods of learning; and instead it forces children into a passive role.

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19 V-P Gates, Other People’s World: The Cycle of low literacy, Harvard University Press, 1995
20 ibid
Reading as a co-curricular activity goes beyond the mechanics of rote learning and empowers the learner for his or her distinctive growth. Even reading as a purely leisure activity leaves an indelible mark on the childhood development. Learning to read is a gradual process and requires supportive measures as per the cultural context of a child. In reality, it’s a complex process, especially for children learning in adverse circumstances, like first generation learners or learners with limited access to print materials. Some of the quotations here underline the role of reading in the growth of a child.

The Michigan Definition of Reading, supported by the International Reading Association, defines reading as “the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among the reader’s existing knowledge, the information suggested by the written language, and the context of the reading situation.”

Preparation of students seeking initial certification at the elementary and secondary levels should be based on both this definition and the following premises:

- The act of reading is critical to learning in all subject areas. Reading is one of the arts involving several communication processes including reading, listening, speaking, writing, viewing, and visually representing. While all six processes are mutually enhancing and essential tools for thinking and learning in all content areas, we have singled out the process of reading and articulated standards for the preparation of all secondary teachers. Since students spend much of their time learning from texts, reading instruction should be embedded and developed in all subject areas. In a broad sense, all teachers are teachers of reading.
- The ultimate goal of reading instruction is to develop independent, strategic, motivated readers who actively engage in reading as a lifelong pursuit for a variety of purposes, such as recreation, economic success, participation in political and social processes, remaining informed, and continuing to learn.

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22 Michigan State Board of Education, Certification Standards for the Preparation of All Secondary Teachers, Reading Instruction, 2002. The Michigan Definition of Reading, supported by the International Reading Association (http://www.reading.org) is the official standard adopted by the Michigan State Board of Education. Since 1956, International Reading Association (IRA) has been a nonprofit, global network of individuals and institutions committed to worldwide literacy. The mission of the International Reading Association is to promote reading by continuously advancing the quality of literacy instruction and research worldwide.
Reading is the fundamental skill upon which all formal education depends. Contemporary research shows that a child who does not learn the reading basics early is unlikely to learn them at all. In medicine, if research found new ways to save lives, health care professionals would adopt these methods as quickly as possible, and would change practices, procedures, and systems. Educational research has found new ways to save young minds by helping them to become proficient readers; similarly these new methods should be adopted throughout the education system. Young lives depend on it. And so does the survival of public education. The urgent task before us is for university faculty and the teaching community to work together to develop programmes that can help ensure that all primary level teachers of reading have access to this knowledge. Learning to read is not natural or easy for most children. Reading is an acquired skill.’

The outline of ‘Reading Cell’ of NCERT claims that failure in achieving sound reading skills may be a leading factor for children to drop out of school. This document also expresses concern that, “as an area of Primary Level Curriculum, reading as such has remained neglected in India’s education system and whatever attention it receives comes under the teaching of a particular language. Although a great deal of research and experience-based insight is available for developing a sound pedagogy of reading, organised efforts in this direction are yet to be taken.”

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2011 by an NGO Pratham summarises the importance of reading literacy-

“Reading is a key fundamental requirement for accessing and acquiring knowledge. It is essential for progress in school and in everyday life. Reading instruction has to be an important part of the early years in school. Along with reading skills, there is a need to build and strengthen children’s ability to understand, communicate, express themselves well and think critically. The unsatisfactory levels of basic reading ability suggested by ASER and other studies, including PISA (Programme for International Student’s Assessment) point to an urgent need to focus on basic learning outcomes. Each state should define realistic, measureable outcomes in reading and understanding that can be understood by teachers and parents. Right to Education Act states that children’s progress has to be communicated to parents. We need to start doing that. In addition, textbook content needs to be reviewed. It also needs to be worked out if textbooks are too difficult for young children. If the pace of the textbooks moving too quickly? Whether we are equipping teachers adequately for improving reading levels? The data on reading point to the fact that most children are two to three years behind where


“Within any culture, it is the purpose of education and the expectations of the society towards education that determine the importance given to reading. Usually the expectation from children is that once schooling is over, the activities of studying or reading need not continue. Therefore sustained and involved engagement with reading is not nurtured within our classrooms. Reading as an activity requires ‘solitude’, however, in our culture solitude is not an accepted state of being. This fact has a role to play in the fostering of reading as a habit. Most schools do not provide facilitating environments for reading. In fact books are not considered an essential part of life by those who are literate. People don’t really have the expectation that a literate person should develop the capacity to relish reading as a sustained activity. Therefore, reading as an activity which has the potential to be enjoyed is not consciously encouraged in our education system.”

Prof. Krishna Kumar, Educationist and Ex-Director, NCERT

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Pic 4. No Child Left Behind – A Blueprint of Reform in the USA
Few years back, independent surveys in the United States showed critical gaps in the Early Literacy programmes. In response, the US Congress conceptualised several long-term initiatives on the scale of a national mission; which ultimately helped in transforming the field of Early Literacy in the United States. Understanding this nation-wide consensus building exercise and its manifestations is as fascinating as the theory of Early Literacy itself.

The United State’s policy framework of Early Literacy is a classic case study outlining collaborative efforts of the state and non-state agencies.

‘Scientifically Based Reading Research’ (SBRR) was first introduced by Marilyn J. Adams (1990) in her book, Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print. It subsequently led to an alternate perspective, and has influenced expansive and influential state-sponsored research reviews in the USA, such as the ‘National Reading Panel’\(^{26}\). This panel was constituted due to the report of ‘National Assessment of Educational Progress’, which revealed that 37 per cent of U.S. fourth graders failed to achieve basic levels of reading achievement\(^{27}\). It was felt that many young Americans cannot read well enough to take full advantage of the benefits of society—or to contribute fully to its sustenance\(^{28}\). All these findings led the US Congress to study the issue of Reading Literacy and publish the Report of ‘National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read’- NICHD, 2000. The report has been influential in framing reading-education policy and practice in the US. However, that report did not examine the implications of instructional practices used with children from birth to age five.

To address this gap in the knowledge base, the ‘National Early Literacy Panel’ (NELP) was convened in 2002 to conduct a synthesis of scientific research on the development of Early Literacy skills in children ages zero to five. The panel was asked to apply a

\(^{26}\) Dr K Jayaram, ‘Report of the Consultation on Early Literacy’, op. cit.


\(^{28}\) I. Kirsch, A. Jungeblut, L. Jenkins, and A. Kolstad, Adult Literacy in America: A First Look at the Results of the National Adult Literacy Survey, U.S. Department of Education, April 2002
methodological review process to that used by the National Reading Panel (NRP) to issues of instructional practices for young children so that parents and teachers could better support their emerging literacy skills.

Questions Addressed by the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP)
NELP’s primary goal was to identify interventions, parenting activities, and instructional practices that promote the development of children’s Early Literacy skills. NELP probed the following four questions to strengthen the knowledge base in Early Literacy-

1. What are the skills and abilities of young children (age birth through five years or kindergarten) that predict later reading, writing, or spelling outcomes?
2. Which programmes, interventions, and other instructional approaches or procedures have contributed to or inhibited gains in children’s skills and abilities that are linked to later outcomes in reading, writing, or spelling?
3. What environments and settings have contributed to or inhibited gains in children’s skills and abilities that are linked to later outcomes in reading, writing, or spelling?
4. What child characteristics have contributed to or inhibited gains in children’s skills and abilities that are linked to later outcomes in reading, writing, or spelling?

Role of ‘American Federation of Teachers’ (AFT)
The ‘American Federation of Teacher’s (AFT) is a union of teachers, which not only strives for the collective bargaining, but also proactively participates in educational reforms. Founded in 1916, AFT is working to support teachers through the comprehensive teacher development and evaluation template, using specially designed tools for teachers. It also encourages professional development of teachers through the Educational Research Programme. Over the years, AFT has been a major force for preserving and strengthening America’s democratic commitment to public education. AFT has produced a well-researched training manual for early reading literacy. ‘Teaching Reading IS Rocket Science- What Expert Teachers of Reading Should Know and Be Able To Do’ by AFT is considered by experts as a classic teaching resource addressing fundamental issues and challenges in early reading.

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29AFT Teachers, ‘Teaching Reading IS Rocket Science- What Expert Teachers of Reading Should Know and Be Able To Do’, op. cit.
Initiatives suggested by AFT in Teaching Reading

1. **Research Should Guide the Profession**
   Teacher educators must be conversant with the new research findings and incorporate them into their coursework in teacher preparation.

2. **Align Teacher Education Curricula, Standards for Students, and Licensing Requirements for Teacher**
   Consistency among university core curriculum for teachers, state standards and curriculum frameworks for school children, and teacher licensing standards could eliminate the confusing and contradictory learning experiences that teachers encounter.

3. **Create Professional Development Institutes for Professors and Master Teachers**
   These institutes would keep abreast of advances in fields such as linguistics, neuropsychology, developmental psychology, cognitive experimental psychology, and multidisciplinary intervention research.

4. **Press the Developers of Textbooks and Instructional Materials to Improve their Products**
   Just as the public is protected from untested drugs, so should school children and teachers be protected from the untested or ineffective programmes and materials. Only reading programmes that incorporate practices and materials validated by research should be adopted for general use.

5. **Promote High-Quality Professional Development for Teachers**
   Validated instructional programmes should be accessible to every teacher, along with consultation and demonstration of their effective use.

6. **Invest in Teaching**
   Teachers who know they can achieve results because their programmes and training have prepared them are likely to stay in the profession and experience a high degree of job satisfaction.

**Note**-
Various socio-cultural issues influence the Early Literacy progress of any country. Though, while considering Indian context in this essay, we’ve considered language instruction as the cornerstone of effective Early Literacy programme. Thereafter, the need for effective language pedagogy has been emphasized in the multilingual context of India.
Early Literacy in the Indian context

As the National Curriculum Framework, 2005 has pointed out multilingualism “is a typical feature of the Indian linguistic landscape.” India is one of the most linguistically diverse nations and the Constitution of India has guaranteed equal status to each state language. Due to its diverse multilingual setup, language teaching instructions varies in each state. As a corollary, Early Literacy in the Indian context becomes a complex subject when compared to other monolingual nations. Though there are some similarities in the Indian languages, many of them have different script, phonology, syntax, and vocabulary. Despite these differences, there can be information sharing for instructional practices and Early Literacy activities. Such activities by non-state agencies are, however, sparse and scattered. Scaling up such activities in the larger system is the real challenge, which calls for collaborative academic activism. In the absence of national focus on Early Literacy initiatives and due to peculiar challenges in the Indian context, ‘Learning Reading and Writing IS STILL a Rocket Science in India’. This fact has been highlighted in this chapter with a specific reference to the ‘education of tribal children.’

If participatory democracy has to survive, we need to give a voice to the language of every child . . . rather than a strict implementation of the three-language formula, it is the survival and maintenance of multilingualism that should be at the heart of language planning in this country. A position paper of the National Focus Group on the Teaching of Indian Languages (NCERT, 2006) recognises the failure of schools to address the linguistic diversity and multilingual competencies of young learners. This document recommends that the medium of instruction at the primary school level should be child’s mother tongue. However, the situation on the ground is complex, with diverse languages being clubbed under one regional language. For example, in the case of Hindi, about 20 languages which have been grouped under Hindi, in fact, had more than one million speakers each in 1991. These include Bhojpuri (23.1 million), Chhatisgarhi (10.6 million), Rajasthani (13.3 million) and so on. Many of these are written languages with an extensive literature. Within the classroom this translates into the reality of several children with “Hindi” as their mother tongue, in fact not being able to understand the “Hindi” of the curricular transaction.

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31 D Jhingran, Language Disadvantage: The Learning Challenge In Primary Education, Aphi Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 2005
In a language class, the teaching approaches adopted and the tasks undertaken should be such that they lead a child to go through the whole scientific process of collecting and observing data, classifying it according to its similarities and differences, making hypotheses, and so on.\(^{32}\)

Facilities for instruction in mother tongue at the primary stage -
It shall be the endeavour of every State and of every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups; and the President may issue such directions to any State as he considers necessary or proper for securing the provision of such facilities.

— Article 350A of the Constitution of India

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\(^{32}\) Position Paper on ‘Teaching Indian Languages’, NCERT, op. cit.
One Nation...Many Languages
Language Teaching of Tribal Children

Large number of young learners in this country, especially children from marginalised communities comes from rich oral traditions or “non-literacy cultures”. Although they enter schools with rich language resources and life experiences, much of these resources are not adequately acknowledged within the spaces of the school and classroom. For these children their first active engagement with the written forms of language occurs only when they step into school. They do not have prior print exposure of any kind. Such children who do not have a print-based home environment in their early childhood years have been found to be at a major disadvantage when they enter school. They do not enter school with the same degree of preparedness as children who have already actively experienced various forms of reading and writing at home. This is compounded by the fact that many of these children come from social groups who are often viewed in disparaging terms and at times as being unfit for school learning. The situation gets further aggravated by the fact that most of these young children do not have any support for reading and writing at home. Many of them are, in fact, required to help with domestic chores; to look after younger siblings; to take the cows and goats to graze or work to supplement the family income. Therefore, even if such children do get to school, they do not get time for home-work or for reading and writing practice at home. All these factors affect their school performance, and they soon they begin to fall behind school expectations.


Key Facts

- Tribals constitute eight per cent of the India’s population. In states like Jharkhand, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Arunachal, Chattisgarh, Tripura they constitute more than 30 per cent of the population.\(^{33}\)
- Researchers of Early Literacy strongly advocate the use of the mother tongue or home language as medium of instruction in early stages of education. *This assumes greater significance in the context of tribal children because their mother tongue is often quite distinct from the prominent languages in the state or regional languages.* In fact, children are carriers of language and language itself would die if avenues of Early Literacy decrease.

• Tribal children face problems wherever teachers do not speak their dialect at all. From the perspective of language, it is desirable to have a local teacher from the same tribal community\textsuperscript{34}.

**Not all languages are written**

It is true that not all languages are written but there are well-known techniques to develop writing systems, so every language can serve as a means of literacy. The more important question is about where written communication (literacy) fits in the broader patterns of oral communication in a particular society. Orality and literacy used to be seen as opposites; now we acknowledge that they are simply different aspects of communication and they can exist in particular contexts to differing degrees. Nevertheless, literacy impacts even a predominantly ‘oral’ society, since people who take decisions affecting their lives do so through written text.\textsuperscript{35}

Several studies have shown that students in tribal schools can recognise letters and construct words with difficulty. It is not considered important that teachers should know the languages of learners, or that special methodologies may have to be evolved to bridge the gaps between the languages of home, neighbourhood, and school. More often than not, classroom transaction is a one-way communication from the teacher to the student, with no guarantee of comprehension on the part of the learners. \textsuperscript{36}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{34}Jha, J. and Jhingran, D., Elementary Education for the Poorest and Other Deprived Groups: The Real Challenge of Universalization, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, 2002
  \item \textsuperscript{36}Position Paper on ‘Teaching Indian Languages’, NCERT, op. cit.
\end{itemize}
Findings of Janshala Programme


Following key issues pertaining to tribal education are identified in this programme-

- Records collected in schools under the Janshala Programme indicate continuing high “dropout” rates among tribal children. A major reason for this is that in most states the medium of instruction is the regional language. Most tribal children do not understand the textbooks, which are generally in the regional language.
- The appointment of non-tribal teachers in tribal children’s schools is another problem: the teachers do not know the language the children speak and vice versa, children do not understand the teacher’s language.
- The issues relating to classroom transactions in tribal schools are difficult as they deal with well entrenched attitudes and prejudices of teachers as well as seemingly intractable problems of the huge difference between home and school languages. Attempts have been made to address the first issue through training programmes for teachers. The second issue has been addressed mainly through the ‘Bridge Language Inventory’ (BLI) and primers in tribal languages. There may be a problem of acceptance of the tribal language as a medium of instruction in the tribal communities, therefore, adequate dialogue with tribal communities and their leaders is required to prepare them on this issue.

The ‘National Policy on Education’, 1986 and the ‘Programme of Action’- POA, 1992, recognised the heterogeneity and diversity of tribal areas while underlining the importance of instruction through the mother tongue and the need for preparing teaching/learning materials in tribal languages. The cognitive qualities of tribal children have to be viewed and evaluated taking into consideration their ecological and cultural contexts that place very different demands on day-to-day life.

Due to India’s multi-lingual federal setup, Early Literacy initiatives are overtly region-specific here. Despite the casual approach in recognizing importance of Early Literacy programmes, several innovative and rigorous experiments are still practiced by committed educationists. With virtually no support from the state in many cases and a languid academic culture, these initiatives are noteworthy for their role in the development of contextual Early Literacy in India. The main purpose here is to give information of few such programmes. Considering the size of India, this list constitutes a sample cluster. It is equally essential that all such initiatives be documented for enlarging and enriching the academic understanding of Early Literacy in the Indian context.

Note-
The efforts listed here give only the outline of various Early Literacy activities undertaken by NGOs, institutions and organisations in India. In the absence of any ‘Impact Analysis Report’, it is difficult to formulate evaluative comments on these programmes. Rather, apart from documenting such efforts, validating their approach as per accredited guidelines is one of the priority areas in Early Literacy. Such validations would not only enhance credibility of such efforts, but could also provide an opportunity for replicating them in other states.

**NGOs**

1. **Ekalavya, Madhya Pradesh**

Ekalavya works with schools that are interested in improving their educational standards. At the elementary level, content and teaching is structured around the natural and social environment of the learner. Ekalavya has initiated several praiseworthy activities related to Early Literacy and childhood development; such as, Parallel Workbooks for children up to std. VII, a rural doorstep library called ‘Pitara’, a children’s own magazine called ‘Udaan’, and a magazine of children’s literature called ‘Chakmak’.

Refer- [http://ekalavya.in/go](http://ekalavya.in/go)

2. **Majhe Pustak (My Book) Programme by QUEST, Maharashtra**

Context-specific reading and writing improvement programmes in Early Literacy have been developed by Quality Education Support Trust (QUEST), an NGO in rural Maharashtra. These programmes are organically developed for tribal students with pre-school orientation in Anganwadis or their homes, with an emphasis on their local dialect. The major challenge for many children in these regions is the smooth transition from the language spoken at home to the language of instruction at school. Majhe Pustak is a context-
specific beginning reading program helping children in improving their reading skills in progressive manner. QUEST has also initiated longitudinal research projects in Early Literacy. Some of these are novel in terms of methodology and data collection efforts in the culturally diverse Indian context. QUEST is also the first NGO to create ‘Bridge Language Inventory’ (BLI) for tribal students speaking Pavri dialect as a home language in Nandurbar district of Maharashtra. This BLI is a series of bilingual small stories (Pavri and Marathi) picked up from the natural surroundings and locale specific imagination of tribal children.
Refer- http://quest.org.in

3. Digantar, Rajasthan
An NGO, working on alternative education for rural children since its founding in 1978. It believes that the purpose of education is to make the child a self-motivated and independent learner with the ability to think critically. Digantar strives to develop educational opportunities for all children based on this idea. Digantar currently runs two schools on the outskirts of Jaipur and two projects entitled Shiksha Samarthan in Phagi block of Jaipur district and Centre for Teacher Knowledge in Jaipur. It develops curriculum material and run workshops for education workers. They also actively conduct education research and publish an education journal and educational material for children.
Refer- http://www.digantar.org

4. Education Programme of ‘Mumbai Mobile Creches’, Mumbai
Over the past four decades, ‘Mumbai Mobile Creches’, an NGO has developed a model of comprehensive child care. It works in a close partnership with parents, the construction industry, labour communities, government agencies and concerned NGOs to promote child rights. In the education sector, their preschool programme builds the basics of pre-reading, pre-writing and pre-mathematics skills. The bridge course supports children to enter the formal school system. For many, this centre is their first introduction to any kind of education, and significantly, to the local language. The NGO has worked in association with the Government of India’s Sarva Shikshan Abhiyan to run these courses.
Refer- http://www.mumbaimobilecreches.org
5. Organisation for Early Literacy Promotion (OELP)

The Early Literacy Project (ELP) of OELP began in July 2006 at Delhi as an exploratory search for ways of building strong foundations for meaningful reading and writing in Hindi. The ELP methodologies were developed through close engagement with the diverse learning processes of children from poor migrant families inside classrooms. As of today, OELP is running 20 Bal Sahyog Kendras within the Ajmer district, Rajasthan.
Refer- http://www.oelp.org

6. Early Literacy Project (ELP), Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT)

The Early Literacy Project (ELP) by SRTT has aimed to address the reading and writing processes of young children who come from ethnic groups that typically underachieve in school. SRTT's ELP believes that engagement with contextualised learning methodologies will lead to increased literacy levels of children from resource-poor and marginalised communities. The main objective of ELP is to develop supportive literacy learning environments inside classrooms, along with methodologies that enhance reading and writing with understanding. It also aims to motivate children from rural backgrounds to actively engage with reading and writing in ways that they find meaningful and engaging.
Refer- http://www.srtt.org/institutional_grants/education/elementary_education/elementary_education.htm

7. Centre for Language, Literacy and Communication (CLLC), Pragat Shikshan Sanstha, Phaltan, Maharashtra

The core mandate of the CLLC is addressing the twin problems of the failure of many children to learn to read and write in their first language (mother tongue), and the system’s inability to meet the demand for English. Its main aim is to help bridge the gap between practice and theory, and ultimately to contribute to changing the ways language and literacy are taught in the schools of this country. CLCC is also visualised as a space in which scholars can get together and overcome the sense of isolation that many of them feel in this domain.
Refer- http://cllcindia.org

8. Programmes by Rishi Valley Education Centre, Andhra Pradesh

Rishi Valley Rural Education Centre (REC) consists of Rishi Valley Institute for Educational Resources- RIVER, a residential Middle School for students from the immediate neighbourhood and twelve ‘Satellite Schools’. While RIVER, along with two ‘Satellite Schools’, and the Middle School are located on REC’s 14-acre campus, the other 10 ‘Satellite Schools’ are located in nearby hamlets.
Refer- http://www.rishivalley.org

The two main aims of the Programme are, to promote village-based education and to draw working children into the school system. 39

Capacity Building Partnerships by REC

- The Nalli Kalli Programme in Karnataka: With resource support from RIVER, a core group from HD Kote town has developed its own self-learning material in Kannada, and trained their teachers in its use.

- Kerala: When District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) Kerala decided that the RIVER methodology was well suited to remote tribal and coastal pockets of Kerala, a similar exercise in transcreating the Educational Materials for use in Malayalam dialects was undertaken.

- **Pondicherry**: The Isaiambalam school of Sri Aurobindo International Institute at Pondicherry has been interacting with RIVER since 1997 in developing teaching-learning materials in Tamil.

- **Uttar Pradesh**: In 1997, the DPEP of Uttar Pradesh, a world bank project, worked with RIVER to produce materials in Hindi and to build multi-level teaching capacities. Currently, the methodology has been scaled-up to another three districts covering 2000 schools.

- **Government of India- UNICEF in cooperation with RIVER**: The Government of India and UNICEF, with RIVER as a Technical Partner, launched a Quality Package Project in the year 2004, with the aim to provide an integrated package of quality education to children in approximately 1,000 schools in 12 states.

- **Chhattisgarh**: The programme has now spread to several districts within the state. With enthusiastic support from the management of State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), which plays a crucial role in successful up-scaling of the methodology in any state, Chhattisgarh, in a relatively short period of time, had made significant progress in the implementing the methodology.

- **West Bengal**: In May and June 2010 RIVER personnel conducted a training programme for Government School Teachers of Howrah District of West Bengal. The programme, which was titled Sakkriota Bhittick Shikhon, was aimed at communicating the multi-grade methodology to a core group of teachers. RIVER guided the West Bengal team in creating levels 1 to 3 learning materials.

9. **Reading Cell, National Council of Educational Research and Trust (NCERT), Delhi**

   A Reading Cell was set up by the NCERT under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. The main objective of this Cell focused upon teaching reading in the early classes in primary schools. The Cell is expected to bring out innovative reading material for young children and to organise teacher training to enable better appreciation of the significance of early literacy for later development. A graded reading material would be expected to help students to communicate and express ideas and feelings effectively.

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40 **Transcreation** is a term used chiefly by advertising and marketing professionals to refer to the process of adapting a message from one language to another, while maintaining its intent, style, tone and context. A successfully transcreated message evokes the same emotions and carries the same implications in the target language as it does in the source language, Viewed on 25 May 2012, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcreation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcreation)
reading series titled Barkhaa has been developed by the Reading Cell of NCERT which attempts to sync with children’s innate cognitive capacities. The conceptual basis of this series is that children reading with meaning and pleasure from the earlier stages, learn to read quickly and will become successful readers. A graded reading series is a pedagogic tool which will help the children of Stds. I and II in learning reading and to arouse in them the urge to read more. Barkhaa has forty stories across four levels spread out in five themes. There are two central characters in every theme and the stories have been presented through their perspectives. The number of sentences and the complexity of the plots in the stories increase with the levels. Gradation across levels has been achieved by variation in syntax, number of words and complexity of subplots.

Refer- http://www.ncert.nic.in/html/rdc/docs/Barkhaa%20link.pdf,

10. M.A. in Education (Elementary), Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai
This course offered by TISS is unique and intensive, with focus on the fundamentals of elementary education. With projects, practical assignments and research components interwoven with theory, this course offers deeper perspectives of elementary education; especially with modules like first language pedagogy, language teaching etc.
Refer- http://tiss.edu/TopMenuBar/admissions/masters-programmes

11. Azim Premji Foundation, Bangalore
The Azim Premji Foundation has committed itself to an overall goal of transforming elementary education. The Foundation under its University offers degree programme aimed to develop competent and committed professionals for the education sector in India. The curriculum is modern, multi-disciplinary and contextually relevant. There is a high degree of linkage between theory and practice. It has also initiated research activities, knowledge creation exercises and participative field programmes in various areas of elementary education, including Early Literacy.
Refer- http://www.azimpremjifoundation.org

12. Communication for Young Learners’- Communication and Journalism Department, University of Mumbai
The Masters in Communication and Journalism course of the University of Mumbai has formally included Communication for Young Learners, as an elective subject in the curriculum. This course aims to encourage media aspirants to become professionals in generating useful content for young learners, supporting educational processes within the classrooms with multi-media skills, writing literature for children and providing learning support for communication needs of young learners. The course also emphasises on supporting language needs of children at the early literacy stage.
State initiatives

13 Children’s University, Gujarat Government, Gandhinagar

The mission of Children’s University will be to undertake vast areas of research regarding the child education and development. It is expected to support Integrated Child Development activities in the state of Gujarat and elsewhere.
Refer- http://university4children.com

14 Vanche Gujarat Abhiyan (Read Gujarat Programme), Gujarat Government

Vanche Gujarat is a novel idea to promote reading among students. An initiative by the Gujarat Government, the aim of this campaign is to develop reading habit among students at an early age. Under the programme, government schools are specifically informed to provide books on different subjects, not including text books.
Refer- http://www.vanchegujarat.in
The National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005 has emphasised the role of multiple textbooks for children. It supports plural approach, where variety and multiplicity brought in by the non-state players is more important than monolithic approach of the state textbook bureaus. Textbooks play a decisive role in the process of effective learning in Early Literacy. Conventionally, textbooks are created in unilateral manner to disseminate knowledge in a controlled classroom environment. This definition is rigid and discourages the role of textbooks for knowledge enhancement. The NCF has sought a departure from this linear approach to textbooks. Some of the key recommendations of NCF for plurality of textbooks are given below.

The National Education Policy of 1986 encouraged contextual textbooks as well as plural learning processes that would reflect the rich geo-cultural diversity of the country. The National Curriculum Framework 2005 further reinforced these policies as follows:

- While reading is readily accepted as a focus area for language education, school syllabi are burdened with information-absorbing and memorising tasks, so much so that the pleasure of reading for its own sake is missed out. Opportunities for individualised reading need to be built at all stages in order to promote a culture of reading, and teachers must set the example of being members of such a culture. This requires major means of encouraging reading. The development and supply of a range of supplementary reading material relevant to all school subjects and across the grades require urgent attention. A great deal of such material, though of varying quality, is available in the market, and could be utilised in a methodical manner to expand the scope of classroom teaching of a subject. Teacher training programmes need to familiarise teachers with such material, and they must be explained the yardsticks by which to select and use it effectively.

- Given the perspective that curricular content must meaningfully incorporate experiences of children and their diverse cultural contexts, including languages, it is important that textbook writing is decentralised keeping in view the capacities that are required as well as the systems that will make this possible.

- While State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), which has been given the task of textbook writing at present, can continue to be the nodal organisation for this purpose, the actual envisioning of the process, selection and writing of content must be done in a collaborative manner by teams rather than by individual subject experts. If SCERT can make the production of textbooks a collaborative exercise, it will improve the quality of textbooks, build capacities, as well as energise these institutions. NGOs have also produced excellent textbooks and supplementary materials that can be used in schools. This is

41 ‘Systemic Reforms, Plurality of Textbooks’, The National Curriculum Framework (NCF), NCERT, New Delhi, 5.5.1, 2005
especially important when we are exploring the possibility of producing more than one textbook for each grade and subject, so that there is far greater local relevance in materials, and also a plurality of materials from which teachers can choose. Such teams could also produce supplementary materials such as reading cards and small stories based on local lore and illustrations, which often are more interesting to children. Choice and variety, which exist in more elite schools, can become common features of all schools.

- When a number of books and supplementary materials are available, the teacher can be encouraged to decide which text lessons are appropriate for specific themes for her pupils. This would substantively enhance the teacher's autonomy and choice. Alternatively, they can also provide opportunities to encourage children to explore diverse sources and understand how the same content may be presented in different ways. This will encourage library work.

NGOs have played a major role in creating innovative models of schooling, training of teachers, development of textbooks and curricular materials, community mobilisation and advocacy. Their formal association with schools and resource centres would be extremely important for curriculum development, academic support, as well as monitoring and research.
Picture Books in 9 languages!

Pic 7. Need to go beyond the text-books
Role of literature in shaping civilisations, human mind and a humane social order is well documented. Children’s literature initiates this process. India’s English publishing industry was estimated at Rs. 1,200 crore in 2010, of which children’s category accounted for about 15%. However, of the total books market, excluding the academic books, the children’s books share is estimated to around 25%\(^42\). Though, the market has neglected to address the reading needs of children from diverse socio-linguistic-cultural backgrounds. Multilingualism can nurture intercultural understanding and stimulate young minds, provided we make children’s literature in various states available in several Indian languages. In this regard, we’ve not taken enough strides to harness our strength as a multilingual nation and foster intercultural bonds at a young age.

A system that over-emphasises on textbooks and textbook centric education system are the biggest obstacles for the growth of children’s literature in India. \(^43\) Sparse efforts are made to develop inclusive and content-rich children’s literature, accommodating multilingual and multicultural needs of children in India. For instance, reading requirement of a tribal child would be culturally different than a child in the cities. Unless, we have literature which tribal children can identify as their own, with references to his or her locality, dialect, culture, surroundings etc., it will yield no result. Here, we have listed few publishing ventures for multilingual children’s literature. This list is not indicative, though it gives an idea of how the professional approach with a robust distribution network can create a wider impact.

- **Pratham Books**
As a not-for-profit publisher, the NGO Pratham, has developed a wide range of story books created to engage children with multiple socio-cultural backgrounds. At the time of writing, Pratham Books has published over 215 titles in English and 10 other Indian languages. That’s over 1500 books, most of which are priced below Rs. 25. Pratham has printed over 8.5 million books, over 10 million story cards and have a readership of nearly 25 million.
Refer- http://www.prathambooks.org


\(^43\) K Kumar, ‘Role of Children’s Literature in Education- शिक्षा और बाल माधिक्रम’, *Public Lecture in Hindi*, Bhopal, Viewed on 21 May 2012, http://rameshtailang.blogspot.in/2012/02/blog-post_06.html
• ‘Parag’ by Sir Ratan Tata Trust
With the number of children entering primary schools on the rise, the need for age-appropriate, graded educational material for instructional and recreational purposes has been felt by the sector. Against this backdrop, the Trusts’ publication Initiative, branded ‘Parag’, focuses on publication of books in various Indian languages, supporting professional development among illustrators, writers and publishers, and dissemination of professional writing, besides facilitating networking among publishers and educationalists.
Refer-


• Tulika
Tulika is an independent publishing house based in Chennai, whose imaginative books are imbued in culture and age-appropriate reading content. Since 1996, Tulika has published bi-lingual picture books in English and eight other Indian languages – English, Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Telugu, Marathi, Gujarati, and Bengali so that more children can access books in the language of their choice.
Refer- www.tulikabooks.com

A system that over-emphasises on textbooks and textbook centric education system are the biggest obstacles for the growth of children’s literature in India

- Krishna Kumar, Ex-Director, NCERT
Recently India joined an elite club of nations by successfully test-firing Agni-V, an inter-continental ballistic missile, capable of carrying a nuclear payload over a range of 5,000 km. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh hailed India’s successful missile test as “another milestone” in the country’s “quest for security, preparedness and to explore the frontiers of science”. The Media also went “ballistic” with India’s astounding achievement.  

Despite its proven role as the founding blocks of early education, Early Literacy is still not considered as a distinct branch of knowledge in our Universities. Departments of Education are blissfully unaware of massive research in Early Literacy in foreign universities. A random browsing of curricular of such departments shows mere lip service to early education and its literacy components. At the same time, as an educational concept, Early Literacy is still a nebulous area for the academicians and policy-makers. It’s ironic that not a single public-funded university runs any course or research programme related to Early Literacy. Our Universities have undermined it with an entrenched belief that they have to deal with higher education only. On the other hand, deemed universities like ‘Azim Premji University’ and ‘Tata Institute of Social Sciences’ have made significant academic investment in Early Literacy. Let the ‘Right to Quality Education’ begin with ‘Right to Read and Write’ effectively.

A country which is part of an elite missile club cannot remain apathetic about failing to provide quality education to children entering literacy orbit.

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Proactive efforts to promote Early Literacy initiatives -

1. Invest in Teachers

Although the interaction of linguistic theory and applied linguistics has produced a variety of teaching methods and materials, the language-teaching classroom has remained one of the most boring and unchallenging sites of education, dominated largely by the behaviourist paradigms.\textsuperscript{45}

In the context of Early Literacy, the teacher is both the strongest (for the role he or she has to perform) and weakest (due to lack of training) link in the entire process.

The law requires a primary school teacher to have mandatory pre-service training. Recently, the ‘National Council for Teacher Education’ (NCTE) has barred new teacher training colleges in Maharashtra until 2013 due to a skewed demand-supply ratio. A public notice issued by the statutory body aims to achieve planned and coordinated development of the teacher education system. Also, in order to regulate the growth of teacher education at all levels, NCTE, on the basis of state-wise study conducted on ‘demand and supply’ of teachers and also in consultation with the state governments/Union Territories, has decided not to accept applications for teacher training colleges (called as D. Ed. Colleges in Maharashtra) for the academic session 2012-13.\textsuperscript{46} The ORF study finds that this dismal state of affairs is due to the unchecked and unplanned growth of D.Ed. Colleges across the state. Scant attention has been paid to the quality aspects of teacher’s training curriculum, which is not linked with the modern research in Early Literacy. These courses pay lip service in teaching Early Literacy as an important building block in the educational development of children. Once qualified, the ill-trained pre-service teachers from these colleges perform the complex task of Early Literacy in schools. Their classroom interaction lack correct instructional methods, required in teaching beginning reading and writing. Therefore, it is very essential to strengthen the component of Early Literacy in the D.Ed. education system after consultations with institutions or NGO’s working in the field.

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Position Paper on 'Teaching Indian Languages', NCERT, op. cit.}

Pic 9. Invest in Teachers
2. Anganwadi and Early Literacy

‘Emergent literacy’, a term first used by Marie Clay to describe how young children interact with books, and reading and writing, even before they read or write in the conventional sense, is an important concept in the early learning process. Emergent literacy is a gradual process that takes place from birth, until a child can read and write in conventional manner.

Literacy learning begins very early in life. It develops through constant interactions with people and the environment. If the experiences of children are supported by adults through interactions (words), then new vocabulary is learnt by the child. It is therefore valuable to verbalise what the child is experiencing. This helps the child to pick up new words. The actual learning to read and write requires hard work and is also dependent on child’s motivation. Therefore, when the child observes adult’s participating in literacy, it is easier for the child to develop a positive attitude towards literacy. The thrust of the programme in pre-school needs to be on developing a positive attitude towards literacy in children rather than on just engaging them directly with print.

As established by research in Early Literacy, pre-school stage is crucial for the preparedness of Early Literacy in schools. In the small towns and villages of India, under the ‘Integrated Child Development Scheme’ (ICDS) the government has established Anganwadi as a child-care and mother-care center. It caters to children in the age group of 0-6. Apart from health support they are also expected to

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49 Anganwadi means “courtyard shelter”, and is managed by the women chosen from within local community Viewed on 13 April 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anganwadi
provide non-formal pre-school education to children. There are 13,04,611 Anganwadi Centres operational in India. Around 20 lakhs Anganwadi workers were employed in Anganwadi Centres as on September 30, 2009. Inadvertently, Anganwadi workers become the first formal tutors of early literacy to children. As they play valuable role in Emergent Literacy, Anganwadi workers require professional training in conducting pre-school activities, especially related to Emergent Literacy. With the help of experts, an Emergent Literacy component in Anganwadi training needs to be developed as an area of research. Due to its vast national network, a replicable model of the same can boost Emergent Literacy activities and help standardising context-specific instructional practices at the pre-school level; especially for rural and marginalised children.

3. Right to Early Literacy- Setting up the ‘National Early Literacy Panel’
Setting up such a panel in every state will help build indigenous understanding of ‘Learning languages’ in the Indian context. The panel should initiate long-term and multifarious programmes for ‘Early Reading and Writing Skills’ like ‘National Early Literacy Panel’ of the USA. Since the medium of instruction in each state varies, such panel should not be centralised and must have state-wide activities. As part of its activities, the panel should identify best practices in Early Literacy and document them for wider dissemination.

4. Research and Knowledge Building in Early Literacy
The education departments at the state level should have a ‘Research Cell for Early Literacy’. This cell along with the Universities or recognised non-state agencies should undertake longitudinal research projects for serious understanding of the issues. This cell should encourage micro research projects in the areas of language-learning and language-teaching methods. The cell should also ensure that any report on the reading-writing abilities of children, must be accompanied by error analysis, i.e. with complete description of mistakes made by children as part of their continuous learning programs. This alone will help mitigate challenges faced by learners, teachers and administrators, in early literacy interventions.

5. Children’s Literature and Content Development
‘Parag’ or ‘Tulika’ are two examples of non-state initiatives in content development of children’s literature. We require plethora of age-appropriate children’s literature matching cultural and sociological needs of variety of children. Content development for children’s literature requires finer understanding of childhood development. India does not have any course on ‘writing for children’ and it generally springs from the interest of individuals. As a result, the market for children’s literature is not built by writers with any formal orientation of the children’s world. The state and non-state publishing houses need to identify age-specific reading needs of children from diverse backgrounds. It should be supported by writers, illustrators, multi-media artists or professionals having understanding of

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51 Ibid., http://wcd.nic.in/icdsimg/WomenAW&AWH2009.htm
52 A Patwardhan, ‘Interview to ORF’, Sir Ratan Tata Trust, New Delhi, 29 March 2012
the development needs of young children. Universities or educational institutes teaching mass media or creative writing can start courses such as ‘communication for young learners’.

6. **Provide easy access to relevant reading material**

Success in Early Literacy, especially in improving reading comprehension depends hugely on easy access to age and culturally appropriate reading material. Through inventive schemes such as door-step library, mobile library, easy and shared access should be provided to children in small towns and rural areas. In order to encourage reading habit, every school must have a well-equipped library, where every possible effort should be made to engage children in recreational reading activities. The access should also be in multi-media format to leverage the advantages of digital technology.

7. **Building upon Children’s Mother Tongue in classroom learning**

Educationists across the world have approved the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction at the primary school level, building upon the rich linguistic vocabulary that children bring to schools. Bridges can be built by creating language resources (storybooks, lexicons) to switch over from local dialect to textbook language. Availability of educational resources and learning tools in the mother tongue gives a natural learning advantage to children. Learning English and Learning in English are two different activities. While Learning English can be a concurrent activity with the mother tongue, Learning in English should also be inclusive of the mother tongue in the initial years.

8. **Special Language Teaching Courses for Teachers**

Since the role of language teaching in early literacy is being increasingly recognised, it would be important for all teachers to undergo a special orientation course, focussed on the nature, structure, and function of language, which also evolves strategies that will help development of learners.

9. **Availability of material and resources in Indian languages**

For wider dissemination, synthesis and sharing, knowledge resource in Early Literacy (which includes supplementary textbooks, teaching-learning aid, research work etc.) should be made available in both online and offline modes. An ‘Open Source Early Literacy Programme’ should be encouraged to allow willing participants to share and use the knowledge base in this domain.
Analysing theoretical research is one way of comprehending issues in Early Literacy. Insights and varied perspectives can also be gained from personal interviews with stakeholders and observing classroom activities. ‘How children are taught to read and write in our schools’ is still an unexplored subject, due to peripheral research culture here. Neither at the state nor at the University level, is there any formal arrangement to build the knowledge base of Early Literacy. Within the context of India’s large population, its ethnic diversity and layers of state and federal systems, exponential number of organizations should be working to further the research. Although the list included in the earlier section is only indicative, more needs to be done to strengthen the Indian context of Early Literacy issues. It means localising the best practices and research methods in Early Literacy as per the contextual needs of children in India, especially the children enrolled in regional schools and first generation learners. It also includes applying established theoretical models in the classroom activities.

Researchers of ORF Mumbai visited the project sites of QUEST, NGO, where it has been supporting Early Literacy activities for the tribal schools. The activities are in the form of longitudinal action research, tracking progress of each child through a rigorous action research programme at every level. Programmes and activities of this NGO provide a specific model of Early Literacy in the rural context.

**QUEST- Early Literacy for All...**

**QUEST** (Quality Education Support Trust), is an NGO involved in the Early Literacy activities in rural Maharashtra. Intervention programmes of QUEST are active in the Wada block of Thane district and the Nandurbar district of Maharashtra. Nilesh Nimkar, Director of QUEST, has been working on the learning issues of tribal children for more than a decade. The researchers interacted with him extensively to understand the intricacies and enormity of the issues and challenges in Early Literacy.

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53 A **longitudinal study** is a correlational research study that involves repeated observations of the same variables over long periods of time — often many decades. It is a type of observational study, Viewed on 13 April 2012, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longitudinal_study](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longitudinal_study)

54 Quality Education Support Trust, QUEST, Viewed on 17 April 2012, [http://quest.org.in/](http://quest.org.in/)
Pic 11. District Map of Nandurbar
Excerpts from the Interview:-

“The real issue of Early Literacy in the Indian context is incorrect and untested instructional methods institutionalised in std. I and II. We assume that children learn to read and write automatically with gradation; in reality they do not. Worse, we seldom understand that they struggle due to incorrect pedagogy of language teaching and decontextualised textbooks. A child requires progressive reading skills to deal with the advanced and multidisciplinary text in the higher grades. When children fail to acquire it, they simply abandon and opt out of the whole process of school system. Labeled as ‘drop-outs’, these children are often blamed for their under-performance in schools. In reality, what needs to be blamed is the blatant disregard in understanding intricacies of Early Literacy. What is required is setting ‘correct instructional methods’ for language acquisition at an early stage. Assumptions related to formative years of schooling and its neglect can diminish the student’s prospective as an effective learner. The education system must be exhorted to acknowledge Early Literacy as a distinct branch of knowledge in itself.’

Nilesh Nimkar also elaborated the role of Dr Maxine Berntsen, whose immense contribution to the field of Early Literacy has greatly benefited organisations like QUEST.

**Contribution of Dr Maxine Bernsten**-

A research scholar on first language pedagogy, Dr Maxine Berntsen’s contribution in the field of Early Literacy (for Marathi language in Devanagari script) is unique. In 1966 she Maxine Berntsen received a Fulbright-Hays fellowship to do fieldwork for her dissertation on social variation in the Marathi speech of Phaltan, a taluka town in Western Maharashtra. From the mid-1970’s Dr. Berntsen’s interests turned to school education. She began writing articles in English and Marathi in newspapers and periodicals, advocating the use of the regional language as the medium of instruction. During her years of intensive field research in Phaltan, a village in Satara district she realised how inappropriate pedagogical methods at the beginning level are inhibiting students, from gaining literacy skills required at the later stage. Through her field experiments, she substantiated how planners and textbook writers have given short shrift to conceptual clarity of teaching beginning reading. She appealed for experimentation and debate at all levels of the education system. Unfortunately, despite her fundamental contributions, her methods and suggestions have not been implemented in the pre-service and in-service teacher’s training.

Dr Berntsen is currently the director of ‘Centre for Language, Literacy and Communication’ (CLLC) - in Phaltan, district Satara, Maharashtra (view- [http://www.cllecindia.org](http://www.cllecindia.org)). She is also a Professor Emeritus at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) at Hyderabad.
Pic 12. Remote Tribal Hamlets on the Banks of Narmada River
'Home to School Language Transition' is one of the key areas within Early Literacy, which QUEST is researching in the Nandurbar district. ‘If you really want to see the unique challenge in Early Literacy, come to Dhadgao’, Nilesh Nimkar urged us. The ORF Mumbai team of researchers visited Ashram schools (residential schools for tribal children) at Shahada, Kochra, Dhadgao and Rajbardi (all villages in Nandurbar district) to understand specific issues of Early Literacy from a tribal context.

QUEST provides remedial interventions for children in stds. I and II in some of the nearby Ashram schools. Dhadgao block is situated in the interior parts of the Nandurbar district in Maharashtra. Nandurbar is predominantly a tribal district, known as one of the most backwards districts in Maharashtra on the parameters of Human Development Index. 

The interior of Nandurbar nestle in the Satpura hills, rubbing shoulders with Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. Its northern boundaries are defined by Narmada River. The Sardar Sarovar Project on the Narmada has submerged several villages in this region, with nearby villages also likely to be affected in near future. BSNL, which is the sole mobile service provider in this area, cease to exist beyond a point. Though, this disconnection and geographical odds have not affected government ‘Ashram schools’ having visible presence in this region. Ashram schools are residential schools governed by the Tribal Development Department of the Maharashtra state. There are 547

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government-run tribal schools catering to 1.87 lakh students in Maharashtra. Their penetration in the deep interiors has made these government-run schools the only source of education for tribal children in this region. They are scattered in this region; some are precariously perched on mountains, others, unimaginably located in the deep valleys of the Satpura hills.

With vast experience in educating tribal children, Nilesh Nimkar is well-versed with the issues and challenges of teaching tribal children in this region. He spoke about some prominent issues faced by the tribal children. ‘The residential school teachers need to be compassionate, sensitive and willing to give space to the child’s culture. Most of the children coming from nomadic backgrounds, find it difficult to adhere to school routines. Actually schooling itself is an alien concept which had not been a part of their life experience so far. But the most critical issue is of transition from the home language to school language. For most children the home language is completely different from the school language. Bhil, Pawari and Kokani are the three main tribal dialects in this region, which do not have a script. For a child whose local dialect is different, it’s a herculean task to adopt an alien language like standard Marathi (despite being the state language) in school environment.’ In such adverse situations, English which is touted as sine qua non for modernity is miles away from these children. There also are individual differences among the children which schools often ignore. QUEST has designed its own graded workbooks after taking the local context of tribal regions into consideration. Nilesh Nimkar outlined their initiatives stating that, ‘The key aim of our reading-writing activities in the local dialect is to allow children to unleash their imagination instead of suppressing it. That’s why at QUEST our team has created a pool of bi-lingual activities, which gradually brings the child into the folds of school language, by creating a bridge between how they speak at home and what they read in textbooks’. The ORF Mumbai team witnessed a session where a locally trained educator by QUEST, narrated a story to children in their local dialect, Pawari. It was not just mere story-telling, but the trainer also acted and used vivid facial expressions to make the story come alive. As the story was based on local characters and narrated in the mother tongue of children, they were engrossed in this activity as active listeners. With rapt attention, they related to the story in every sense. Afterwards, the same story was narrated by the trainer in the school language (i.e. Marathi) in similar fashion. This time, students were able to correlate the textbook language with their own dialect, thanks to the earlier effort by the trainer. With these kinds of focused exercises stretched over the academic year, a child starts comprehending the school language.

The ‘Tribal Development Commissionerate’ in Maharashtra has done little to acknowledge the ‘Home to School language transition’ as a pedagogical issue. No Bridge Language Inventory Resource from Pawari to Marathi is available in the state sponsored learning aids. Unless we institutionalise models like QUEST’s, tribal children will remain perpetually crippled from attaining normal literacy level. The current system of pre-service teacher’s education system in Maharashtra (D.Ed.) does not take into account local contexts of tribal culture and region-specific pedagogical adaptations. There is no induction programme for teachers serving in tribal areas.

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\[56\] Tribal Development Commissionerate, Viewed on 14 May 2012, \url{http://mahatribal.gov.in/htmldocs/ashram.html}
Pic 14. Teaching Resource by QUEST
Image References

Pic 1 - *Early Literacy* - The Foundation of Life-long Learning, http://quest.org.in/node/135
Pic 2 - *Universalisation of Elementary Education*, http://www.dise.in/Dataquest.htm
Pic 4 - *No Child Left Behind* - A Blueprint of Reform in the USA, http://libraryopaheke.blogspot.in/2011_08_01_archive.html
Pic 5 - *One Nation...Many Languages*, http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/india/indianlanguages.htm
Pic 6 - *State-wise Tribal Population Percentage in India*, http://tribal.nic.in/index2.asp?sublinkid=545&langid=1
Pic 7 - *Need to go beyond the text-books*, http://www.thebetterindia.com/4547/tulika-books-celebrating-the-multicultural-multilingual-india
Pic 9 - *Invest in Teachers*, PhotoCourtesy- Quality Education Support Trust (QUEST)
Pic 11 - *District Map of Nandurbar*, http://www.homotherapyindia.com/content/district-map-nandurbar
Pic on page 60 - Creative design by Riddhi J Chokhwala

(All web links mentioned above are viewed between 1 June 2012 to 10 June 2012)
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Rammohan Khanapurkar has done Masters in Communication and Journalism from the University of Mumbai. He has considerable experience as a lecturer in various Media colleges affiliated to the University of Mumbai. During his lectureship he was exposed to critical gaps in knowledge acquisition among students at different levels. The turning point came, when he realized that facile foundation at the school level has left students intellectually hamstrung, at the higher education level. School system with rote learning, overt focus on marks and stunted space for critical thinking has had a debilitating effect at the higher education level. With this realization he started exploring inner of elementary education. He joined ORF in June 2011 and since working on ‘Issues, Ideas and Challenges in Elementary Education’. Along with issues, he has also focused on understanding capacity building of primary school teachers through e-learning and innovative classroom pedagogy.

His extensive trips to hinterlands gave him first hand insights of challenges involved in beginning reading and writing. This encounter with unsettling reality prompted him to write this booklet; which is just a modest step in untangling several knots in elementary education.
Learning Words - First Step Towards Building Character