

IV. The Tale of Chintalguda Village

It has been widely acknowledged that the socio-economic conditions in rural Orissa is the major obstacle to spread of primary education, and the social inequality has been identified as the major cause of educational deprivation among children in rural Orissa. A large portion of children from the economically poor and socially disadvantaged groups and girls in particular, in rural areas, are failing to get either access or complete even five years of basic education. In this context it may be worthwhile taking note of a few developments effected by Vikash in Chintalguda village.



Chintalguda, a village of 40 *Paraja* (a tribal group of Orissa) families, locates in Pottangi Block of Koraput District. Rich in natural resources, the village provides the basic means livelihood to the people. Agriculture, cattle herding and domestication of animals are their major occupations. But before the intervention of Vikash, people were ignorant about the importance of other primary needs like education and health. Although there was a primary school in the village, the total number of students was only 10 and the school was run only for one or two hours everyday. Apart from that school and village surroundings were very unhygienic, cattle sheds were attached to the houses, children were always in dirty clothes and suffering

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from various ailments. Diseases like malaria, bronchitis, tuberculosis, gastroenteritis and many skin infections were rampant. Traditional culture and folklores were in a dying stage.

In 2002 Vikash expanded its activities to empower the people by making them aware about their rights. Early Childhood Development Center (Mukti Pre-school) was established. Educational awareness camps, cleaning camps, health camps were organized in the village. Managing Committees and Parents Committees were formed and meetings, trainings, workshops were arranged for the committee members for the development of the center.

The main purpose of this initiative was to enable children to acquire awareness about self-protection, self-confidence and self-reliance. Normally they were the pre-school children (up to 6 years of age) in the village. The pre-school facilitators took the major role for primary socialization by providing understanding of fairy tales, legends, small dramas, and tried to bring about a connection between the nature and culture through teaching. At the same time the children tried to internalize nature through observation.



The children were taught to plant different vegetable plants, water them and turn the soil with their hands. In this way they are taught the organic relationship between mankind and

nature. They later on prepared a kitchen garden in the preschool premises. In addition to that children were engaged with their parents in the village cleaning camp to make the village clean and green. They were also taught about the importance of hygiene and sanitation practices in the day to day life. Parents were motivated to send their children to the Pre-school, to keep their surrounding clean, to detach the cattle shed and pigsty from the house, and to attend the parents meeting regularly. Many changes have occurred in last 5 years. Now Chintalguda has a different status among all the villages. More than 90% of children of the village are attending the Pre-school. Around 30 children have been integrated to the primary school system since 2002. At present there are 25 students including 2

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disabled children in Primary school who have been integrated from Pre-school. These two disabled boys are now better off and can walk without support. A great behavioural and attitudinal change has been noticed among the children. Now they are dreaming of by pursuing higher studies.

Vikash has also taken an initiative to conserve the traditional culture of Chintalguda village through this education program. Two exposure visits were arranged for the pre-school children to Puri and Bhubaneswar. Children practiced and

presented *Kathi Nacha*, a *Paraja* folk dance in many places of Bhubaneswar. The

programs reflected the traditional art and culture, which are in dying stage.

Now the people are realizing the real value of education. They are participating in development initiatives with the members of Vikash wholeheartedly and attending the Managerial Committee and Parents Committee meetings regularly. Women are found more active in this regard. Slowly men are also realizing the ill effects of alcoholism and smoking. They say collectively, "Now we can dare to dream about the future of our children, family and village."