

NIGHT SCHOOLS OF THE SOCIAL WORK AND RESEARCH CENTRE

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The Environment

Rajasthan is a semi-arid state where the average rainfall is low. In most parts of Rajasthan, the farmers till a hostile soil getting low yields. Thirty-five years after independence, it still has links with the feudal system that determined its lifestyle for centuries. Yet many old values are gradually giving way in the face of curiosity and the people are beginning to come to grips with change. The different demands of a democratic pattern of government and the introduction of local self government are only partly understood. Education is traditionally linked either with priesthood or with employment. The community has to work with officials at the grass root level and the grass root functionary controls access to many facilities - amongst them important functions such as certification necessary for the procurement of loans. Having a relation, preferably a son, in the official hierarchy facilitates access. Boys are sent to school with the expectation of employment. Girls are not sent to school as their education is seen as unnecessary.

When India became independent, primary education in the state of Rajasthan was limited to a few villages. Feudal norms determined access to education and this was limited to those who belonged to the upper strata of society. The Government of Rajasthan made primary education the responsibility of the Panchayat Samithi (local self-government committee) and a number of village schools were opened from 1952 onwards.

The village schools in independent India adopted the curriculum, the textbooks and the approach of urban primary schools which in turn had direct links with the education pattern and conventions established by the British when they ruled India. Though located so as to be easily accessible, the schools drew only a small percentage of the children in the age group 6-11. Formal education was seen as a relevant process for preparing children for responsible citizenship and for bringing them into the mainstream of participatory democracy. The teaching institutions however remained isolated from the village, its culture, activities and people.

In Rajasthan, the Education and Panchayat Departments which are responsible for the curricula and the running of the primary schools have not made any substantial changes and the number of alternative schools in the villages is small. The formal education pattern which was inherited from the British has been marginally modified and there are some efforts being made to change curricula.

The Government of India has laid down policy directives for the universalisation of primary education. The government has realised that all available alternatives to schooling have to be pursued if the problems of illiteracy and lack of education are to be tackled within the resources available. One of the more important recent efforts in this context is the institution of non-formal education programmes for children. The adult education programmes had always drawn a large number of children who for various reasons could not attend regular school in villages. This led the Government of India to encourage the exploration of alternatives to primary education and evening schools which perhaps may better satisfy the demands of the local people.

Silora

Silora is one of the eight development blocks in Ajmer district of the State of Rajasthan, a semi-arid area with rainfall very much below the national average. Irrigation is mainly through open wells. The people of this area are largely dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry. Many small groups in the villages belonging to what is known as scheduled caste, also work on crafts and cottage industries. The Block has an area of 82,349 square kilometres with a population of approximately 110,000. In this semi-desert region agriculture is beset with numerous difficulties and even when the soil and water are comparatively better the yield per acre is below average. In the pre-independence era Silora was part of the kingdom of Kishengarh. The Raja of Kishengarh lived in the town which bears his name and which falls in the Block area of Silora. These 110 villages are grouped into 29 panchayats (village councils). Each one of these village councils elects a Sarpanch (village leader). There are 60 primary schools in the Block. Literacy according to the 1971 census is 20.73 per cent male and 3.53 per cent female.

Women do about 60 per cent of the agricultural work. Cultural restrictions on their activities appear inflexible. The women have to cover their heads and faces in front of their in-laws and all men. They are not permitted to talk to men and even their husbands in public. They are important so long as they are a useful part of the work force. Most of the decisions even about agricultural activities are taken by men. Women are responsible for all household work. The burden falls heaviest on the daughter-in-law. Women also look after children. They decide on schooling as well. Since women are often illiterate, they do not see the relevance of schooling and girls are not sent to school.

The Village

There are four major varnas (castes) in the social hierarchy of the Hindus. These varnas are further divided into jathis, which vary from place to place. In Silora there are about thirty jathis which fall under the various varnas. Of these castes or jathis, about 30 per cent are scheduled (lower) castes. The major castes are: the Brahmins (priests), Rajputs (rulers), Jats (farmers), Gujjars (herdsmen), Banias (Tradesmen), Khati (carpenters), Kumhar (potters), and amongst the scheduled castes: Chamar and Regers (leather workers), Balais (weavers), Bagria (scheduled tribe) and the Harijans (outcastes). The castes do not generally eat together or intermarry.

The Thakur or chief, who was a representative of the king in the village and the Rajputs who belong to his clan, usually dominate the socio-economic and political scene in the north of Silora. In the other areas, the powerful group are the rich farming community known as Jats. Land is unequally distributed though most people own land. Since the land is of poor quality, there is not much pressure on it. Family income has to be, and is, augmented by the children who become part of the work force by the time they are five years old.

Children begin to work on the farm or with animals and take care of younger brothers and sisters and are often precocious and know much about adult matters. They know about political and power groupings in a village, much more than may seem apparent to a casual observer. They grow up learning to protect themselves from pressures in a social structure that does not tolerate fools easily. These children who are literally rough and ready to fight are often looked upon as a troublesome bunch by both parents and teachers. It is obvious that a young boy of seven who takes twenty-five sheep to graze five kilometres away from home should learn to protect himself and be ready with his fist, in case he is threatened. He is generally not raring for a fight, but should it come, he gives as good as he gets.

Children do not take to the formal school kindly. They are often afraid of the teacher who is an outsider to the village. But it is the habit of corporal punishment in primary schools which is responsible for a large number of drop outs. Poverty, which does not permit the parents to buy uniforms and books for their children, is another obstacle in the way of primary schooling.

The Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC)

The Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC) at Tilonia, Rajasthan is a voluntary organisation registered under the Societies Act, 1960 and is concerned with poverty and its eradication. The project which covers the area of Silora, began with the objective of starting a dialogue between the urban trained professionals and the rural communities. It believed that integrated rural development was possible through professional intervention in rural communities providing services for the

farmer and his family. In 1979 the SWRC reviewed its work and re-stated its objectives. This was a result of a critical self-evaluation of the service approach to rural development.

The redefined objectives of the SWRC state clearly that the project works only with the poor to increase their awareness and make them self-reliant. In this process, development services and training are used only to accelerate awareness and bring about social change.

When the project began, the founder viewed it also as an experiment that could offer a replicable pattern which other young people or groups could adopt to work in different parts of the country. The growth in size of the SWRC from a single project in one block to ten projects in ten blocks in seven States has been possible because of in-built flexibility and structural decentralisation.

All the projects in the various states and blocks are run independently of the main project at Tilonia with varied inputs determined by localised needs. The Project Directors get together four times a year and discuss mutual problems and concerns. The working ideology relates to the identification of a specific clientele, the poor, and in the firm belief that development work should eventually lead to social change. The operational aspects of the projects differ and are determined by the nature of the group working in that specific area.

One of the preoccupations of the SWRC has been the concept of integration. Integration is viewed by the SWRC not so much as the provision of services (though this is done), but as satisfying the integrated needs by planning for the community and not for programmes. The SWRC has a varied range of interests including agriculture and animal husbandry, health, education, co-operatives and the mobilisation of peasant groups.

When the scale of activities of the project at the SWRC Tilonia grew, the structure was reviewed critically. The major re-organisation of the SWRC at Tilonia concerned itself with two main areas. The first related to evolving a participatory decision-making process which would involve the workers and the community, and the second with decentralising the focus of activities from Tilonia to five focal points in the block, the Field Centres. These Field Centres are independent decision-making and implementing bodies. The workers of the five Field Centres as well as the specialised professional staff at the main centre meet once a month to consider major issues and take decisions on policy. The Field Centres are free to choose the methodology and identify the communities. All activities are part of an approach which is non-formal and which is based on community involvement. The SWRC believes in and focuses on education as the base for community involvement in planning.

Ten years after its inception, the SWRC Tilonia has been able to transfer gently much of its urban knowledge and skills to a group of local people. Education is, in fact, the basis on which any relevant development programme or activity can be built in an area where there is a high

degree of poverty and illiteracy. If the pattern of education does not consciously focus on projecting the issues related to development of the individual in society, it fails in its essential purpose.

When a small group of workers came to live in Tilonia to work for rural development, they identified this lack of awareness as one of the fundamental reasons for inaction. The malaise seemed to be linked to factors in the texture of village life which could be changed by exposing the children in their formative years to alternatives of which their parents were unaware. How could children be attracted to primary education and through a process of learning become responsible citizens, growing up and continuing to live in the village to work for its development and exploit their strength in numbers to demand attention to their needs? How could a community be involved in planning for itself? How could there be sharing of learning between the formally educated and the formally uneducated? And how could primary education be made more relevant to the villagers? Can the education system be made answerable or accountable to the community it serves? These were the questions never before asked.

The SWRC Night Schools

The SWRC's programme of alternative education for children fills the gap created by the formal pattern of education in the block. The formal schools do not run at times convenient to the children. The teachers who are normally from the towns, do not stay in the village and adjust their timing to the arrivals and departures of trains and buses. Most of the poorer members of the community are indifferent to the education given in the schools and only a few are persuaded to utilise the services.

This project was conceived in relation to the demands of development of a community, to learn to identify its needs and plan for itself. It became obvious that it would be necessary to make schooling more relevant to village life, to involve the parents in planning, to run the school at times convenient to the children, to select teachers from residents in the village and to evolve curricula and teaching methods related to the environment. The objective of the non-formal schools is to relate the learning needs to numeracy and literacy so as to prepare children to be active participants in the process of development, and to make them aware that there are alternative avenues for growth and development.

A preliminary study¹ was planned for three villages with the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT), the Centre for Educational Technology (CET) and the Government of Rajasthan. An initial survey showed that the villagers viewed the educational system in the villages as non-productive. Their reasons were sound. The system did not help the family in either producing employable sons or in learning more about their environment. Children who went to school became drop-outs from conventional village life. While they did not want to work in the same environment or in the same way as their parents, their skills in other fields were so poor that they could not face up to competition with children with access to better schools.

The schools themselves were badly run, the teacher came to school when he wished to, very often absenting himself as he did not live in the village, and the working methods he employed frightened the first few groups of learners who went to school. In this context it should be mentioned that while the father can exercise his paternal right to corporal punishment he is loath to share that right with a school teacher.

The project began in a small way with three experimental schools in 1975. It grew from three to nine in 1980, and from nine to twenty-nine in 1981. Each school is located in a village and the teachers are residents of that village. There are on an average two teachers to a school of about fifty pupils. The teachers in each Field Centre mentioned earlier meet every Saturday to discuss problems relating to teaching, their own understanding, making of aids, general developmental problems and administrative matters.

The problems discussed at the Field Centre by the teachers and other workers are often related to discussions held at Tilonia in the monthly meetings. These weekly and monthly discussions are, in fact, viewed by all those involved as an educational process which leads to greater clarity of concepts and ease of action. This sharing of a common concern leads to renewed enthusiasm for tackling problems in the field.

The Objectives

The programme began with very simple objectives which were related to the problems identified in relation to the existing village schools. During the period of the preliminary study, an attempt was made to increase the enrolment, to retain the child in the school, reduce drop-outs and take care to avoid stagnation, determine the timings of the school in relation to community demands, involve the community in the school and develop school/community relationships, encourage use of the environment for all learning, recruit teachers from the village, provide work experience or relate the curriculum to the occupation of the child, and finally produce a replicable model for acceptance by the Government.

After the initial experimental period of three years, many questions were asked. These questions related to the role of education in the development process and the specific role of the night school in relation to the SWRC. One of the important reasons which led to the re-examination of the night school was the involvement of the teachers in planning and implementation of development programmes. When development issues began to be discussed, the importance of the night school as a nucleus of awareness building began to emerge as one of its primary functions. The method of learning drew on the environment of the child. The focus was broadened to relate learning to issues that emerged from development concerns as well. After many informal deliberations, the SWRC redefined the objectives of the night school.

The essential point of departure from a conventional literacy and numeracy programme began with a change in perception of the teacher and

the SWRC that the imparting of skills up to the level of standard V did not in any way satisfy the learning needs identified by the community. The community sees education, in terms of schooling, as a vehicle of social mobility or increased market value for employment. When it was realised that formal schooling did not satisfy either of these demands, the instinctive act was to reject the school. The community still sees schooling as relevant, only if children are not alienated from their surroundings. The school therefore has to reflect this concern. Hence it has to impart training in skills needed to relate learning to their day to day existence.

The schools are now seen not in isolation but as part of the overall process of education and awareness building in which the SWRC is involved. While the imparting of specific skills like literacy and numeracy continue to be important, the SWRC now sees the night schools as areas of basic learning where literacy and numeracy are used as tools to generate awareness about the community at large.

Concerned as the SWRC is with the basic question of poverty and illiteracy, the mere transferring of literacy and numeracy skills to children is not seen as an end in itself. These tools make access to development facilities more easy. Even so, the ultimate use of the facilities is largely determined by socio-political factors in society. Children have to perceive the linkages.

The Structure

The project is related to the overall structure of the SWRC. The night school programme is intimately connected with other development activities of the SWRC. The development activities of the SWRC are of an integrated nature and most of the people involved have to play multiple roles. The night school teachers, for instance, work in health and in organising farmers and their activities.

As the activities of the SWRC increased and intensified, the structure has been decentralised to five focal points in the block from where all the activities are co-ordinated and linked. The twenty-nine night schools are distributed over these five Field Centres and operate in clusters of five or six. The teachers identify training needs and share problems within a more localised area and discuss them in each Field Centre.

Working from the Field Centres has strengthened community participation. The involvement of the parents in development activities has sharpened their understanding of the need for education in general, and schooling for their children in particular. The parent's interest in the process of learning is slowly bringing them to the school for interaction with the teacher as well as the children. In this system, the role of the supervisor is as much one of learner as that of the teacher or the child. The teachers and the supervisors have multi-faceted relationships in which they interact over many development issues.

The Concept of "Non-Formal"

The definition of non-formal content and methodology began to get more meaningful when the linkages between development and education were stressed. Initially the SWRC accepted the concept of "non-formal" as that which implied efforts outside the formal system as regulated and controlled by the government. The debates that have been provoked over the use of the concept has sharpened the understanding of those concerned. It is currently being debated as to whether the schools which are run at night can really be called "non-formal". The word that is preferred by the SWRC is "alternative school".

Interestingly enough, the most useful meaning of these terms was elicited at a teachers' meeting held one Saturday in the Field Centre at Saleemabad. The small group of twelve teachers and development workers sat and tried to find a mutually acceptable definition of the concept. This led to lively discussion which lasted for over two hours. The assumptions were made confidently, and as the discussion wore on it went from assertion to query. Even amongst a group of twelve, it was difficult to arrive at acceptable definitions. It was finally decided that the concepts would be broken into their relative components. The concepts were analysed as follows:

Formal is that method of education which has a fixed curriculum with a fixed objective of certification at the end of the learning period with rigid rules as to how that certification should be done. The method of teaching is restricted to covering a syllabus in a specified time. Teaching is viewed as course completion.

Non-Formal is that method of education which is determined by localised needs and is flexible. The syllabus is only for the guidance of the teacher and learning is linked with the environment. The non-formal approach to education aims at improving the quality of life of the child and is not primarily concerned with making him pass an examination. Curriculum is not binding. Learning is the most important aspect of non-formal education. Non-formal schools are not teaching shops. The role of the teacher in non-formal education is crucial and his training is important both in terms of his own understanding and growth and in how he relates to the learning needs of the children.

The use of rules and regulations do not necessarily make a school formal, because they have to be viewed as necessary minimal agreements to facilitate work for a group of people.

Identification of non-formal and learning needs have, of course, not removed the difficulties faced by the SWRC, the teacher or the child. Learning has successfully been related to the environment. But where the imparting of literacy and numeracy skills are concerned, teacher and taught alike have gone back to formal methods very often. The teacher does not easily accept his role as an initiator of learning in a community of children. Conditioned as he is by his own schooling in the formal system, teaching is initially viewed by him as a "Guru-Chela" (teacher-taught) relationship.

In brief, the non-formal characteristics of the night schools are inherent in its timings which are flexible and the ability to adapt the syllabus to the changing demands of the clientele and innovations resulting in improved methods of teaching.

The problems of resistance to non-formal methods and approach from the community and teacher alike may have been more rigid if the links between the school and other development processes had not existed. It is easier to change the approach of the teacher to education methods if he is allowed to participate in a number of activities in which he grows to understand and analyse the importance of relating methods and needs.

The Teacher and his Training

The teacher is selected by the village and the SWRC. His selection is based on two basic criteria. Most important, he has to belong and be acceptable to the village community and be respected by it. He also has to have enough literacy and numeracy to be confident about imparting those skills. The education criteria have been left flexible. The teachers range from 8th class (fail) which is a qualification, to MA (please see Table 1 on p.152). The experience of the SWRC has shown that teachers with a higher degree of formal education are not necessarily better either as teachers or learners.

These teachers come to Tilonia for a period of one month initially for training. The first 15 days of the month are spent on informal discussions on subjects ranging from socio-political problems in the village to methods of teaching. The first 15 days also cover a series of workshops in which learning situations are simulated and as a result of the experience gained, teaching aids are identified and made. After this, the teachers are sent back to their respective villages to conduct a survey of children in the age group 6-14, those in and out of school, their occupation, occupation of the parents, socio-economic status of the family, family size, literacy levels in the family, and gather any other relevant information. In the latter half of the training programme, the data are synthesised and a tentative plan of action drawn up. The teachers are exposed to evaluation methods, methods of monitoring as well as the maintenance of records.

The teachers are trained through regular meetings held thrice in a month at the Field Centres where they discuss problems relating to the school. Workshops are organised twice a year in which all the teachers from all the Field Centres meet to discuss and orient themselves about matters identified as relevant.²

The workshops are planned by the teachers. They were initially more structured, with teachers opting to take up specific issues for demonstration teaching with their own school or in another school. The themes were chosen from a list of difficult learning areas. Later on the workshops have been relatively unstructured, with a greater emphasis on learning skills of articulation and analysis of problems. The making of innovative aids has been an important part of the process. The most

important feature has been the sharing of experience over the three day period. The workshops have been organised by the SWRC as well as by other agencies. The Indian Institute of Pre-school Education and the NCERT have held workshops in which teachers from government schools were invited to participate³.

Curriculum Development

When the project began, the SWRC adopted the syllabus of the Board of Education, Rajasthan. Agriculture and animal husbandry were included as part of the syllabus. The curriculum is being critically reviewed by the pupils, teachers and other workers of the SWRC and is expected to be in final shape in 1982-83. The involvement of the teachers in preparing the learning materials makes it a creative process. The syllabus had in its original form concentrated on schooling up to class V and on relating learning to the environment⁴. Instruction and learning materials were prepared keeping the environment in mind. Books were used only as supplementary reading. The syllabus was not changed totally, as the experiment was conducted with the intention of evolving a replicable model for implementation by the Rajasthan Government. The State Government however did not accept the concept and the lack of political support thwarted the programme.

The night schools, however, continue to be run by the SWRC and there has been considerable shift in attention as well as in emphasis. The teachers as well as the programme co-ordinators have felt the need for theoretically redefining and restructuring the curriculum on the basis of what has actually been practised in the schools in the last three years.

The Use of Local Resources and the Making of Aids

The SWRC believes that the villages are rich in resources for learning. The teachers have been motivated to identify and use these resources. Active participation in village life is not seen as separate from learning that takes place inside the classroom. The local singer, story-teller, midwife, health worker as well as many others are used as stimulators for learning. The teacher aims at involving the community as much as possible.

To make planning easy, the resources have been categorised into material and human resources, institutional and non-institutional. The SWRC has also conducted a study for UNESCO, Bangkok, on the identification of resources in Silora Block⁵.

Media

Rajasthan is rich in folklore, theatre and puppetry. The SWRC has been using puppets as teaching aids. Children and teachers alike have been involved in puppet making, script writing and presentation of the programmes. The use of scientific and modern aids has been limited as they are often expensive and manufactured in an alien environment. However, slides and filmstrips made in Tilonia have sometimes been used for

learning. Traditionally the use of dance and puppetry for learning is viewed as frivolous. The communities' initial response was one of shock and displeasure. Gradually, however, the use of media in the night schools was accepted, and in the case of puppet shows, the demand has extended to shows for the entire village.

The SWRC has realised that media used for communication should be as familiar as possible. If the media chosen is part of the culture of the people, the message gets communicated better. This is not to say that technology should not be introduced, but that it should be used in moderation and only where appropriate.

The Learners

The children who attend the evening school fall between the ages of 8 and 14. They work during the day, the majority of them are goatherds and shepherds. There are some who work on their parents' farm. The attendance is fairly regular, except for some children whose parents lead a nomadic existence and leave the village for longish periods in search of fodder for their cattle. This is so particularly in drought years. Boys attend in large numbers. Girls attend school with difficulty, because motivation is low. The average literacy rate amongst the women is 3.5 per cent. It is therefore difficult to get women teachers and the absence of women teachers reduces girls' attendance. This area is feudal in culture. Women observe purdah, and do not talk to men in public places. It is difficult therefore to convince the mothers of the need to educate their girls. In spite of this, approximately 10 per cent of the pupils are girls. Girls are being persuaded to attend the pre-schools that the SWRC runs in the morning with the help of semi-literate women for children in the age group 1-6. Girls often come with their younger brothers and sisters and sit in with them.

Of the children who attend school, approximately 50 per cent are from socially under-privileged groups, though all children work during the day. Sitting together and sharing the pot of water with the upper castes is in itself an education for the children. In one school, the children had a mock election in which they elected the monitor on the basis of caste. The 'elected representative' was incompetent. The children were peeved and wanted to change the monitor. The teacher led the discussion on to the basis of a free election and the reasons which should dictate the election of a candidate. The children have learnt an excellent lesson about caste, the role it now plays in elections and why it should not be so.

The children are motivated to identify with the school. In many cases the unsympathetic attitude of an official in the village, which manifests itself in negative action like throwing the night school out of the formal school building or the place given by the Panchayat (village council), has been taken up by the children themselves with good effect.

There are 1,466 children attending the twenty-nine night schools in Silcra (see Table 2).^{*} The comparative figures of enrolment in the formal school and the attendance in the night school are given in the same source. The children still out of school are also indicated. It is interesting to note that the largest number attends the schools in Kadampura Field Centre, where the peasant organisation is most active.

The learning in areas related to everyday life is much quicker than in those where they are expected to relate to concepts that are unfamiliar. Literacy and numeracy skills take longest to perfect. The ability to do quick and intricate mental sums is not matched by an equal facility with written figures. The younger children get these skills with greater ease. Reading is comparatively easier. Children are given story books to read and to help retention of reading and writing skills are encouraged to keep a diary when they can find time for it during the day. The children who leave school are provided library facilities from the school. The SWRC also brings out a fortnightly 'read out' paper "Bagatri Baat" in the local dialect which is circulated to the school leavers.

The most obvious indicator of the children's capacity to understand and question is the apparent lack of inhibition with which they approach the learning process itself. They are curious and vocal. The night schools are quite often noisy in contrast with the formal school. The first visit often begins with an impression of chaos. It is only after a few minutes that the pattern emerges. The groups bunched around kerosene lamps with aids are talkative. The questioning of all new phenomena is encouraged. The teacher whose knowledge is often limited is provoked into making enquiries and acquiring information.

Evaluation

Where evaluation is concerned there are two distinct areas for consideration. Firstly, the evaluation of the children and secondly the evaluation of the project itself.

The evaluation of the children has been done both formally and informally. Children's literacy and numeracy skills have been evaluated through modified formal methods. The levels in other aspects of learning have been gauged through a number of methods including discussions, dialogues, object recognition and recall, articulation, leadership skills and informal discussions with the child in his occupational area. There is no obligation in terms of 'passing' or 'failing'. Children are grouped according to skill levels which are different for different areas of learning.

The project is continually evaluated by the teachers and the community in periodic meetings held both at the Field Centre and at the village. Formal evaluation of the project has also been done by outside agencies such as the Regional College of Education and the NCERT⁶.

^{*} on p. 152

While formal evaluation is of importance in proving one's credibility to those outside, the SWRC firmly believes that participatory evaluation is essential and crucial to the project's own development and growth. This is not viewed as a structured or time bound process. This attitude enables the SWRC to continually revise and change in relation to the needs of the community, and the growth in awareness of the teachers. Participatory evaluation is in fact seen as a process which leads not only to growth in the specific area of education but as a means of relating schooling to village life. It also includes exploring alternatives to the SWRC programme for the continued existence of the night school.

Continuing Learning and Replication

In a recent participatory evaluation of the project, sixty teachers of twenty-nine night schools, specialist staff of the SWRC and outside participants sat together to look at problems relating to replicability and continuing education. Since the project has to be independent of the SWRC at some stage, there was much discussion as to how the night schools would react to the closing of the SWRC itself, and whether the schools could continue to run and how. Support from Government through funding emerged as one of the viable alternatives.

The interesting issue that emerged for discussion was one that related to the teachers' commitment to actively continue this process independent of other considerations. In the ultimate analysis, the replicability of the project depends on the acceptance of the need for schooling by the community and this acceptance manifesting itself in demands for facilities from government. The SWRC has in its own way reacted to the demands for development by supporting groups of young people in several districts in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Orissa. The concept of the night school as experimented with by Tilonia has been accepted by many of the SWRC sub-centres located in other areas. A total of about fifty schools are being run in Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh based on the same pattern with localised modifications.

Some of the pupils who have passed class V of the night school have been covered by other development activities of the SWRC. Some of them have been persuaded to take loans from the banks to buy goats and sheep, others have been trained in masonry work relating to sanitation and bio gas, some others have been trained in handpump installation and maintenance, and all of them continue to interact with the SWRC and the night schools in the village. Many of them come often to the night school to help the teacher and participate in group activities.

Comparative Costs

The actual running of the night schools works out to about Rs.10 per child per month. Viewed in relation to the amount of learning that the child gets, and if education is to be viewed seriously as the single largest input for development or social change, this seems a negligible amount.

As compared to the SWRC expenses, a Government primary school run at village Harmara near Tilonia has 276 pupils with 7 teachers who get a minimum take home pay of Rs.600. The total annual expenditure of the school is Rs.60,000. This works out to an approximate expenditure of Rs.217.39 per child.

Funding

Ideally the schools should be supported by the Government of India, or of Rajasthan, the state Government in whose jurisdiction the schools falls. Education in India is a State responsibility and the States are responsible for primary education. The variation in salaries between formal and non-formal teachers not only reflects the lack of understanding of the problem but also of the implicit evaluation by which the morning school which despite its failure to draw and retain children is given a pre-eminent position. The issue that arises is whether non-formal or alternative schools for under-privileged children are going to be viewed for all time as inferior or as requiring fewer inputs. A contradiction that emerges clearly is that on the one hand the non-formal or alternative school teacher is expected, though untrained, to use teaching aids and non-formal methods as well as identifying and using concepts from the environment but on the other hand that his skills as an educator are not recognised. This dilemma needs to be resolved in terms of the level of remuneration to the teacher, acceptance of the role of the night school in learning and development and a recognition of the teacher. The government and planners alike continue to raise questions about community participation and contribution in terms of financial support for the night schools. In a country like India where formal schooling is free in most States, the Government has already destroyed the notion of community contribution for schooling. In this context, it is very difficult for a night school to demand contributions in cash. The community provides space for the night schools, sometimes kerosene for the lamps, voluntary labour for building the school or contribution of produce from their land.

The project was initially funded by the NCERT. At the end of the project, government funds were not available and the project costs are now being raised from a British donor agency. In a recent meeting with the teachers, the scheme of assistance to voluntary organisations to universalise primary education mooted by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, was discussed. Though this means a fall in salary for the teachers and bringing down the expenditure of the Field Centres, the teachers are keen to procure government funds for the programme.

A Review

The SWRC night schools have so far been able to draw and retain children in the age group 6-14. But the number of girls attending the schools has not been enough. To stimulate interest in girls education, the SWRC has been working with mothers and grandmothers who take the decisions. The response has been slow. The mothers who are themselves illiterate, place a higher premium on boys' education. The boy is seen as a permanent member of the family and a future bread-winner. The girl is at best

a domestic help and a temporary member of the family who will eventually be married off. The motivation work with mothers has begun to achieve results through demands for girls' schooling, but the timing of the school and the nature of the curriculum may have to be different. The morning pre-schools which are run by women will be the focus of girls education in the future plans of the SWRC. The SWRC firmly believes that the teacher has to be a local man or woman and that they alone can bring children to the school. The ignorance of the adult has been identified as the main obstacle, and hence the SWRC has been working with women to make them literate and to educate them to manage the pre-schools.

The SWRC has been working with elementary education for children out of school with the intention of making education more relevant and thereby creating a demand for it from within the community. One of the important areas for attention has been the training of local youth and the transfer to them of skills and knowledge required to manage the night schools. The success of the project has not only been its ability to retain and develop its pupils, but its teachers as well. Talented teachers have grown to shoulder greater responsibility and offer leadership.

A Story and the Reasons Why

In most empirical observations of phenomena or in analyses of situations (case studies included), the "outside" presence does not often tell the whole story. Many of those who have been involved in activities within an identified community have found an interesting perceptual difference between those involved totally in the process and those who precipitate change. With this in mind a short narration by Lakshminarayan, one of the local participants in the project who has worked as a teacher, as a planner, and who is a respected member of the community, is presented.

Lakshminarayan's Story

"I am a resident of Phaloda, a village 2 kilometres from Tilonia. I was born into a family of priests and we have a village temple where I perform ceremonies. In my village, the main occupation is agriculture and cattle rearing. It is difficult to get water for the fields and for drinking. The land is unequally distributed. The cattle is owned by just a few people. About 60 per cent of the land and cattle belong to 10 per cent of the villagers. I do not own any land. The land that I till belongs to the temple. Social customs like funeral feasts and child marriage are strictly followed. These lead to never ending debts. We have to borrow money from local money lenders at high rates of interest.

In my village which is poor, there are farmers and herdsmen, some Rajputs (former ruling class), potters, weavers, leather workers, carpenters, priests, petty traders, and scheduled tribes. There is no social mixing between castes and this is also one of the reasons for poverty in my village. We have drinking wells (a separate one for each caste), a village tank which collects rain water for irrigation, and on the outskirts the village built of stone and lime some 15 years ago.

We have a formal morning school in our village. As a literate and responsible man in the community, I tried to encourage children to go to school. But I found that the children who went herding the cattle (theirs or others) or worked in the fields could not go to morning school. I started a class for children in the evening at the request of some parents.

Early years with SWRC

When the SWRC came to Tilonia in 1972, I met one of their social workers and this began my association with the SWRC as an adult literacy teacher. In 1974, when primary education was taken up as a major task of the SWRC, I began work as a teacher at the experimental school at Phaloda. In the initial years, I had my own doubts about the experiment. But when I got involved in the planning of the programme and attended meetings in Tilonia I was trained at the Regional College in Ajmer, in Tilonia, by the Indian Association of Pre-School Education and the NCERT, in New Delhi. I began to understand the value of non-formal methods for children who were first generation learners and who are frightened at the sight of a book. I also understood that teaching was the concern not only of the teacher but that parents and others in the village too should be used effectively for learning and teaching.

Primary Education in the Village

When I looked at my people and their children, I began to notice many things which had to be changed if we wanted to get all the children to go to school. The first thing we had to ensure was that school was run at a time convenient to the child. The child should be encouraged to feel confident when he enters the classroom. In a formal school, the first generation learner enters with a handicap. Everything that is of value inside a classroom springs from an alien culture. In my classroom, the children and I began by exchanging views about the village. The syllabus was of help only to me, as a teacher. I could not use the syllabus to teach the child. The environment is the most important source for learning concepts and I learnt to use it. The village elders and talented youth have to realise that they have a role in the school, that it can be for all a process of learning together. For instance, in my village, we seldom ate vegetables. But when I started teaching, we planted vegetables in the kitchen garden. We even dug a well. The village slowly got interested in the garden. Not only did the children eat the vegetables, but their parents began to see this was something which could bring them money. Now the village exports tomatoes. I see the night school as an important source of learning for the future generation; as places which will prepare children to be good citizens and to work together for a common purpose and teach them to use resources and facilities. In order to build up this confidence in the children the teacher should belong to the village to enable him to have easy access to the community in which he works.

The Teacher

I am a village teacher. I have only a Higher Secondary certificate and no formal training. When I first became involved with the primary education programme, I had to face gossip and mistrust from those of my villagers who had a higher degree of formal education and training than I. They thought it would not be possible for me to "compete" with the urban trained school teacher. Even I did not think that I could do so. After all, my knowledge was so limited. In the first six months of my training as a teacher, I learnt that I could be a competent teacher. At the end of the experimental phase, three years after the school had begun, I was willing to face evaluation by an impartial committee from any school in my region.

When later on I ceased to be a teacher and got involved with planning for primary education in the SWRC, I realised the important role that night school could play in making learning related to the realities of life. I came to understand what the word development meant and I saw my own part in it. I think that the night school is where development starts. As a one-time teacher if you ask me what is education I think I would say it is a process by which a child can create space around him by being able to see various ways of doing things and judging which is best for him (or her) and the life around. This is, to my mind, what development is about. It is difficult to fragment the nature of thought and action at the level of human beings. I am different at different times. I am a teacher, a learner, a priest, a development worker, a husband, a father, a responsible member in my community and I play different roles at different times. What I do in one area is definitely influenced by what I learn in the others. If it is so for myself, it is so for a programme, for an organisation, or for the country. At the level of my work there can be no success without combining the different roles demanded of me. To be relevant, the night school has therefore to prepare children not only to read and write but more important, to understand rural situations and look for alternative ways of tackling problems in the village. In this process, the school teacher and all of us in Tilonia who work specifically for health, education, agriculture and animal husbandry, poultry, rural crafts, women, intermediate technology and pre-schooling, see the night school as a point of common interest in building an awareness of our situations and why things are what they are.

In the last eight years that I have been at the SWRC, the programme has grown. From three experimental schools in three villages, we are now running twenty-nine night schools in as many villages. We have six groups of schools in a Field Centre and there are five such centres. The work in agriculture, education, pre-schooling, health and women conducted by these centres is co-ordinated by one person. I am now a Field Centre Co-ordinator. I now live in a village called Saleemabad, north west of Tilonia.

Our School

Our children wander in after an early supper at about 6 or 7 in the evening. Most of them have had a tiring day herding cattle or tending babies. The first thing they do is to group themselves on the floor around a kerosene lamp and have a chat.

Generally we have about fifty children with two teachers. The children are gradually grouped according to their learning skills and their areas of interest. While we concentrate and start discussions (maybe even have a smaller session with one or two groups), the rest are kept occupied with simple learning aids.

One day, not too long ago, I went to a school in Thal village. It was about 7.30 in the evening. The boys had already formed themselves into various groups, one of which was working on problems related to arithmetic. I sat down and started talking to the children. Mangilal looked a bit troubled. He looked after his uncle's fifty head of cattle and took them five miles away from home looking for fodder trees (kejri) and a bit of green. Sometimes when there was a growing field of corn or gram, millets or wheat which was unguarded, he might let his cattle in for a brief while. What would then happen? Was it right to let his animals graze on standing crops? And what would happen if he was caught?

The boy explained that his father had taken a loan from the village co-operative. Years later when he could not repay it, he was threatened with legal action and he had to borrow money from his uncle to repay it. His uncle lent his father the money at a prohibitive interest rate of 25 per cent per annum. His father could not even pay the interest and in return for waiving the interest, the boy was bonded. In the discussion that followed the implications of bonded labour and the alternatives that were available were discussed. What emerged was a discovery by the boy. He could seek another job in which perhaps he would earn enough money to repay the interest and yet save money for himself. All of us knew that there was a minimum wage, and this idea seemed practical.

Two weeks later, I went back to the same village and found that this boy had persuaded his father to allow him to work independently. Part of his wages went as payment to his uncle and the rest was used by his family.

We encourage the community to take part in the life of the school. Various local officials have visited the school; they have explained the procedure for revenue collection and details of land record maintenance, the value of trees, the cross breeding of cows and use of hybrid seeds. Methods of banking have been explained by village experts. The SWRC personnel have visited the school and have explained simple technological methods thus getting the children interested in getting to know more. Soil samples have been taken for examination in the Tilonia laboratories and tested.

The children have made visits to institutions in the community. At a bank they were shown what business was done at each counter and how loans were given. They were taken to the railway station and the

functioning of the railways and the duties of passengers in making the railways more effective were explained. At the post office, they learnt about letters, money-orders and registration, and were fascinated by the telephone and the telegraph machine. Some children wrote themselves postcards, posted them, and were thrilled to receive them the next day. Visits to a demonstration farm were particularly important to create interest in new farming methods. In all these visits, the children learnt many things that they did not know. I myself learnt a lot from these visits. Even though I had passed my Higher Secondary examination, I was not confident about filling in a money order form and was scared to talk on a telephone. I find from my experience that in my school, among children, fear of the unknown is a major block in learning. I feel that giving new experiences is important for the child's growth but they must be given at the rate the child can accept.

Our Training

The first thing we do after we have been chosen as a teacher is to go to Tilonia and spend 15 days learning many new ideas and carefully questioning accepted beliefs and ways of doing things. We learn to question those whom we had traditionally accepted as more learned whether they be experts from the cities, government officers or the social elite. It is a difficult process. In the first few days of our training, we find it awkward to question and contradict the college graduates in Tilonia. We gradually got to know that learning is a continuous process, that the resource persons or specialists may have various areas of strengths but they also have weaknesses. They may have academic knowledge, but we know more than they do about the community. Without our co-operation, no action is possible. We learn to share our experiences. We realise that in the classroom we will be in the same position as the resource person. A child who comes to learn from us in the classroom may very often know much more than we do.

After the fifteen days at Tilonia, we go back and survey the village. We identify the number of children in the age group 6-14, the number in and out of school, the educational and social and financial status of the family and its occupation. We then come back to Tilonia for the second half of the training.

We are given a syllabus or a programme of lessons and the underlying ideas of each area of knowledge are explained to us. We learn to use the surroundings as the main teaching aid, and use the children themselves and their experience as the main starting points for learning. To help us teach, we prepare projects. For instance, we have a project on the Panchayat which is our village council. The Panchayat is then used as a means of teaching a child about political status and social rights while he is also learning history (feudal history of Rajasthan and present democracy), geography (village size, area, directions), agricultural patterns, the planting and care of trees, health and sanitation, arithmetic and language. If there are things we do not understand or have a problem related to the classroom, we get help from the weekly meetings that we have for teachers at the Field Centre.

Our visits to the villages are friendly occasions for discussing many things, apart from the main purpose, which is to see how the children are progressing. We therefore make use of all village situations to talk about other ways of doing or looking at things. We meet the fathers and mothers informally at the village tea stall, marriage feasts and village fairs. We also visit them in their homes. It is then that we talk about the attendance of their child in school and other related problems.

Teacher and I

It is true that the gap between me and the teachers is small. We have the same background and share the same culture. But I have changed. Sometimes it is difficult for me to transfer my enthusiasm to my newer colleagues. Some of the new recruits who are products of the traditional system continue to look at the school as a means of passing exams so as to get better jobs. They are uneasy about teaching through aids. However, because they have had training and have discussions on all matters relating to village life, they have now become as teachers more confident. These sessions of the teachers every month are very useful. Once every six months, we have a workshop. In this workshop, all the teachers have to present a paper or conduct a session. When they attended a NCERT workshop together with primary school teachers in Tilonia in 1980 we found that the night school teachers were in fact more alive to problems and much better able to think and speak more clearly than the others. They as a group and as individuals began to see that learning and formal certification need not necessarily be connected. The confidence in themselves and in their own ability to react, think and express themselves is the first step in making the teachers participate actively in the learning process.

I sometimes wonder whether the teachers trained in non-formal methods will lose their skills if they are not in constant touch with small learning groups. It is not the size of the entire programme that decides whether or not they are good teachers. It is the care that is given to the individual person that is so important. So long as a small group of people can talk things over and work together, the programme will continue to be a success. Teaching materials and other requirements could easily be provided. But the effort of Tilonia has been to make it possible for each individual teacher to find out for himself what needs to be taught. The learning process is determined by children's needs and the teacher's own choice of methods."

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TILONIA : AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

Table 1, showing the data relating to teachers in the SWRC Night Schools in Silora Block

Name of the Field Centre	No. of Night Schools	No. of Teachers	Age Group		Caste	Qualification			Occupation				
			18-35	35 & above		Others	School/ Higher Secondary	Higher Secondary/BA	BA/ above	Agri- culture holder	House- holder	Students	Others
TILONIA	5	11	11	-	1	10	8	2	1	5	3	-	3
SALEEMABAD	6	10	9	1	2	8	10	-	-	9	-	1	-
CHOTANARAINA	6	13	12	1	3	10	13	-	-	10	-	2	1
KOTRI	5	9	8	1	2	7	9	-	-	9	-	-	-
KADAMPURA	7	13	11	2	3	10	12	1	-	12	-	1	-

Table 2, showing village population, children's population in the age group 6-14 and the number attending formal day school and the SWRC night school in 26 villages in Silora Block

Field Centres	No. of Night Schools and Villages	Total Population of the village	No. of children in the age group 6-14	No. of children in		No. of children out of school (6-14)
				Government	SWRC Night Schools	
TILONIA	5	10,268	1,658	639	281	738
SALEEMABAD	5	3,852	1,018	189	211	618
CHOTANARAINA	6	9,841	2,223	637	288	1,298
KOTRI	5	3,603	1,186	229	262	694
KADAMPURA	5	3,381	697	126	286	285