



Muskaan Annual Report

WHAT ARE WE WORKING TOWARDS?

Education Implementation at the Ground Level

We continuously strive to provide quality, relevant, and contextual education to children of marginalised communities. Through our approach which has taken into account the needs of the children and their communities, we have been successful in making this a reality through a package of interventions and adapting ourselves.

We do this by;

- Running our current school
- Having residential educational facilities for children
- Facilitating youth who have dropped out/are studying in Class 9 or so in their education journeys
- Building capacity of community youth leaders
- Starting libraries and learning centers in bastis

Children's Publications

In the past decade, as we saw that there is very little children's literature representing the marginalised communities in our country, we began our foray into this area as we believe that stories affirm the reader's identity and also enable understanding others, thus functioning as mirrors and glasses. Stories we have published depict the lives and culture of the communities we work with, and have primarily been written/told by community members and our students.

Advocacy around Tribal Education

The importance of tribal education spans across education and tribal rights. By integrating indigenous values, valuable perspectives can be gained for today's society. Teaching methods that embrace multiple languages should acknowledge the mother tongue as a beneficial asset for learning other languages. A tribal education initiative should encompass colonisation, history, trauma, literature, nature, and other subjects to enhance self-expression and identity.

We see our work in this direction growing in the form of -

- Documenting classroom practices,
- Publishing around various aspects of Multilingual Pedagogy and Tribal Education
- Building/contributing to existing networks on multilingual pedagogy
- Training teachers
- Organising seminars on these themes to build awareness and energy around this cause
- Designing courses for Universities providing degrees in Education and advocating for their incorporation

WHAT ARE WE WORKING TOWARDS?

Field Interventions and Advocacy for the Rights of Denotified Tribal Groups

Our chance engagement with Pardhi children who were apprehended and abused by police while waste-picking has impacted the course of the organisation quite significantly. It has helped us understand the state, marginalisation, the limitations of NGOs, and the possible trajectories of communities into the future. We feel that we have the experience and attitude that is needed to work with these groups and also realise that this work is critically needed to fill in the gaps of other groups and state interventions, with the hope of changing and contributing to the course of 'development' within these groups. We do this through research and report writing, capacity building, and advocacy.

Support for Community-led groups

As more community-led groups evolve through current efforts, we will be taking a back-step in some community efforts and strengthening the groups/organisations such as Majal, Lahar, and more. This would imply primarily training and facilitating networking. Fundraising and vision building with these groups are considered part of the training inputs, and we see ourselves not limited to training but supporting them in this effort where/when needed.

Mental Health Amidst Indigenous Communities

As an outcome of the trauma experienced both directly at the hand of various entities and inter-generational trauma, addictions, suicides, unnatural deaths of other forms, high rates of drop-outs are part of the lives of denotified tribes and many urban poor populations.

To tackle these, we work on-

- Implementing art therapies, including movement therapy, in classrooms and communities
- Organising workshops on parenting, gender, and understanding and reflecting on personal traumas with community members
- Building a base of community mental health workers and curriculum based on practice
- Networking with other groups for expansion of learning and a voice on Mental Health responses in schools and community settings
- Interventions around Violence and Suicide with affected people
- Research including Action Research and thereby sharing of learnings on these issues
- Consolidations of our Learnings into Mental Health Training Programs in other spaces, such as universities

HOW DO WE DO THIS?

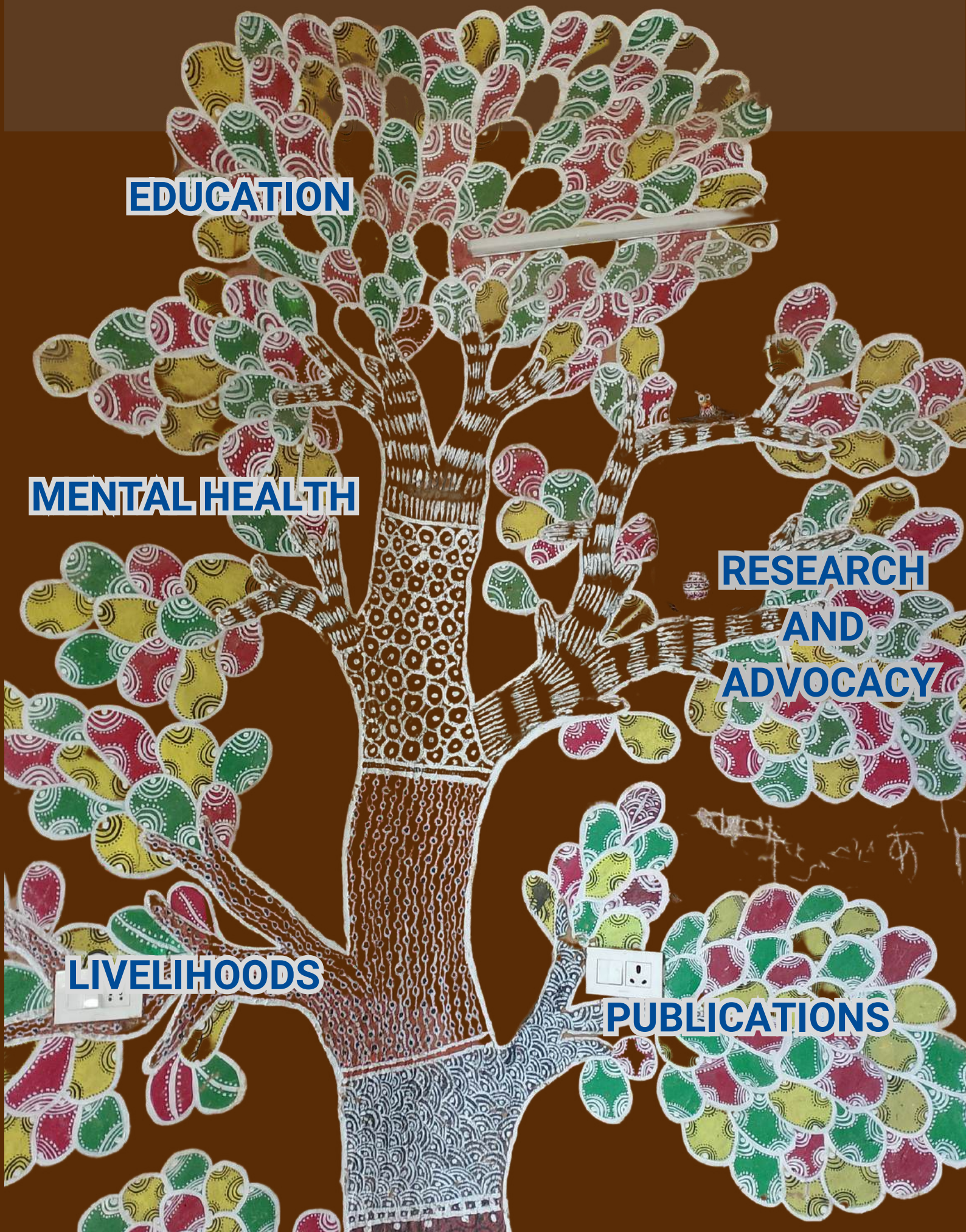
EDUCATION

MENTAL HEALTH

**RESEARCH
AND
ADVOCACY**

LIVELIHOODS

PUBLICATIONS



Jeevan Shiksha Pahal:

“This is not a school, this is a home!” - Jeenu (a young student who now runs our theater programs)

‘Jeevan Shiksha Pahal’, is an alternate school designed to be a safe space for children and youth from marginalised communities such as Pardhi, Gond, Kanjar, and Muslim, among others. Children are taught their curriculum through practical exercises, stories, songs amongst other mediums. There is a special focus in teaching children using their language, and giving them a space to explore subjects in their mother tongue.

They walk, play, work, talk, examine, care, question, act, sing, create, analyze, sew, express and feel as they live through this space. Children are distributed in groups as per their learning levels, so you may see a 14 year old studying with a 9 year old, or any such combination. But this is a fluid group and they may move from one group to the other during the year or sometimes, by choice of their activities. Our children come from extremely difficult circumstances, many belong to nomadic tribal communities and hence have not been in a space long enough to complete their studies. The fluid classroom system encourages children who have dropped out of school to return and complete their academic journeys.

Our school is registered from class 1 - 8 and we continue to support children beyond that through the NIOS schooling system.

Residential Educational Space

Children from DNT communities come from extremely vulnerable backgrounds. Young adults, especially young girls are pressured into early marriages from both families and community panchayats. Girls are sold for amounts that can range from 1 lakh to 4 lakhs and are given no autonomy and minimum agency in their choice of partners. Once married they are expected to work for their families whether its through waste picking, or selling alcohol or even through dance. Young boys are also pressured into early marriages within the communities. Many children and young adults have also lost their parents in traumatic manners, such as accidents or custodial violence and are left without any kind of safe space.

In spite of these harsh realities, children still have bright ambitions and dreams for themselves for which they are willing to make huge sacrifices. To support these children and to give a safe space where they can be children, we have started our hostel, which is especially there for young girls. Many children and young adults have come to Muskaan and currently reside in the hostel space and are working relentlessly to achieve their dreams.



Learning Centers:

Children have experiences being called “thieves” or forced to sit separately from the remaining classes amongst other incidents. Students were not allowed to speak in their mother tongue, and their community name was used as a slur. Additionally, most children also work alongside their studying to help support their families who live in extreme poverty. This in turn has forced many students out of school. We have established 18 Basti Centers for children belonging to denotified communities to support them in continuing further studies. The centres are run by people belonging to the community who act as role models to students and are sensitive to their context. In some bastis, a space has been given by the communities, others run them in the maidan or any open space in the area. Classes are conducted in the local language and the lessons are designed in a manner to make them practically relevant to their everyday lives. We aim to use alternate mediums to engage students in learning. Classes are conducted regularly focusing on helping children prepare for higher education and their foundational learning.

Library Centers

Many children in Bastis do not have access to books, especially stories that represent the everyday realities of their communities. In schools, children may have access to 4 or 5 books, which get used throughout the academic year. These books do not have many pictures, are simply black and white, and do not incite the urge to read amongst young children. Reading books is an interesting and alternative medium to introduce topics of many subjects and to support the socio-emotional learning of children. We have curated a collection of books that include books written by students from similar backgrounds, as well as books by Eklavya, Tulika, Pratham Books, and Parag amongst others. Through our libraries, we attempt to make reading fun by conducting activities like read-aloud, and book talks and using theater as a medium to represent the stories that have been read. We conduct baal melas to engage children and parents in our library space. Important events and holidays are celebrated in the libraries. It also becomes a space to discuss current affairs. Through our libraries we are attempting to foster a love for reading, exploring new ideas, and reflecting on inner thoughts. We are also working with children to help them develop their narratives, stories, and drawings which represent their everyday





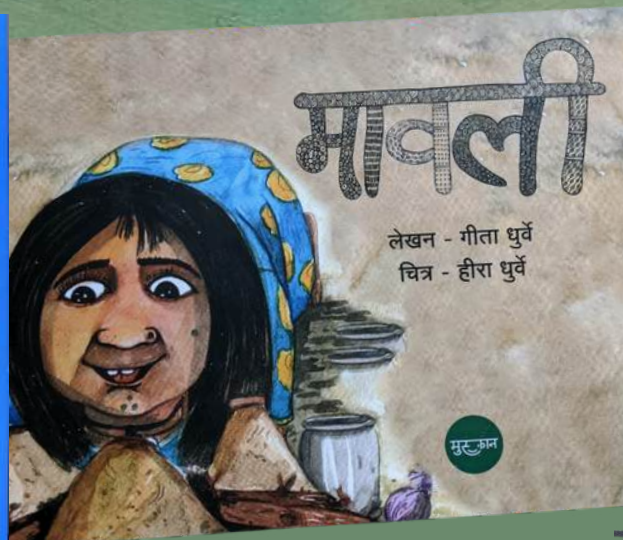
Higher Education

All of our children are first-generation learners and many are the first in their communities who are pursuing higher education opportunities beyond class 12. In our 25 years, we have observed without the correct support, children wind up back in the streets. This also de-motives others from pursuing higher education. We see it as our responsibility to support them beyond class 12. This is done through career counselling, supporting them in preparation for entrance exams, and through accessing scholarships. Our students have gone on to become the first in their communities to become lawyers, social workers, artists etc. They in turn are inspiring children within their bastis to pursue their dreams.

Publications

A story book works as a mirror as well as a sliding glass, in the sense that children feel affirmed when they are reflected in a book. Rural children, children migrating with parents, waste picking children, working children, Adivasi and Dalit children don't see themselves in textbooks, or in the classrooms, in story books, animation series, children's films or audio materials, alienating them from formal studies as also reducing their interest in reading/ listening cultures and sustains the narrative of their communities who see themselves as excluded. One of the strategies that can address this gap is building deep diversity in Children's literature.

Our books focus on children's lives, reflecting their daily lives, and experiences. The stories which are co-created with children from the communities is written incorporating the language and the cultural practices of people from within their community. The stories range from addressing social issues, showing children's resilience, questioning gender biases to colourful anecdotes and stories that reflect the everyday reality of an indigenous child. Our stories have been translated in several languages and have travelled across the country from book stores in Bangalore to libraries in Assam.





Mental Health

Our communities have experienced violence at various levels, from institutional entities such as the police or government school systems, or violence within the community at the hands of the panchayat or at the hands of the husband or parent. These traumatic experiences have been passed down from one generation to the next and have resulted in a cycle of violence, self-harm, substance abuse amongst other issues. Cases of death by suicide have been increasing rapidly, especially amongst youth from the Pardhi communities. There are many reports of children as young as 10 attempting or dying by suicide.

To address the mental health crisis arising in the basti, we have trained people from within the community and within the basti to act as Barefoot Counsellors and provide mental health and psycho-social support to people. This is done through individual and group-based counselling sessions. We have adopted dance movement therapy as a medium for people to understand the physical impact of trauma on the body and to release the trauma in a safe space through expression, art and movement based activities.

We are also working towards documenting and understanding communities experiences of violence and trauma that supports us in further developing our intervention.

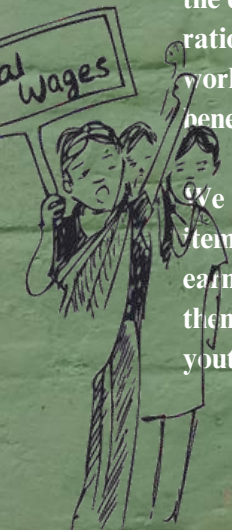
Shahri Mazdoor Sangath

Traditionally people from DNT communities survived through a range of nomadic practices that included hunting within the forests, or selling alcohol amongst other activities. Presently, the lack of educational opportunities have resulted in lack of livelihoods opportunities. In most families, the women is the primary earner of the household, that is done through waste collection. Children also accompany their mothers, carrying sacks the size of their bodies, travelling long distances, carrying scrap and getting little to no returns to survive.

Children were forced to drop out because they had to support their families through waste picking or begging. We realised that without supporting families in accessing livelihoods, we would not be able to support children in accessing higher educational opportunities. Following the first COVID lockdown in 2020, Muskaan started to support two groups as collective enterprises. The first group, based in the Pardhi basti in Ehsaan Nagar, focused on crafting handmade diaries, while the other, comprised of youth who reside in Muskaan's hostels, specialised in handmade soaps..

Beginning from the lockdown, we also started small-scale interventions to assist community members in the establishment of micro-enterprises. Individuals received loans to kickstart their ventures such as ration shops, vegetable stalls, or phone repair services. Shahri Mazdoor Sangathan, which has been working on livelihoods at the community-level, played a crucial role in identifying and following up with beneficiaries.

We have also started a stitching centre in the basti where women can make bags, pouches and other items. We support them in connecting to external markets wherein they can make increase their earnings. Both groups have been successfully turning in profits from the sale of their products, which are then distributed amongst the groups as either financial support for their families, or as savings for the youth



Youth Leadership

Azad Jugnoo Club

After years of discussions regarding the agency and welfare of children, Azad Jugnoo Club was formally established in 2016. Our work began with organising meetings with the children attending our learning centers to address their grievances. We got to learn that they needed a space to put forth their issues themselves, and have discussions about what they were learning in the centers. Children's participation was considered paramount and we started taking steps to provide them with a space where we could collaborate with them and move forward to take up their agendas. The children were proactive in everything from choosing the name of the club to mapping their bastis to gain knowledge. Some of their initial concerns were a lack of a playing ground, violence in schools, and verbal and physical violence that they would be subjected to in the bastis. The Club organises regular inter-basti visits guided by facilitators, where children get to meet their peers and have discussions on their respective bastis' issues. They learn whom to approach to get their voices heard concerning matters such as the unavailability of garbage trucks, water, and toilets, and how to eradicate the problem of alcoholism. They share their own experiences and guide each other on how to solve problems at the community level. Since the Club started, its members have released Bal Akhbar (Children's Newspapers) periodically to help address some of their difficulties. They had also consolidated their voices in a book titled Bastiyon Ki Awaaz (Voice of the Bastis) in 2017, and are currently working on the third edition of the book. The Club members create and perform plays in different bastis to spread awareness; some of the recent plays have delved into the issues of cybercrime and maintaining cleanliness.

At present, the Club is operating with 23 Bal Samuh (Children's Clubs) with over 800 members. The members of Azad Jugnoo Club, along with other children's clubs in Bhopal, are currently in the process of forming a Children's Federation of Bhopal.

Majal

Majal is a collective of Pardhi youth from across the bastis that work towards the welfare of their community. The group began to meet after the death by suicide of Tinti Bai, a young Pardhi woman, due to multiple cases of custodial violence and torture in 2021. They began working in the bastis to address the issues identified through their own unique approaches and interest. Jinu works with young adults through theater, Sanish has been using dance movement therapy and art-based activities for mental health, Tasvir works on legal advice, Abhishek through frisbee and sports, and Narendra through film making. Each work with others to support young Pardhi members in achieving their dreams. Majal as an organization was formally registered this year. Majal is a Pardhi word that references the preparation that the community does before travelling from one location to another. It also denotes the struggles to reach towards a specific space. The idea is that there is a collective dream and vision that these young adults have for the Pardhi community and the organization is the support to achieving these goals. Majal youth leaders are actively involved in working towards education, advocacy, documentation and research.

Lahar

Lahar is a youth collective of the Pardhi community that works in Harda, that is towards the outskirts of Bhopal. Lahar means moving forward collectively, leaving no person behind. The members of Lahar engage with people through libraries, village learning frisbee amongst other activities. They especially focus towards encouraging young Pardhi girls to pursue higher educational opportunities, as well as to stop child marriages in the region.



HIGHLIGHTS

APRIL 2023

There have been consistent and repetitive instances of illegal detaining and inflicting violence on the Kanjar community. It was, however, the first time that a Kanjar community in the area had come out to protest against the persistent police violence and harassment that they face. It was a mass protest and several people from three villages of Kanjar community were supported to submit an official complaint that would keep the instances of harassment on official record.

A ward-level meeting was organised with women from three bastis to address the increasing cases of violence within the communities, and to understand how to access justice and file complaints. In the meeting, women were made aware of their legal rights and what constitutes gender-based violence. They were also given approaches to addressing these cases and filing complaints. Owing to the historical and social violence experienced, many women are scared to approach police officers to file cases in the thana. The URJA DESK has been an initiative that has been launched to provide a safe space for women to go and to file their complaints. A women helpline number has also been shared across the bastis, which can be used to call the Urja Desk directly and file a complaint in case of any atrocity or violence.

A meeting was held with the Panchayat Members of the Gond community in Gandhi Nagar. The Panchayat would especially target women who were 16 years of age, who were having relationships with people from outside their caste. These women were tied and beaten in public spaces and were excommunicated with the community. The families were forced to pay huge fines to the Panchayat which would bring them into crippling debt. Several meetings have been conducted with Panchayat members to address this issue, through the police didi meeting program. They were counselled against these practices, and warned that if they continue these violent crimes against women in the communities, legal cases would be filed against them. After a great deal of follow up with the Panchayats by our sangathan members, the cases of atrocities have been greatly reduced.



HIGHLIGHTS

APRIL 2023

A session was done in Ehsaan Nagar to understand their experiences of childhood trauma, who were of the ages between 15-18. Young adults shared experiences of violence both within the space of their home and in public in the hands of police officers. Ehsaan Nagar as a basti has seen countless cases of suicide, many amongst young adults within the community which can be rooted in experiences of violence and trauma.

May 2023

As part of leadership and perspective building workshops with DNT youth, a second in the series was centred around understanding issues of Gender and Constitution. From May 14 to May 19, a discussion was conducted with Madari, Bedia, Kanjar, Bagri, Pardhi, and Sapera youth on the topic of gender. The discussions revolved around exploring how societal norms influence our perception of gender roles, process of socialisation, gender fluidity, consent and agency, the rights of sex workers, constitutional beliefs and values and several other aspects were opened up.

There have been increasing cases of violence in police stations and other spaces towards children. This includes forms of sexual assault and violence as well. Members of Shahri Mazdoor Sangathan who work towards addressing custodial violence in the bastis organised A Police Didi in Kamla Nagar and Gandhi Nagar police stations. During the session, they discussed ways to remedy the ongoing violence against children and further discuss on collaborative efforts with police authorities to reduce instance of violence and atrocities against children. The women also held discussions in two government schools- Sasaki Vidya Saraswati School and Excellence School to discuss safe sex, understanding safe touch and unsafe touch, and share spaces that a child could access incase of any violence against children. As a part of the collaborative efforts of the Police Didi program, “Naari Shakti” cards were issued to the women so that they could leverage police support as they continued with their work in the bastis





HIGHLIGHTS

June 2023

Workshop on Children's Agency: In June, we conducted a five-day workshop with our team members and representatives from other social sector organisations to explore children's agency. Over the course of the workshop, we delved into defining agency and participation, discussed ways to support agency in a real sense, and explored the possibilities of inculcating leadership from a young age, and supporting the collectivization of children.

Members of youth groups and the Azad Jugnoo Club regularly arranged for learning and exposure visits for children and youth who had previously dropped out. Some of the sites where the visits were conducted were police stations and SIP units in Bhopal. The process to re-enroll them in schools has also begun. In June, there was also a meeting of children's clubs in Bhopal, collaborating with safe city partners in the working area, for the purpose of creating a federation of all the children's clubs in Bhopal.

Our Education team member Dhani, along with three of our students Gudiya, Vidya, and Rehan went to Himachal Pradesh from June 15 to 19, where Sambhaavna Institute of Public Policy and Politics had organised a workshop titled 'Vajrasuchi- Samajik Nyay Par Karyashala'. Through the 5-day period, they had group discussions on the caste system, Manusmriti, the Bhagwat Gita, the harms of caste and how to abolish the caste system, reservation, and read the works of Ambedkar and Phule.

Another big highlight for the year was that a big group of first generation learners from the Pardhi and Gond community cleared their 12th board examinations with flying colours. A group of 23 young students passed their 12th and are now pursuing their college from institutes like Azim Premji University, Makhanlal Chaturvedi University for Journalism, Career College of Law, Barkatullah University.



HIGHLIGHTS

July 2023

Jeevan Shiksha Pahal : At Jeevan Shiksha Pahal, our school run at the ‘Mitti ka Ghar’ (Mud-Brick Home), our students welcomed the onset of the monsoons in high spirits. Throughout July, the school focused on the theme of rain, dedicating more than a month to exploring it through various means. Shanti Aaji and Kochai Aaji shared their traditional songs and knowledge about the significance of rain, and students from senior classes sought to understand environmental challenges and drought in Maharashtra. An insightful session on diseases that spread during the monsoons was conducted by Dr. Seema, Dr. Mohan, and Juned, who work in the Public Health Course at Azim Premji University, Bhopal. On 18th July, a session dedicated to the theme of rain featured an exhibition created by the children, featuring their artwork and poems.

Mental Health: Our children undertake many roles, as children, caretakers, and work in many roles, as sellers or waste pickers. Children have experienced many degrees of in their various spaces and their various roles which has resulted in agitation, aggression, and mood swings. : To understand and provide the necessary support, Mental Health Team Coordinator Savita has been undertaking weekly mental health sessions with students who reside in our hostels, and children across 11 bastis since July. The sessions were designed to provide a safe space for children to reflect and understand their emotions, and develop a coping mechanism to the various trauma experienced. Children also learned to identify techniques to relieve their anger and develop alternate coping mechanisms to relieve their stress. For example: instead of hitting another child, the child takes a moment to take a breath, and drink water.

August 2023

Vimukta Divas: 31st August is celebrated as Vimukti Diwas every year, in honour of the repeal of the stigmatising Criminal Tribes Act in 1952. Members of the Pardhi community travelled from Harda, Panna, Khandwa, and Sehore, to join their fellow community members in reinforcing the demand for ST categorisation for Pardhis. We have been working to make the process of getting documents easier for community members and despite structural issues), in the past year, we helped over () by streamlining the process to avail or correct required documents. As part of these efforts hundreds of people from the aforementioned villages signed an application with a robust demand for ST categorisation and availing caste certificates. This was handed over to leaders of the state government and the leaders of the opposition as well. Education and equal opportunities for dignified life has been a long standing demand of the Pardhi community across the state.





HIGHLIGHTS

MH X Gender: A session was done specifically with the girls of the hostel to understand their desires. What are the things that are important to me, precious to me that I need? Think about it individually and not from other spaces. When children drew in the papers, they drew very beautiful pictures, black salwar that can be paired with many kurtas, a chadda that could be used more regularly, I want my mothers' love. M stays in the hostel, and wished her mum would visit her more often. A child who lost her mother wished she could feel her mom's love. We cannot understand a children's need as an adult, so this session was to support us in uncovering their needs and to facilitate a space for them to share their needs/thoughts.

September 2023

Frisbee teams are mixed gendered to offer both girls and boys equal opportunities to play and engage with physical activity that is typically a male dominated space. Many young women from the communities were drawn to frisbee as a sport and have even drawn strength from frisbee to challenge everyday patriarchal structures and have even asserted their right to play as well as to pursue their studies. Youth from Majal, a collective of Pardhi youth who are now advocating for their community, who have taken to playing frisbee both recreationally and competitively, went to Mundikhedi to play frisbee in September. A camp was organised with concerted efforts to engage the children of the area who displayed palpable excitement with the game, and many were enticed to continue their endeavours with frisbee. With over 200 children and young people in Bhopal, Berasia, Harda, Khandwa and Mundikhedi engaging with Ultimate frisbee in their daily routines, a core team of players - Flying Teetars have been instrumental in organising local tournaments, participating in state and national tournaments held in Lucknow, Surat and Delhi as well. Simultaneously, they have been exposed to the game in different spaces such as The ANT in Assam for an extended training.



HIGHLIGHTS

September 2023

In the series of Youth leadership workshops, from September 25th to September 29th, we organised a third of its kind workshop as a part of our work with the “I Am” Collective. Participants came from different DNT communities that include Madari, Pardhi, Kanjar, Banjara, Baawri, Gond, from various states including Rajasthan, Gujarat, as well as other parts of Madhya Pradesh such as Harda, Berasia, Khandwa and Bhopal. Our collective histories and identity was the focus of the first phase of the leadership workshop, while the second one focussed around Gender and Sexuality as well as constitutional values in our individual and collective lives. The third round focussed on the trauma and the intergenerationality of it that has built a legacy of traumatising impacts stemming from the historical and contemporary oppression. We tried to identify and trace it in our individual lives and then tried to understand it in different institutional spaces like schools and universities. Violence, discrimination, lack of love and sense of belonging has kept us away from any social or cultural or economic mobility, we could sense that in different ways. Activities like ‘making our faces’ helped in acknowledging the trauma that has been sitting in different parts of our bodies; things like movement therapy sessions and healing helped us in navigating through these difficult but important dialogues. Deconstructing our ideas around love and understanding the ‘toxic’, ‘traumatic’ as different from the authentic sense of ‘love’. Challenging our elders’ orthodox constructs that stem from structures like tribal council is essential, but abandoning or distancing the self from our elders may not be a way to heal ourselves is what we were realising. Crucial aspects from the works of Suzanne Metholt and bell hooks were discussed. We also went around the soothing places around the city like Van Vihaar, Kerva Dam, Lake, Museum, where we explored some forms of healing that we can seek from such spaces as well.

To facilitate a better understanding of other de-notified tribes, including their history and culture, we took the students of Jeevan Shiksha Pahal to visit three settlements of the Kanjar community in Berasia, namely Taravali, Karariya, and Dhekpur, on 26th September 2023. The students conversed with the elders of the settlements, and documented the conversations to preserve knowledge. They came to learn of the history of the Kanjar community, their creation myths, the gods they worship, and how they came to live in Berasia after getting land grants during the time of the Bhopal Riyasat. They learnt of the community’s difficulties with respect to physical infrastructure and police violence. They also visited the nearby school, which is only up to primary classes. There they got to see the harsh realities of education for the local students, where the standard of education is not up to par. The purpose of the visit was twofold: to help the students learn about the local communities, and engage with the children there and inspire them to continue with their education.







HIGHLIGHTS

October 2023

The play 'Guthli: Ek Ehsaas' was performed for the first time at Eklavya on 6th October. Created and performed by the theatre troupe Nazre, and based on the story 'Guthli Can Fly' by Kanak Shashi, the play is about a transgender girl named Guthli. She wants, and tries, to live as her authentic self in a world that only sees her as Gitthu and doesn't understand her at all. Taking inspiration from the children's book Guthli Can Fly, the play incorporates personal narratives and everyday stories of students from trans communities. To truly understand the social stigmas associated with gender identities, male students dressed in sarees and female students dressed in shirts and pants and they took a walk in the outskirts. These experiences supported the development of the script. The play was conceptualized and developed by the students. In the performance, many male students took female parts and visa versa as a form of solidarity. The play was followed around a discussion on gender identity and the traumas experienced by members of trans communities.

We worked with women belonging to historically economically and socially marginalized communities as a part of the Ujjiyar Gender Fellowship. Women who were selected for the fellowship were those who were forced out of educational spaces but are very courageous and continue to have big dreams to support others in the community. 14 women participated in the fellowship training, with a residential training that included writing as well as collecting information through photo stories and recordings (in case people experienced difficulty in writing). These research projects raised issues of the community, from a gendered perspective. Mala from the Bediya community did a study titled "Pyaar Mein Bandhan," while young Mona from the Gond community research on the "Shaadi Mein Anand" boldly exploring questions and experiences of women and pleasure.

In the middle of October, we held a 5-day training program for teachers who are working at the basti level learning centers. This was done to elevate the teaching skills of teachers who are dedicated to working with underserved communities. Over the workshop, the facilitators were trained on how to teach language and math to children using games, poetry, and activities. They were encouraged to teach languages using the whole language approach, where children are first taught sentences they are already familiar with, and then the words are broken down into letters, which are used to teach more words. The teachers were also trained to make flashcards which would facilitate the students to learn words using pictures. The idea is to develop innovative methods to engage children in the classroom



HIGHLIGHTS

October

In October 2023, specific communities' narratives are still absent from mainstream media. Renowned artists and filmmakers Shefali Jain and Maheen Mirza organized a workshop named "Mitti ka Ghar". Drawing inspiration from Tasvir Parmar's tale 'The Pardhi Rule', they integrated aspects of Kanjar children's daily lives into the stop-motion animation film 'Ek Raasta Jungle Ka'. The film highlights the cultural traditions practiced by vimukta communities during hunting, which ensures the sustainability of a species. The 3-minute animation ends up with a rap song in the Pardhi language by student Kuldeesh.

A qualitative action research project, focusing on the Kanjar community, began in October. There is little to no literature from the perspective of the community. Literature available speaks mainly of them as criminals and thieves or documents practices of distilling alcohol. The objective of this research was to share the difficulties and everyday experiences of violence faced by the community as a result of institutional prejudice and exclusion. Interviews were taken in villages in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. To understand the historical basis of prejudice, extensive archival research was done in the National Archives in Bhopal and the Directorate of Archaeology, Archives, and Museums in Bhopal.

On 29th October, the Azad Jugnoo Club hosted a Bal Mela (Children's Fair) at Mitti ka Ghar. 200 children from 19 bastis attended the Mela, where different activities like craft, origami, and singing and poetry sessions were organised. There was also an awareness corner where their rights as children were discussed. They got to learn that they had a right to play, a right to get educated, and a right to give their opinions and be heard on pertinent issues. There was also a session on the Azad Jugnoo Club and its responsibilities, to give them a greater understanding and enable a sense of collective responsibility over the Club.







HIGHLIGHTS

November 2023

On Human Rights Day, a comprehensive Women and Child Violence Prevention Program was organised, bringing together various departments, committee members, and city security. The event aimed to recognise and honour youth and children who have made significant contributions to their community's progress or the well-being of other children.

We participated in the Potters Market exhibition that was held in Gauhar Mahal. We set up a stall to sell our children's stories as well as diaries, earrings, and scrunchies made by women from the bastis. Our children also performed their thought-provoking play Guthli: Ek Ehsaas.

December 2023

A highlight of December was a book launch and panel discussions in the field of children's literature, on 15th December. "Mawli" was written by Geeta Dhurve and illustrated by Heera Dhurve. It documents the folk story of a Gondi goddess of the hearth named Mawli. It is believed that Mawli protects the old and the young and is omnipresent. A mischievous girl named Gehna refuses to believe in Mawli's existence despite her Aji's (grandmother) stories until a chance encounter changes her beliefs. The book launch was followed by a panel discussion between authors Rinchin who wrote "The Uprising" and Neetu who wrote "Naram Garam Dosti" on the gap in literature from the bastis and tribal communities and the importance of documenting these narratives from the community. The event was organised to celebrate children's agency and voices in literature. To explore how literature can empower and resonate with younger audiences, our young students interpreted different stories in their own words. It was a coming together of the new and old with published writers encouraging and sharing their journeys of developing stories, and many younger students sharing their own drafts and asking questions!

The Nazare troupe performed the play 'Guthli: Ek Ehsaas' at the ICUF Ashram in Bhopal, and at Sanchi. The team introduced a "hot seat" segment for the workshop at Sanchi, where participants were encouraged to actively engage in the discussion. A candid exchange of perspectives sheds light on the impact of exploitation on marginalised communities, and serves as a call to action to dismantling exploitative structures.



HIGHLIGHTS

19th January: Like every year we came together for Ekjutta Divas where we did a three day event to remember Tinti Bai, our friend from the Pardhi community who was forced to take her life because of police violence and harrasment. There have been many stories of people from denotified communities who has experienced this degree of violence and societal apathy. This event was a coming together of people and mark a recognition of the everyday violence experienced.

People shared stories of everyday violence, which included being forced to close down businesses, or being stalked by police officials while going for waste-picking. Tasvir, Chandini, who have completed their law degree and Sheshraj and Bindiya who are pursuing their law degrees did a session through role playing on legal rights that each Vimukta community member is entitled towards.

We also spoke of intergenerational trauma and the impact of this violence on an individual's mental health.

To celebrate the culture of DNT communities, we also had an exhibition of materials that symbolise DNT culture.

20th January: The day began with a protest song - "Dariya Ki Kasam, Mojho Ki Kasam", that talks about the need for women to take a stand for their rights. This was followed by a sharing of community narrative through children's stories and a discussion with Gondi artists Pooja Sahu and Dwarka Wish on the need to create stories by indigenous communities. Children and youth also presented their animation film "Ek Raasta Jungle Ka." A read-aloud of "Mirchi Ka Chura" by anti-caste author Bama was done by the team. The community members were then distributed into groups and guided by our team, wrote narratives on their everyday experiences, drew, painted, expressed in multiple, creative ways. After a lunch break, the children from our theater group presented their play: "Thappa" that delves into the historical experiences of violence and trauma, as well as the present day violence experienced by communities. The play also spoke of the need for community solidarity to resist the everyday experiences of oppression. The program concluded with a night of Kabir music by the Tatsang folk collective.

21st January: For the final day of the program, a series of panel discussions were organized that specifically focused on a women's rights. A group of young students shared their stories of fighting for their right to education. Many resisting forced child marriages. The second panel delved into the nature of child marriage, specifically focusing on debunking the practice of Bride Price which is prominent in vimukta communities. Women spoke of their personal experiences of violence after being sold as a bride at a young age and the need to end this practice for the upliftment of the community as a whole. The third panel spoke of the practice of Natra within Vimukta communities. Natra refers to the manner in which young women who lose their husbands are forced to remarry the husband's brother or family member and how the practice is violent towards women. The three panels collectively unpacked the everyday violence and oppression of women done by the community and called on the participants to reflect on ways to change this.

Simultaneously the first edition of our DNT Newsletter - **ढें हूँ**, was launched.







HIGHLIGHTS

February 2024

In February 2024, a series of approximately 20 sessions were held at different localities of Bhopal, somewhere we have been working, and some which were reached out to for the first time. These included Gandhi Nagar, Madani Basti, Mandwa, Arif Nagar, Babu Nagar, Rajiv Nagar, Suraj Nagar, and Sevaniya Gond and Baghmughalia. The sessions covered topics such as cleanliness, childcare, nutrition, and discussions on discrimination and gender issues. Though the team also worked with children who were a part of the formal educational system, special attention was given towards children who had either been pushed out of the system or never given the chance to participate in it. Some of the issues discussed were related to the prevention of violence, and by means of storytelling, practical advice was offered on how to handle misconduct or discrimination. Youth were also encouraged to combat drug addiction by using accessible means such as incorporating water chestnuts into their diets.

In affiliation with the Police department and UNICEF, we conducted training sessions under the Srijan and Abhimanyu program with 110 students (46 boys and 64 girls) at Mahatma Gandhi Government Higher Secondary School. Seema Deshmukh, Child Protection Program Coordinator, held sessions on laws related to children, in particular the POSCO Act, as well as had discussions on the impact on mental health of behaviours associated with sexual violence and eve teasing. The students were briefed on child protection mechanisms such as Child Line, CWC, and Energy Desk. In another session, the students were encouraged to choose subjects of their interest which would enable them to have a better future.

We organised a program titled 'Equality, Justice and Liberty: Human Rights in the Context of Denotified Tribes' on February 24, 2024, at Mohaniya Hall, Gandhi Bhawan, together with PARIMAL LAB- Pracademic Action Research Initiative (With) Multidisciplinary Approach Lab with police constables from across Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. In the seminar everyday experiences of violence were shared as well as the communities' resilience and work on ways to limit or de-escalate these instances. The objectives were to facilitate individual and collective reflection on the grave situations of the past and present lives of de-notified tribes; to build awareness regarding the UN convention against Torture conventions, laws, statutes and judgments regarding torture; and to build an environment within the system, for recognising and building a response to the issue of violations against de-notified tribes. Speakers at the event included DGP Vineet Kapoor, Atish Indrekar, a theater activist from the DNT community as well as lawyers Chandini Jagat, independent researcher Devika Prasad and Venkatesh Naik, Director of CHRI (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative), activist Nandishna, as well as family members of those who lost their lives because of custodial violence. We launched our fact-finding report "I Am Not A Criminal" that captures instances of custodial killings documented during 2020-2021, perspectives on legal rights, history, and perspectives on mental health.



HIGHLIGHTS

March 2024

The Shahri Mazdoor Sangathan opened its office in Sabri in 10th March 2024. The center was a huge effort of the sangathan to create an office space wherein meeting, and plans could be coordinated. The sewing center was shifted to Sabri basti as well and regular tailoring work is being undertaken to increase their earnings. Additionally a counselling center has also been opened wherein people can access mental health counselling as well as legal counselling. The space also supports people in accessing the documents that are required to access basic welfare schemes, or exercise their rights to vote.

In collaboration with Shahri Mazdoor Sangathan, sewing lessons are being provided in the bastis, with a dedicated teacher training the group to ensure the sustainability of this program. Additionally, a group has ventured into crafting handmade soap, expanding their product range to include scrunchies and jewellery. Notably, in Ehsaan Nagar colony, efforts are focused on encouraging the adolescents from the Pardhi community to make diaries. These endeavours align with our commitment to community development, which encompasses promoting employment, establishing self-help groups, introducing savings schemes, and providing interest-free loans to women. As a result, there has been a noticeable increase in the sale of diaries, soaps, scrunchies, and jewellery, indicating the positive impact of these initiatives on economic independence and sustainable opportunities within the community.

An initiative by our educational team provided children from Berasia, including the villages Dhekpur and Kararia, with a platform to showcase their talents and skills. Despite the challenging social conditions in their villages, these children have been actively engaged in practical activities alongside their education, fostering their confidence. Throughout the program, the children sang, shared their thoughts, and told stories in front of their fellow villagers. Witnessing the children's courage and resilience in voicing their perspectives left a lasting impression on everyone involved.

Another group of young Pardhi students cleared their class 12 and are pursuing higher education opportunities in esteemed universities across the country. They are pursuing courses in journalism, history, design, and social science





OUR IMPACT

Education



130 + students pursuing their education at Jeevan Shiksha Pahel School

60 children from DNT communities residing in our hostel

803 students visiting 13 basti libraries in Bhopal, Berasiya, Sehore, Harda and Khandwa run by Muskaan, Majal and Lahar

630 children visiting 18 community learning centers in Bhopal, Berasiya, Sehore, Harda, and Khandwa run by Muskaan, Majal and Lahar

Azaad Jugnoo Club

23 Bastis in Bhopal and Berasiya

Total 800 members in Azad Jugnoo Club

2 Issues of Basti Ki Avaaz



Mental Health



7 basti counsellors trained in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

21 team members have been trained to facilitate dance movement therapy sessions (including 7 basti counsellors)

Individual + Group (total) counselling- 870 participants

Majal

20 Pardhi youth are engaging in Majal on a regular basis.

130 children are engaging with frisbee from 5 bastis

26 children are engaged in theater



Lahar

18 young adults are engaging in Majal on a regular basis.

Study Camp was conducted twice in the last year

in Harda reaching a range between 40-50 students. A focus has been on engaging children who have dropped out from their studies



Sheri Mazdoor Sangathan



8 youth from Vimukta and Gond community engaged in soap making

11 young women from Vimukta and Gond communities engaged in making diaries

10 women from Gond community earning an income through the sewing center

Publications

2 new publications were released in 2023

Our books are reaching over 1000 libraries across the country.



OUR FINANCIALS

PROGRAM EXPENSES	
School Program Expenses (Annexure- I)	21,86,647
Outreach Education Program Exp. (Annexure- II)	24,93,390
Residential Hostel Expenses (Annexure- III)	14,46,741
Residential Camp Expenses (Annexure- IV)	2,717
Child Protection & Youth Program Expenses (Annexure- V)	1,12,28,855
Community Program Expenses (Annexure- VI)	30,56,195
Economic & Livelihood Activities (Annexure-VII)	96,530
Material Development Costs (Annexure - VIII)	2,88,486
Organisation Development & Capacity Building (Annexure - IX)	1,271
Administrative Expenses (Annexure - X)	13,66,040
Property Tax (Annexure - XI)	3,700
Establishment Expenses (Annexure - XII)	4,18,633

THANK YOU TO OUR FRIENDS

Asha for Education, U.S.A

Asha Verein zur Forderung der Schulubidung

Terre Des Hommes

Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Wipro Applying Thought in Schools

UNICEF