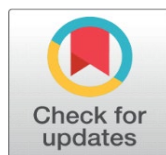


CONTRIBUTIONS BY RASHTIRYA SEVA SANGH IN NATION BUILDING

Dr. Satish L Chaple ¹

¹Head, History Department R.S Mundle Dharampeth Arts & Commerce College, Nagpur, India



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ABSTRACT

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has significantly contributed to social harmony by fostering unity across communities and promoting the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. Through the formation of Ekal Vidyalayas, it has provided education to children in rural and tribal areas, ensuring inclusive learning opportunities. The organization has also established hospitals and healthcare initiatives to serve underprivileged communities, improving access to medical care. Additionally, through Lok Kalyan programs, the RSS has undertaken various welfare activities, including disaster relief, skill development, and empowerment programs for marginalized groups.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. EDUCATION SECTOR

Right to education is a right conferred by the Indian constitution under RTE act of 2009 under article 21A. Education is a basic right of every citizen & it should be imparted to everyone irrespective of caste, color, race, religion, creed, etc. It is important for foundation for personal & societal growth, enhance knowledge, skills & critical thinking. To improve rural communities, the government is now creating several educational projects using various strategies. Unfortunately, though, many citizens are still uninformed of the majority of these programmes, which is why many rural schools are currently facing trouble recruiting students and teachers. Every village today needs educational development, especially in villages where access is complicated. For this purpose, our institution has been operating under the guises of "School for Village" and, during the deep interior areas, "Ekalavya Ekal Vidyalaya" has 1035 schools under its name. This project is consistently run without assistance from the government, thanks to the collaboration of the locals and volunteers from Vidarbha. Together we work to build educational institutions in every village to create an effective supportive educational system and social environment. Hence, Ekal Vidyalaya started as a movement to impart integrated education & holistic development for children of rural and tribal India. The main activity undertaken in this truly people's movement was to run one-teacher schools (known as Ekal Vidyalaya) all over India, in the remotest rural & tribal villages. The aim of the movement was to take the education to every child, wherever the child lived. Today Ekal Vidyalaya schools have been established in many areas of Nepal too.

Ekal Vidyalayas were first established in 1986 in Jumla district in Jharkhand. The concept of Ekal Vidyalaya traced its origin the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi who firmly believed that the education is not just about teaching books but imparting them the skill based education. The Ekal Annual Report 2018-19 states, 'Ekal imparts informal primary education to 23,40,902 students enrolled as of 31 March 2019 in 86,401 villages in 25 states of India & Nepal. It has more than 50 percent girl child participation'

2. STRUCTURE OF EKAL VIDYALAYA

Foundational requirements for the school: A village with a population of 200–1500 is selected. Classes for students from 1st to 7th standard are conducted in various locations, including the Zilla Parishad school (outside of school hours), a public building, a temple, or someone's home.

- 1) **Flexible school hours:** The schedule is flexible, with classes held either in the morning from 7:00 to 10:00 or in the evening from 5:30 to 8:30, depending on the convenience of the villagers.
- 2) **Criteria for school teachers:** The teacher should be well known to the students and the local community. Therefore, someone from the same village is chosen. The teacher should have completed at least the 10th or 12th grade or be a graduate. This initiative also provides them with financial assistance.
- 3) **Qualifications and responsibilities of the supervisor:** Each supervisor oversees ten schools. To be eligible, they must have completed at least the 12th grade. They manage the schools in their assigned area and use their knowledge to address local issues.
- 4) **Education structure:** The primary goal is to strengthen fundamental skills such as learning tables, reading the alphabet, and developing writing abilities. Customs and traditions are also introduced to the students. Educational lessons are delivered through engaging activities. Regular attendance is recorded, and reasons for student absences are noted. Additionally, each student receives individual attention to ensure their physical and mental well-being.
- 5) **Educational material:** The trust provides all necessary learning materials, including blackboards, chalk, dusters, mattresses, notebooks, charts, and printed booklets.
- 6) **Exam pattern:** Exams are conducted twice a year to help students prepare for Zilla Parishad school exams.
- 7) **Gram Shiksha Samiti:** This committee comprises the Sarpanch, Police Patil, and a few respected members of the community. The committee meets once a month with village teachers to discuss student progress and various village programs. An annual meeting is held at the tahsil level. In the 2021–2022 session, 7,245 members actively participated, including 4,347 men and 2,898 women.

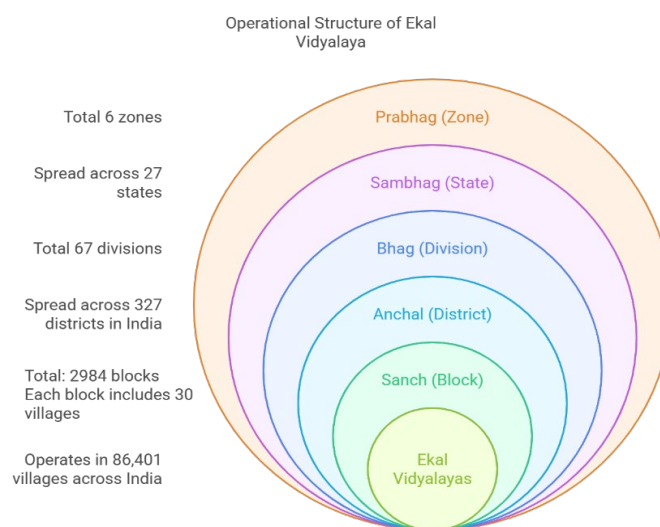


Figure 3 Operational Structure of Ekal Vidyalaya

- 1) **Training Programme:** Before the session begins, the teachers and supervisor participate in a 5-day training programme. This programme emphasizes general knowledge, learning, and teaching skills. At 5.30 a.m., the daily schedule begins with yoga and early prayer. A cultural presentation and debate bring the day to a close. Evenings feature a variety of sporting events. Through this training programme, qualified instructors assume the duties of educating rural residents and contributing to their development.
- 2) **Programmes Conducted:** Trust representatives run the initiative with the assistance of the villagers. Additionally, attendees from nearby communities take part in the programme. The villagers work together to plan this event. Through this initiative, people know the value of education, government plans, and local progress. Each center hosts a gathering and parents' meeting in January and February. The event runs all day long and includes games, physical activities, and traditional dances before concluding with a shared meal. Along with this, agricultural advice is provided, and health camps are held. These programmes are successfully carried out in the Naxalite belt at Gadchiroli and Gondia district. In 2021–2022, around 125000 persons attended this event. Last but not least, the trust also runs a computer training programme.
- 3) **Monthly Meetings:** Every month, all of the supervisor gather for meetings. The discussion of issues and the search for solutions to keep the schools functioning smoothly are on the agenda for these meetings. Visitor lists, attendance information, and monthly touring statistics are gathered. Programs for next month are scheduled. The coordinator sets up the discussion and provides information to the teachers in his community.

Only a support education for the children who go to regular schools, or who have not entered formal schools yet. Therefore, a teacher takes the classes five to six days a week for three hours in the afternoon. The students are usually helped with their homework, basic reading and writing and the sanskars that Ekal Vidyalayas preach. Each class has about 25 to 30 students. The teacher divides the class into three sections, and each section is given different tasks to do. For example, one group is asked to do maths, the other group is asked to memorise a poem, and the third is asked to do the homework.

3. OUTCOMES OF THESE INITIATIVES

As a result of our initiative, school dropout rates have been entirely eliminated, ensuring continuous education for all children. Our efforts in developing several schools in the outlying areas of Amravati's Mailghat district have contributed to a positive shift in the social and educational environment. This transformation is evident in the increasing enthusiasm among both students and parents toward education and higher education. Additionally, our work has successfully fostered awareness of the benefits of education among the Bhil community in Akola and Buldhana districts, empowering them to pursue social, educational, and economic advancement.

In regions such as Aheri, Etapalli, and Bhamragarh, there is now a heightened sense of social and educational awareness, further strengthening community engagement. Similarly, in Yavatmal district, farmers are more vocal about critical issues, including farmer suicides, fostering open discussions and collective problem-solving. Through Gram Shiksha Samiti, we have also initiated several community-driven programs, such as cleaning campaigns, rainwater harvesting, and the establishment of both farmers' and women's savings groups, which contribute to local economic stability and self-sufficiency.

These schools have not only served as educational centers but have also become hubs for social cohesion. Villagers come together to celebrate festivals like Ganpati Utsav, strengthening communal bonds. Public celebrations of Ganapati, Durga, and Sharda Goddess are now possible through Eklavya Ekal Vidyalaya, and major festivals such as Diwali and Holi are celebrated on a grand scale, fostering unity and cultural preservation. Beyond education, our initiative has helped raise awareness about government schemes, such as the Pradhan Mantri Population Census Scheme, ensuring that villagers understand and benefit from these programs. Furthermore, through Eklavya Ekal Vidyalaya, many have accessed financial security measures like the Atal Pension System and accidental death insurance.

The dedicated efforts of 134 supervisors in their respective areas have significantly accelerated school expansion, further strengthening our mission. With these continuous advancements, we are confident that the social and educational landscape of the villages will continue to improve, leading to a more informed, empowered, and self-reliant community.

4. GROWTH OF EKAL VIDYALAYA

From 60 schools in 1988, Ekal Vidyalayas have grown into a network of over 78,000 one-teacher schools in India. Spread across the far-flung rural and tribal areas, the schools referred to as Ekal Vidyalaya currently provide primary education to over 2.1 million children. Ekal Vidyalaya- which means one and school respectively in Hindi- refers to one-teacher school.

Ekal Abhiyan project, the one-teacher school initiative, is run by Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation (EVF), a non-profit organization. It has more than 78,000 volunteer teachers to impart basic education to the children in the age group of 4-10 years in the remote tribal villages of the country.

According to the '2022 vision' spelled out in the annual report (Financial Year 2022) of Ekal Abhiyan, all Ekal Vidyalayas will have activities incorporated in their curriculums around its five-fold education model by 2022. The use of technological devices, mainly tablets in teaching, will be stepped up. Ekal Abhiyan's five-pronged approach is focused on primary education, healthcare education, rural development education, ethics and value education, and empowerment education.

To fill up gaps in reporting requirements, Acharya App, Karyakarta App and Pragat Sanch App are being developed to get real-time data regarding students, teachers and community at large. The aim is to cross the milestone of running 100,000 Ekal schools, once again, as per the vision document. About 20,000 schools had to be discontinued to maintain quality during 2021-22, bringing downtime number of schools from over 100,000 to around 78,000.

An ambitious target has been set to enhance the funding of Ekal schools by local communities to cover 10,000 schools. Currently, 1,468 villages are funding Ekal schools in their areas. During 2021-22, Ekal Abhiyan received contributions to the tune of Rs 1.5 billion from within the country and around Rs 440 million from abroad. A sum of Rs 1.3 billion was incurred on Ekal Abhiyan during this period.

As per the annual report (2021-22) of Ekal Abhiyan, around 2.1 million students are currently enrolled in 77,983 Ekal Vidyalayas. Of them, 50 per cent are girls. So far, 7.5 million rural children have passed out of these schools which are spread across 26 states covering 344 districts.

Bhau Rao Devras, a renowned social activist and younger brother of the third Sarsanghchak of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Madhukar Dattatray Devras, first outlined the concept of one-teacher schools at a seminar organized in Gumla, Jharkhand in June 1986 to find a solution to the problem of illiteracy in tribal villages.

At first 60 Ekal Vidyalayas started in Dhanbad in Jharkhand. The initiative of Ekal Vidyalayas got wings when another social activist and senior RSS functionary Shyam Gupta with his tremendous organizational skills transformed this informal model of education into a movement which is now known as Ekal Abhiyan.

Table 2 Growth of Ekal Vidyalaya



Figure 4 Growth of Ekal Vidyalaya

5. CONTRIBUTION OF EKAL VIDYALAYA

The Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation (EVF) has had a significant contribution through educational movement, including:

- **Education:** Ekal Vidyalaya schools teach literacy and moral education, and have helped 10 million children learn to read and write. They believe in the right to education to all irrespective of class, caste, color, gender, religion thereby inculcating feeling of equality.
- **Healthcare:** EVF operates health centers in rural and tribal areas, and provides medicines to children. Also impart them the hygienic practices to avoid the recurring illness.
- **Rural development:** Ekal Vidyalaya schools promote organic fertilizers and provide training in agriculture and vermiculture. Apart from this they also focus on providing some skill based education to make them capable.
- **Gender equality:** Ekal Vidyalaya has trained 17,400 women vocationally. They provide them tailoring training to be self-reliant.
- **Digital literacy:** Ekal Vidyalaya has helped 20,000 young people become digitally literate.
- **Social harmony:** Ekal Vidyalaya schools promote social harmony and respect for all faiths.
- **Local cultural heritage:** Ekal Vidyalaya schools emphasize local cultural heritage to promote pride and self-respect. As teacher is from the same village they try to teach the local ethos & ethics to make them proud of the Indian culture.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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