

# **Aditi Learning Centre**

Village Kusgaon, Mawal Taluka, Pune.

An Update. April 1, 2022

## **Covid 19 and its impact**

Our green boards in each of the classrooms have the date March 12, 2020. That was the last date that the Aditi Learning Centre was fully functional and “off-line”. Our graduating students, five for class ten and 6 for class 12, were felicitated before their examinations in late February 2020.

The first cases of Covid 19 were showing up in Pune. As four of our five teachers travel by local train, it was decided we would close for two weeks. Before the 2 weeks were over the Covid-19 lock down happened across India.

Teaching has been on-line since then.

## **Teaching online.**

Aditi teachers were not prepared at all to teach on line. For our teachers teaching online was a totally new experience. Our teachers have continued to teach in spite of having no experience in teaching online.

The reports from the learners are glowing proclamations of appreciation of our teachers.

Where we did lose out was in our ability to connect with girls who are unmarried and at home. The smart phone is with the father and not available to the learner. An attempt was made to make smart phones available for the learners. We were discouraged by parents against this as it would give freedom to their daughters to connect with people outside of their trusted circle. This was an impact we could not take responsibility for.

On September 20, 2021, when the lockdown was lifted partially, we marked the graduation of 12 learners of year 2021. Three of them had appeared for class 10 and nine had appeared for class 12. Post results we were able to conduct a congratulatory event for these 12 learners and their families

One of the 9 class 12 students of 2021, Muskan Sheikh, has initiated her bachelor of Arts degree in a local college. Her dream is to become a lawyer. This is a first for us. This was possible with a generous donation from a well-wisher.

## **Our experience of Covid 19.**

Four of our six teachers have had Covid. There have been Covid related deaths in the extended families of our teachers and in communities they live in.

## **Graduation Event 22**

On February 26, 2022 we had our celebratory event for 21 women. This event is usually done to celebrate the opportunity that the women have given themselves to finish their education. The twelve women appearing for class 11 examinations are all married women. Two of them are grandmothers. Four of them are grassroots health workers, also known as Asha Workers (Accredited Social Health Activists) who are an integral part of the government's health system.

There are 9 women who have just completed their class 12 examination.

One of the graduates this year took her class 10 examinations after a 28-year break. She has now appeared for class 12 examinations after a 6-year break. In her class 10 examinations she had scored the highest marks in her class from Aditi. She anticipates scoring the highest marks in this year's examination also.

## **Potential Impact**

The number of married women now taking the program opens up the possibility of working in the communities they live in with greater depth on such issues as reforestation, composting and in establishing community libraries.

The program at Aditi is planning to offer modules over weekends throughout the year to expand the awareness and consciousness of these learners. They will include modules on themes such as story-telling, the birth of the earth, organic approaches to farming.

## **Value of Community**

Our customary celebratory event when we celebrate the journey of studying at Aditi and of being ready for the examinations involves some dances and poetry from the students not appearing for examinations.

This year the programme started with three presentations from our teaching staff. Our teachers reported on the influence of working at Aditi has changed their interactions in society.

Teachers Ms Nandini Bhosale, Mr. Lahu Ghojage, and Ms Namrata Khandare talked about the shift of consciousness that happened within them that encouraged them to initiate transformative initiatives around their communities.

Nandini Bhosale talked about her effort to encourage reading in her community. Books were seen as totally associated with schools and there was no interest in reading. Today both children and adults access the books and read them.

Lahu Ghojage had reluctantly taken the training of the Potali Programme (Learning Basket of the Institute of Cultural Affairs) in 2012. He was unmarried and did not see the need for such training in his life or work. Within a year after the programme Lahu got married and they were blessed with a daughter. He found the training he had taken immensely valuable.

This year he conducted the Learning Basket program on his own initiative among 12 families of his neighbourhood in the village of Ambe in Pune district. In our experience he is the first male practitioner. He states very clearly that being a father has very important responsibilities in allowing a child to be prepared for a complex world.

Lahu Ghojage is also initiating a reforestation effort in collaboration with FORREST in the village of Ambe in collaboration with the local gram panchayat.

Namrata Khandare has been planting trees. Soon after the module on trees and the Miyawaki approach to reforestation, during the summer holidays, she planted 300 trees in her parent's town. She facilitated a group of young people to take on this task, raised money and planted the trees. The community was not open to planting a forest and so they planted it in the traditional way of trees at 8 feet of distance. Over the last Covid lockdown Namrata did a presentation on the Miyawaki approach to reforestation to a group of her friends. As a result of this effort two meditation have used the approach. One centre has planted 1000 trees and the second has planted 1500 trees.

## **The Miyawaki Reforestation Demonstration**

The Miyawaki patches continue to impact visitors. Our current count of trees planted as a direct result of visiting the patches at ALC is around 65,000 in various parts of India, but mostly in Maharashtra.

Forrest is an organisation that has worked with us at Aditi on water conservation, bio-diversity and the second phase of the Miyawaki plantation. This experience has benefitted them a great deal in their work which is now focused on complete ecological restoration. This involves bio-diversity conservation, water conservation and forest restoration. They have restored around 70,000 trees so far.

## **Organic Farming of Paddy**

A team of 6 Potali Practitioners have experimented with growing paddy using organic fertiliser at the ALC since 2018. Their desire grew out of their interest in providing healthy food for children. These women did not have the power to recommend a shift in how their own families grew paddy. From their own positive experience at ALC they recommended that some of the paddy cultivated by them should be grown organically.

In 2021 two of the six families shifted totally to the organic approach to farming. They are pleased that the quality of rice is superior in structure and taste.

At this point the mind shift that occurred in them is beginning to influence other families in the village of Chikalse.

## **Aditi has many mercies to be grateful for:**

Pallavi Gaikwad, a class 10 student, stayed connected with her teacher throughout the lockdown. She did her studies right through the lock down and showed her mind maps to her teacher (Namrata )using her father's phone.

We celebrate Pallavi's tenacity. When she chose to study with us I did not see this tenacity. The students got their results at 10:30 at night. She called up each of her teachers immediately with great delight to share the news.

A few months ago Nandini, our teacher, was covering a lesson in Marathi using her phone. She was communicating with 4 women who are choosing to prepare for class 12 examinations. One of her learners was admitted in hospital as she was expecting a baby. This lady attended the one hour Marathi class from the ward with the saline drip attached to her. This kind of resolve is quite amazing.

This learner, when she came to us three years ago, was keen on breaking out of the restrictive joint family patterns in her home. Nobody in her family, other than her husband, knew she was learning at the centre. When asked why she wanted to learn she did not have the words to express herself.

Tears would roll down her face.

## **Addendum:**

Namrata Khandare's ( one of the teachers) poetry on the occasion of Aditi Learning Centre completing 13 years on April 1, 2022

*Today is the 13th anniversary of Aditi. In these 13 years, Aditi has seen a lot of ups and downs. Everyone who worked at Aditi also saw the positive changes taking place in the girls who were studying here, and while doing so, the teachers also got experiences that changed their lives.*

*I would say Aditi is my magic mirror, because I could see myself in this mirror. I have been working in Aditi for 9/10 years. In these 10 years, I have gained clarity in my life. And that has boosted my confidence. I consider myself very lucky to be a part of Aditi. And thanks to everyone in Aditi*

Lahu Ghojage's (one of the teachers and a potali practitioner) statement made for the Learning Basket Presentation (also known as the Potali program in Maharashtra):

*When I was little, my grandmother, always carried a little bag which was around her waist. There was some change in the bag. In one of the pockets she carried dried fruit like dates, almonds, a couple of medicinal seeds, small shells. She would get us,*

*her grandchildren, to sit together and tell us stories. Then she would give us the goodies to eat from her bag. This is not seen these days. This bag was known as a "potali"*

*I heard that there was going to be a training called Potali for the teachers at Aditi Learning Centre. There were many questions in my mind. Should I do this or not? What benefit will I get from this? As it was offered to all the teachers at Aditi I participated. The training gave us knowledge about what happens in the first three years in the growth and development of a child from the very first moment in the womb of the mother. The training was focused on the healthy and total development of the child (physical, mental, emotional and social changes dimensions that take place in a child). The role of the parent and care giver was emphasized.*

*Soon after this training, I got married. It was not long before I became a father. As I watched my daughter grow and as I participated in caring for her the Potali training program came to its fullness. I was interested in sharing this with my friends and neighbors.*

*This dream became a reality when I decided to do a two-year Masters in Social Work program. In the two-year program, I was required to understand and participate in the activities of the complete functioning of an organization in the field of social work and community development. I worked as a practitioner for the Potali program with Kishor Mitra. I worked with 12 families over a 5-month period. This was done in the village of Ambe where I reside.*

*This was a very important learning experience for me. Interacting with children, listening to what they said, honoring their choices and giving them freedom were some of the activities we discussed.*

*My friends and I have found this very helpful.  
This gives me great joy.*