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"Mobilising resources has never been a problem for me. I believe that if one's work is for the social good resources automatically follow"

I entered primary school in 1946 at the late age of 11 years. At that time a teacher whom I consider my guru, Shri Nagardas, persuaded a group of 25 boys to undergo education. We used to prepare dramas which focused on prevention of alcoholism and social problems. I was a bright student and won many prizes. I completed my schooling in 1954 and entered high school. But my guru called me back and asked me to become a primary teacher. I started my career as a primary teacher in Thakarwada in September that year. My guru has been the source of inspiration for whatever I have achieved.

Early years

I started teaching the first standard, but was immediately shifted to the seventh standard. Very early on I was able to achieve pass results of 95 to 100 per cent. This motivated me. Whenever the inspectors remarked that I was well trained, not knowing that my training was very limited. I felt very happy. In the mid-fifties we introduced night classes for standard six and seven students since they found it difficult to attend during the day. This was one of our early experiments in flexible school timings and in combining an alternative form of school with the regular day school. In 1958 we introduced a *Bal Manch Vikas Yojana*, a savings scheme for children. Very soon we collected Rs. 1,200 and this led to *Vastu Bhandar*, a shop. This shop was run by the students themselves and I used to teach them how to run a small business.

Use of drama to improve enrolment of girls

During the mid-fifties only about 60 per cent of the children of school-going age were enrolled in school. The situation of girls was very poor-only, about 35 per cent were in school. I decided to employ the social drama concept to motivate girls to enter school. I wrote the scripts which focused on education and social problems. Since the medium through which the message was communicated was familiar to the people, and the message itself was powerful, the campaign was successful. By 1960 the enrolment was 100 per cent. I then left the village for a year in order to undergo my training course.

Donations for the school

Soon, after my return in 1961 we celebrated Independence Day. During his speech my guru expressed the need for a secondary school in the village. I responded by starting a fund, with my own contribution of Rs. 251. He added an equivalent amount. The other villagers were inspired and we were able to raise Rs 7,000 in a very short time. Since the school was supposed to cover the surrounding villages also, we initiated a fund-raising drive in these villages. We mobilised Rs. 25,000. I donated part of my own house for the school, keeping only one portion for myself. We appointed a teacher from a neighbouring

village and started with the eighth standard. Gradually, we added the high school classes. We formed a governing body for the school and I was appointed Secretary. As the years passed the infrastructure needs increased. In 1970, I went to Bombay with my guru and collected a fund of Rs. 150, 000 from various businessmen and donors who had links with our area. We also instituted a norm that the village community would contribute to the school fund on all national festivals. In return, school matters were made an agenda item in the Gram Sabha meetings. This cemented the village-school relationship

"Learn and earn"

I also started to think of ways in which students could be initiated into small business activities which could help the student community at large. Two such activities which have stood the test of time are newspaper distribution and construction of *mandaps* (platforms for functions like marriages). In 1956, I took up an agency for newspapers and magazines to be handled by the students. The teachers of our school undertook to support this activity informally. The students of classes 5, 6 and 7 took turns to distribute the newspapers within the village and in neighbouring villages. This activity was carried out between 8 and 9 in the morning. The agency is still in business. The annual profit of Rs. 2000 supports the school's educational activities.

Mandap construction was the second activity. The *mandaps* were made of wooden planks and poles. The students' association bought the material and kept it in the school. Whenever there was a function in any house in the village, the students of classes 5 to 7 used to go to that particular house and construct a *mandap* under the guidance of two teachers. The activity spread to the surrounding village schools. At present, the students do not construct the platforms themselves but organise the activity and transport the material from the school to the house. They take the help of artisans for the construction. Village people donate generously for this *mandap* activity.

I also initiated a Books Savings Bank in which the students of well-to-do families donated used books. These were bound and given to needy students. One donor has contributed a television set for the school.

Mobilising community leaders for improving enrolment

In 1966 the people of village Tokariya demanded my services and got me transferred to their village. The school had classes 1 to 4 and only three girls. The village was dominated by the Muslim community and members of the scheduled castes. My initial aims were to increase enrolment and reduce the drop out rate so that the school could progress to the upper primary stage. I adopted a two-pronged strategy. First I contacted the leaders of the various communities - the Muslim *maulvis* and the leaders of the traditional scheduled castes' *panchayats*. I also included the village sarpanch. I held a series of consultations with them. The *maulvis* were especially important *since I wanted to see Muslim girls educated. I managed to persuade them to change the timings of the madrasa*. This move on the part of the leaders enabled many parents to send their girls to school. I was very satisfied with the enrolments which started increasing. Secondly I

mobilised the children who were attending school to start a publicity campaign. I designed various slogans which were written on the walls outside the school and changed every Saturday. This created interest in the community since they were eagerly anticipated new slogans. I also sent the children on a door-to-door campaign in the entire village.

Within two or three years we were able to extend the school up to the sixth standard. The number of teachers went up to four from the initial two. I also got two classrooms added to the initial room. For this purpose I mobilised Rs. 70,000 from the community, just as I had done in Thakarwada. I also succeeded in installing water supply for the school.

Another significant feature of my stay in Tokariya was the integration of the Hindu and Muslim communities in cultural programmes. The Muslim students did not take part in programmes which had prayer songs. I held discussions with the Muslim leaders and convinced them that children needed to be together at least for cultural events. We then worked out a system by which the leaders were also involved in the preparation of the school cultural programmes. Though Muslim girls did not take part in my dramas, the boys played the female roles. My guru retired in 1971. I had organised a farewell for him which was also attended by the then Education Minister of the state. I had mobilised Rs. 25,000 as a retirement gift but my guru did not accept the money. Instead he suggested that the money be used for constructing a high school for the village. Around this time, the people of Thakarwada got me transferred back to the village.

Thakarwada school - the best in the district

In 1972 I took over as principal of the Thakarwada school. We established an informal *panchayat* village education committee of which I am a member. I also felt that students needed a forum of their own. I initiated a students' association to which a president and two secretaries were elected by the students.

I wanted to see my school become the best in the district. Our enrolments were almost 100 per cent. We persuaded the remaining few children, who were mainly girls belonging to the scheduled castes, to come to school. In 1973, I introduced a weekly test for the seventh standard children. Four of our students succeeded at national-level scholarship examinations. From 1976 to 1980 we secured 100 per cent pass results in our school. During this period we also ran night classes for students who wanted to learn more. In 1978 I established a good library in the school. In the same year we won the first prize in the district level best school competition. We also won first prizes in science fairs. At that time the district education officials advised me to apply for a best teacher award but I refused as I felt that the school needed to develop more. In 1982 I received a prize for promoting the education of girls in our area. In 1992 our school was again declared the best school in the district.

Mobilising resources: transparent aims

Mobilising resources has never been a problem for me. I believe that if one's work is for

the social good resources automatically follow. When I was principal I wrote a letter to a Bombay-based businessman asking for help in installing a drinking water pipeline for the school. He immediately responded with Rs. 11,000. During a public meeting attended by the district *panchayat leaders* I issued an appeal for the school. The leaders started a fund then and there and in a short while I collected the Re. 15,000 needed for the school at that time. A businessman donated money for a radio and TV set. The school needed a low stone parapet. I organised a children's fair and mobilised the required Rs. 8,000. The school has facilities like telephone and a microphone system. I also see to it that the primary and secondary schools in the village share resources. For instance, equipment for experiments is shared. One of our old students, now a doctor in America, recently donated Rs. 65,000 for two additional classrooms. I persuaded the government to match this amount with Re. 35,000. The construction is going on and when it is completed more money will flow in for additional infrastructure. I have also mobilised Rs. 1,000,000 for the high school from well wishers, businessmen and friends who believed in my earlier work with the primary school. If money is utilised sincerely and effectively, people see a moral value in donating.

In 1991 I received the state-level best teacher award. The people of Thakarwada were very happy and contributed a total of Rs. 20,000 as a reward for me. I deposited this money as a fund for instituting awards and scholarships for students performing well academically. One of my old students added Rs. 10,000 to this fund.

I also associate myself with various social development activities of the village. For instance I raised money for a pilgrim house in the village. I am also planning a hospital for my village and have already initiated steps in this direction. In 1986 there was a severe drought and with the support of village leaders and outside donors we organised a cattle camp for about 2000 cattle. The camp was maintained for about six months. The initiative had to be repeated during the drought of 1987. This camp was run for eight months.

Students' activities and children as instructors

The students' association of the school conducts about 50 different educational activities in the school. Students of classes 5 to 7, and children who have passed out of school but are still in the village, run adult literacy classes at night for illiterates either in their homes or on the streets. The children also read out the daily news everyday. In my village there is no illiteracy in the age group of 15 to 40. The night school experiment is still going on because of the cooperation of the students, parents and the genuine guidance of the teacher community. The students believe in the famous Gujarati slogan *dive divo pragatavo* (light a lamp with a lamp). The older children, who had passed out of school, also taught school-going children.

We have frequently organised study circle meetings and meetings for outside teachers in our school. Our school is the pay-centre school. Ten other schools are in regular contact with us. These schools have been provided guidance. Since our school is one of the best schools in our district many other schools visit us to observe our activities and for guidance.

I started a scheme called 'learn and teach' in collaboration with other teachers of my school. Some of the students were very good in academics. We constituted groups of four students, with one outstanding student in each group. On specified evenings, like weekends, the groups used to meet at the residences of various teachers. The good student then instructed the others under the guidance of the teacher. The idea was to encourage group work, and also reward the good students. The students worked till late night and slept at the teacher's residence. Till some time ago our school did not have a teacher who could teach the students English. I requested my son to help out and he voluntarily taught Class 5 to 7 students for some time. Then one of my old students who is a graduate took up the job. As part of the Socially useful productive work (SUPW) classes, we taught the students weeding and organised weeding outings on various farms. In return the farmers were asked to donate to the students' association, About Rs. 12,000 were collected this way for student welfare activities.

On a personal note, I wish to state that the source of my inspiration has been my firm conviction, originating in my reading of the scriptures, that accountability comes out of being a 'duty-lover' and developing a consciousness about a sense of duty. If one does one's work well, help follows. I believe in rigorous discipline to make the best of the time available to me. I get up at five o'clock in the morning every day and do not take more than five days off in a year. I also believe in setting aside time for learning. I have attended many meetings and have visited many good schools, all at my own expense. I have always received support from students, teachers and community. What pleases me most is the recognition that the community has accorded me. When people ask me, How are you sir?, I feel that the respect in the question is my greatest wealth.

Till now I have been busy creating educational infrastructure and seeing to it that students do not suffer on account of lack of resources. A lot has been achieved. I am now concentrating on how to maintain whatever I have done. I am training a couple of teachers. I still spend time in the school everyday. I am a religious person and hope that God will give me courage to accomplish this wish of mine.