

VIGNANOTSAVAM

(Organised by Kerala Sastrasahitya Parishat)

A CASE STUDY

DPEP Training Activity No. 10

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VIGNANOTSAVAM - A CASE STUDY

REPORT

Introduction

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), being based on the principle of holism, is viewed as a powerful intervention to achieve the target of Universal Elementary Education - universal enrolment, retention and attainment of minimum essential levels of learning. In this report the National Council of Educational Research and Training too plays its role by undertaking certain tasks related to curriculum training and research. One such task under training component is the DPEP Training Activity No.10: Case studies of innovative in-service training practices/interventions in education, especially by Non-Governmental Agencies. The Regional Institute of Education (NCERT), Mysore, selected for case study the innovative intervention in education called "Vignanotsavam" conducted by Kerala Sastrasahitya Parishat (KSSP).

It has been known to us that the KSSP has been actively involved in improving the standard of education in Kerala. Some of our old students are also contributing energetically as activists/volunteers. This organisation has been approached for supply of information pertaining to training provided to teachers and materials developed by them in connection with our DPEP training activity No.1, viz., Documentation of In-service Training Practices in Vogue in the Southern States, which was brought out in 1995. Their response came after this and it was here that we came to know about their innovative experiments in formal education. Comprehensive evaluation though talked about frequently, is hardly practised by teachers. Vignanotsavam, being an innovative experiment in comprehensive evaluation

of students in a festive atmosphere caught our attention and a decision was taken to make a case study.

Mode of Case Study

A team of 2/3 members of the faculty knowing Malayalam was deputed to observe this ***Festival of Knowledge*** in all phases, take notes on the process and collect necessary data. The members of the team also interacted with the organisers, volunteers, KSSP activists, parents, participants, educational authorities of the educational block and the Heads of the institutions where the Utsavam was held and the Panchayat board members for collecting relevant information. The teams deputed for the different phases of the Utsavam were as follows:

1. School level: Mr.K.P.Sankaran, Dr.R.Narayanan
2. Panchayat level: Mr.K.P.Sankaran, Mr.A.C.Josy
3. Block level: Mr.P.Ramachandra Rao (Task Leader),Dr.R.Narayanan and Mr.A.C.Josy

Kerala Sastrasahitya Parishat - An Overview

In the year 1962 during the month of April, some 25 people belonging to different walks of life had assembled at some place in Kozhikode. There were leaders in literature, doctors, engineers, teachers and bureaucrats among them. In that meeting they resolved collectively to spread scientific temper in society. This event marked the birth of the Kerala Sastrasahitya Parishat (KSSP). Adopting a slogan 'Science for Social Revolution', the KSSP soon diversified its activities to cover social service, environmental protection, women's development, educational reforms, scientific methods in agriculture, etc. Now it has grown into an organisation with 1860 units and over 62,000 members all over Kerala. They have played an active role in the total literacy programme of the Kerala State. In the mid seventies their active involvement for protection of the *Silent Valley* lead to the Government

dropping the Silent Valley Power Project. This project which drew world wide attention would have solved the power problem of the power hungry southern States, especially Kerala. But the implementation of the Silent Valley Power Project would have completely upset the ecosystem of the Western Ghats which would have brought irreparable damage to the environment in the region. The Parishat has over 600 books published in Malayalam. Its magazines, *Eureka*, *Sastrakeralam* and *Sastragathi*, are very popular among school and college students and teachers throughout Kerala. A review of the educational activities of this agency is appended (Annexure I). In the area of formal education the KSSP has been carrying out two major experiments, School Complex and Vignanotsavam. The details of these experiments are given in Annexure II. The KSSP's intervention in education in Kerala has brought laurels to it. The first national recognition of the Parishat came with ICSSR award in 1983. Next, its role in making Kerala a total literate State has received recognition in the form of the King Sejong Literacy Prize in 1990. In the same year it was also conferred with the UNEP's Global 500 Award for environment activities. Now the KSSP may be said to stand at the pinnacle of success by bagging the Right Livelihood Award, known as the Alternative Nobel Prize this year (1996). Congratulations, KSSP! Keep it up.

Vignanotsavam - Concept

The Vignanotsavam, to quote the KSSP, is directed towards examination reform. It has evoked tremendous interest among children, teachers, parents and all those who are concerned with the education of the children. A look at the present day examination system shows that it is mainly a test of bookish knowledge, gained mostly through rote learning. It does not take into account the fact that a child learns many things through observation of nature, community life and through interaction among fellow children. Application of knowledge, creativity, etc., are not at all taken into consideration in the evaluation process.

A second aspect of our examination system is the unhealthy spirit of competition, generated among the pupils and to a greater extent, among the parents too. Many a time a child sees his classmates as enemies who should be 'defeated' in the 'war' of examination. This brings in a great deal of unhealthy practices like refusing to share knowledge with others and hiding or even stealing of notes and other learning materials on the eve of the examination.

The concept of Vignanotsavam as evolved by KSSP has to be viewed as an experiment to find an answer to some of the problems cited above. It is more than an ordinary quiz programme which mainly tests the bookish knowledge and general knowledge and puts a greater stress on memory and quick response.

Objectives

The main objectives of this programme are:

1. to test the pupil's knowledge, skill, the extent of development of his five senses,
2. to test his ability to observe keenly,
3. to test his skills of measurement and judgement,
4. to evaluate the development of his psychomotor domain, creative skills, etc.,
5. to promote the concept of learning together and working together.

Vignanotsavam - 1996

This year the Vignanotsavam has been conducted in three phases/stages - school level, Panchayat level and block level. The school level programme, it is learnt, is a new feature introduced this year. Hitherto, the Panchayat level programmes used to be the first one wherein children from different schools in the region participated. But the school level

programme introduced from this year gives it a wide scope as all the children, irrespective of their grades in the class, can participate in the Utsavam.

The school level programme was organised on 26th Sept., 1996 throughout Kerala from 2.00p.m. to 4.00p.m. The students are grouped into three sections - primary section (Stds.3, 4 & 5), upper primary section (Stds.6, 7 & 8) and secondary section (Stds.9 & 10). For the Panchayat level Vignanotsavam, five students under each category from each school in the Panchayat participate in a full day programme of quiz and activities. Selected students from these groups meet in a 2 day programme at the block level comprising all the Panchayats coming under that block (education).

For our case study in the first phase we selected the Government Welfare U P School at Kodakkad in the Pilicode Panchayat region. This centre was selected through the KSSP activist, Mr.M.Narayanan who is a teacher in the same school. For subsequent phases, the same Panchayat region (Pilicode Panchayat) for Panchayat level and the educational block (Thrikaripur Block) in the same region for the block level competition were selected for the sake of continuity. In the present report we give a detailed account of the evaluation procedure adopted at different stages. First, we discuss the general aspects of evaluation.

General Aspects:

Participants

In the school level programme all the students (about 200) of the LP (excluding I and II standards) and UP participated. The school where we observed the school level competition was an upper primary school and hence the high school section programme could not be observed at this stage. The participants at the Panchayat level were selected students from

school level, numbering about 250 from different schools of the Pillicode Panchayat.

In the block level programme, the lower primary section consisted of 28 participants (16 boys and 12 girls), the upper primary section, 21 participants (16 boys and 5 girls) and the high school section had a total of 20 (17 boys and 3 girls). One can notice the progressive decline in the number of girl participants from LP to Secondary. It is worthwhile for the KSSP to study this aspect over a few years and thus take up necessary measures.

Question Paper

The Vignantsavam, as stated earlier, is a quiz programme with a difference. The very name, 'Vignantsavam', is attractive and has a deeper connotation. It means a 'Festival of Knowledge'. The crux of the whole exercise is, in fact, a test and still it is significant that the whole thing is understood and enjoyed by the participants as a festival. In the school level programme, all the children participate. The question paper is prepared by the KSSP and despatched to the schools with clear instructions to open the packet only just before the scheduled test. The question papers for the three sections of a particular phase were more or less identical in structure, with the depth and the standard of the responses required going higher and more demanding as one goes from the LP section to UP and Secondary sections and also from the school level to the Panchayat level and Block level. In each school a group of teachers is selected and given orientation for administering the test. This is done by the KSSP volunteers and activists normally a week before the date of the programme.

Organisation

Another important aspect of Vignantsavam is the manner in which it is organised. A team of volunteers is selected from the same locality in which

the school is situated. This team may include old students of the school, local prominent people, as well as other KSSP activists. Active help is rendered by these people at all levels of the competition. These include local arrangements, publicity work, assistance in evaluating, marking the score, displaying consolidated marks on charts, etc. For the Panchayat and block level programmes, refreshment and lunch for the participants and volunteers are also arranged by the local people. The block level programme continues for 2 days and for this arrangement for the children's over night stay is made with the help of the local people and the Parent Teacher Association. During our visit we could see their actual involvement in all spheres of the activity. It is quite evident that the school authorities alone cannot organise such an activity without the active participation of the community. This in itself has an educative value for the students wherein they find the school and the society to be merging towards achievement of the objectives of school education.

School Level Utsavam

Part A:

At the school level competition, which is of 2 hour duration, the test in general consists of questions for 50 marks. Of this the KSSP gets the questions prepared by a team of experts for 35 marks and despatches them in sealed envelopes. This is part A of the question paper. These questions cover all subjects like science, language, mathematics, geography, general knowledge, practical skills, etc. The questions are read in the classroom by the quiz master one after the other and the students write the answers in a sheet of paper. Some of the questions are also written on the board as per the KSSP guidelines. A few questions may need hint or discussion so that the students grasp the questions clearly; the quiz master is free to do this. The marking is done then and there itself. Once the children complete answering a particular question, the teacher reads out the correct answer and tells the children to allot the marks themselves on the left hand margin

which is checked by the volunteers. A special mention may be made of the 2 questions based on visuals supplied. One of them, interestingly, was to identify by means of a photograph, a Malayalam writer who won the Jnanapeeth award this time. It is evident that lot of emphasis is laid on day to day information that can be gathered through regular reading of newspaper.

Part B

Part B of the question paper is prepared in the school itself and carries 10 marks. Of this 4 questions (of one mark each) are based on the school textbooks, but not covered in part A of the question paper and 4 questions on local region or Panchayat or environment. Apart from this 2 marks are allotted for a craft work to be done by using paper, coconut leaves, etc. The remaining 5 marks out of 50 is for a project work (to be done earlier and submitted). This is usually concerned with aspects related to environmental education. We could see attractive products of 2 such projects, one on a collection of leaves by primary students and the other on collection of feathers submitted by the upper primary students.

Panchayat Level Utsavam

The Panchayat level competition was organised on 19th October, 1996 from 10.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. Imagine a usual competition where competitors enter the second round, third round, etc., after successively passing through the preliminary rounds. At each succeeding stage, the participants are under greater and greater tension with the sole aim of reaching the top. Do we see similar tension ridden young faces here? Surprisingly, the situation here is entirely different. We do not see the students discussing and doing the last minute browsing of textbooks or class notes. Instead some of them were seen going through the pages of what looked like magazines - they were the magazines published by the KSSP - Sastrakeralam and Eureka, 2 magazines that have become popular among the school children.

Rendering of a Community Song

If, however, any tension were there, it was removed by the opening activity of the programme. The participants were initiated into the day's events through an enlivening programme of rendering a community song, which was made reverberatⁿ by the simultaneous singing of the same, step by step by the students. The appeal of the song was as such undeniable; but more undeniable was its aptness to the occasion. The song centred round the crucial question - 'WHY', the incentive for any inquiry.

Some of why questions in the song are like this. Why does a rainbow appear on the sky ? why do stars shine ? Why a particular flower is white or red ? Why a flickering torch on the edge of the tail of the glow worm ? The questions raised went beyond the sphere of natural phenomena thereby questioning some of the prevailing social injustices seen in the society. Why a certain woman, her son and her daughter wandered begging in the streets? Absorbed in an appealing^{way} these questions may unfold themselves with their implications at a later stage; and the spirit of enquiry that they kindle in the students will hopefully lead them on to endless areas of interest. What is significant here is the suggestion of the song that such interest can expand into the areas of social sciences as well. There should be specific reasons behind the structure of the society where some are very rich and some are very poor. Why is it so ? These lines rendered effectively through the opening community song can instil into the child's mind such questions. Only those minds which tak^b such questions repeatedly can also strive to find any answer to them.

Breaking the Ice

After the community song session the students go to the respective rooms allotted and the quiz programme starts. Here again a certain amount of warming up is resorted to by way of what is called 'breaking the Ice'. The

purpose of this is again to generate enthusiasm among the children and to bring about a rapport between the 'Quiz- master' and the participants. So informal and inspiring had been this exercise that its impact could be sustained for a substantial spell. The specific means of breaking the ice was different at different sections. At the LP section it was in the form of an impressive narration of a story during which the children were encouraged to register their moods and responses. By such a narration the examinees are initiated into a meaningful involvement providing them the necessary mood to welcome the ensuing examination. (One possible drawback of this breaking the ice programme is that its full potential can be realised only in the hands of a competent quiz master. Every assigned teacher, understandably need not be of equal competence. However, to the extent possible, the KSSP has taken note of this and has provided some advance training to the teachers).

At the Upper primary level, this item was in the form of an interesting rhyme, which in the end seeks answer to a specific question containing some arithmetical problems, the rhyme may lead one to a wrong answer unless he pays proper attention to the lines. However, arriving at the right answer is after all only incidental, what is more important is the fun that the rhyme offers.

At the high school level , the opening item called for sharp and quick responses in the terms of word-building on a given initial letter. Those who exhaust their stock will clap hands; gradually more and more participants joining this group , the clapping becomes more and more hectic and enjoyable. The interesting aspect of this is that even the losers in the game are not left gloomy: they in fact lead the clapping and have a greater share of joy.

The Test Begins:

Now the real test starts. The test comprised ^{of} three sections: Section - I : 13 questions and 20 marks (10.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon); Section - II: 12 questions and 15 marks (12.00 noon to 1.00 p.m.); and Section-III : 6 activity

based questions for 15 marks (2.00 p.m. to 3.30 p.m.). The time schedule and the marks distributions were common to LP,UP and Secondary sections, though the number of questions slightly varied.

Salient Features of the Question Paper

A full analysis of the question papers though worthwhile, may not be feasible in a report of this nature. We therefore restrict ourselves to give the salient commendable features. As was mentioned about the school level programme, here also the quiz covers not only science but other fields of knowledge as well, including a good dose of general knowledge which requires regular exposure to the media. The questions were not restricted to the knowledge and memory level but goes well into the higher realms like understanding and application.

Panoravat level

Question no 5 in Section I for Lower primary tests the understanding of the chronology of certain historical events instead of simply asking for the date of occurrence of certain events. A set ^{of four events of} of historical importance is given and the student is to rearrange them chronologically. Question No.7 in the UP section -I makes use of the word 'MARKET', not to test its meaning or synonym or usage but looking at the word on the black board the students should make as many meaningful words as possible using the six letters coming in the word MARKET. Question No.3 of Section I(Secondary section) gives three words to be written on the black board - brown, brick, bright. The test is here to rearrange them as they appear in a dictionary. Such innovative questions lend to reveal whether the student is really competent to manipulate his knowledge according to the requirement.

One item (No.12, Section I of LP)warrants special mention. This presumably wants to test the awareness of the children on some newly emerging social values such as equality of sexes, male share in the

household duties, etc. Given are certain statements regarding what happens in a household on a regular morning - ' Father is milking the cow, mother is lighting fire in the oven. Meanwhile comes the News Paper; mother is having a glance through it, father also shares it. Then while mother goes for washing dishes, father cleans the rooms', The passage is not given for doing any correction in grammar or structure but the students are asked to make corrections in these statements in terms of its contents. An item like this is apt to raise varied reactions, especially when it is included in the LP level. Notwithstanding that scope, one, however, has to appreciate the bold and open attitude expressed in the item.

Section -II in all sections mainly evolves on articles appeared in KSSP's official publications - the Eureka and the Sastrakeralam, both magazines having a wide circulation among the student community. This practice also helps in encouraging the students to indulge in close reading of such science journals.

Section III tests the students in their skills in activities. Most of them, naturally, are developed around experiments in science. Yet, it could be noticed that some activities have a bearing on other areas as well. For example, one item (no.5) for the LP is to improvise mat weaving, using a very common, cost less material - a piece of banana leaf. Similarly at the UP level, there is an item to assess the creativity of the children. Some interesting and slightly intriguing lines are given wherein the possible etymology of certain places in Kerala is suggested and how these names tend to outgrow those implications in course of time. The students are required to construct two more lines of rhyme in similar way which incorporate this kind of an etymology and its extinction. Seeing the results of this exercise we felt that enough creativity can be kindled in young children, if only the right incentive is provided.

Block Level Utsavam

The block level Vignanotsavam was organised throughout Kerala on 22nd and 23rd November, 1996. The school complex, where it was conducted, wore a festive look. Selected students from the Panchayat level competition from the six Panchayats (Neeleswaram, Cheruvathur, Pilicode, Padanna, Thrikaripur and Kayyoor - Cheemeni) belonging to the Thrikaripur block participated in the two-day long Utsavam. The host institution was the Government Welfare U.P. School, Kodakkad. The lower primary level competition ended on the first day itself whereas for the upper primary and high school level it lasted for two days. The local community played an active role in the organisation and conduct of the programme. Though KSSP provides some financial assistance for the conduct of the programme, several other aspects (public address system, generator, refreshments, lunch, etc.) have been taken care of by the activists by getting sponsors from local and neighbouring regions. For example, lunch (simple, but nutritious) and refreshments were provided to the volunteers and participants at the school premises itself. Arrangements for this were made through contribution obtained in cash and kind from the sponsors. The UP and high school students were to stay overnight. This was taken care of by the parents of the children of the same school. Two or three children were sent to each family in the nearby places where they could spend the night with boarding facilities extended by the hosts.

A cultural programme was organised in the evening of the first day in the school quadrangle. During this programme the prize winners of all sections (lower primary, upper primary and secondary) of the recently held District Youth Festival were honoured by the KSSP and the local organising committee. They performed the prize winning items such as Kathaprasangam, mimicry, mono-acting, singing, etc.

Inauguration

The block level Vignanotsavam was inaugurated by the Assistant Education Officer of Cheruvathur sub-district. Earlier, the Headmaster of the school Sri.Mukundan Nambiar welcomed the chief guest and the participants. After the inaugural function, a community song was rendered by one of the KSSP activists of the region. The song was repeated line by line by all the participants of the function. As we have reported in the case of the Panchayat level function, this song also shows the importance of the explosion of knowledge and urge the younger generation toward an enquiry approach.

Breaking the ice

The actual competition commenced with an activity called 'breaking the ice', intended as a warm up activity at the same time trying to inculcate the observation capacity of the students and develop rapport with the group members and quiz masters. The lower primary group assembled in a circle under a tree ~~is~~ given a twig of a shrub abundantly growing nearby. *The twig is* passed on from member to member. The student examines the twig and tells one attribute of it and then passes it on to the next student. Each student should observe the branch and tell an attribute. Some of them may even try to name the plant or the family. One who cannot state an attribute or repeats one stated earlier is declared out. The game continues. There is no grade or marks given to this activity. The whole exercise as mentioned earlier is meant for a warming up, to identify themselves as a group, investigating some aspect of nature and to familiarise with one another including the quiz masters. At the same time it tends to make them understand the importance of keen observation and how a keen observation of a tiny plant could give such diversified, yet, knowledgeable information. Similar 'breaking the ice' activities were performed for UP section (using a box of matches) and high school section (using a popular brand of soap cake).

Quiz - A Unique Type

Unlike the school level and Panchayat level Vignantsavam, the groups were not subjected to quiz questions immediately. There were a large number of activities meant to assess other values of life. Almost in every field we find groups of people tackling great problems together and coming out with success. In all such cases apart from the brain work of a few people it is the team spirit and co-ordination among the team members which bring laurel to the members as well as to the team as a whole. Working in group by sharing ideas should be nurtured at the school level itself. Therefore a great number of ^{groups} activities has been included in the block level festival of knowledge.

The high school students were divided into four groups and each group was given a booklet with a certain portion marked. The task was to read those pages, discuss and then prepare a set of ten questions based on the passage. Some of these questions were to be used later as quiz items. Each group ^{also} studies the passage given for preparation of questions by the other three groups. Quiz competition is held after this.

New Features of the Block Level Competition:

Lower Primary Section:

Apart from the usual quiz questions session the children of the lower primary section also had other activities including some group activities. One such activity was to make any three craft items using splinters and leaves. One could see the enthusiasm and adeptness with which different students were making craft items. A second activity was to guess the phenomenon taking place behind a screen by listening to the sound coming from. A taste of the creativity and the histrionic talents of the primary group could be seen through an activity wherein the student is given a towel and a stick and he

should use them to enact any scene based on his imagination. May be due to their shyness or due to lack of imagination, only a small percentage of the group could present a novel item. Most of them enacted a scene of an old person. May be an old person and his stick are inseparable? Or is there no other use ^{for a} stick than to lend support to a person during his old age? The final round of activities for the LP section participants (LP section programme was for one day only.) was to prepare a wall magazine using a chart paper. This was a group activity wherein they were divided into four groups and each group prepared a wall magazine. During our rounds we could see them busily working on some short stories, sketches, puzzles, poems, etc., each member of the group exhibiting his or her talent. At the end of the day a sense of achievement and joy could be seen beaming on their faces.

Upper Primary Section

At the UP section also in addition to the usual quiz programme covering different fields of knowledge the students were exposed to varied kinds of experiences thereby enabling them to show their multi-faceted talents. While most of these were group works, a few individual assignments were also present. Some of the skills tested include preparation of slides for microscope observation, focusing and observing a slide through a microscope and trying to sketch the pattern seen, exhibiting skills in solving certain specific problems, cutting things in required number of pieces in given number of trials, selecting the proper tool from among a set of given ^{ones} _λ to do certain specific work, etc.

Projects

'Catch them young' is a famous proverb having a wide scope and meaning. In Malayalam also a similar saying is there which means that whatever has been practised at an early age cannot be forgotten till death. Certain values and skills developed and nurtured during childhood will continue to be useful even in later years. One such value is the scientific

attitude and the processes of science. Every participant is expected to do and submit an investigatory/survey project and these projects are examined by a group containing teachers and other activists of the Parishat. At the UP level, the project carries 60 marks out of which the report itself carries 35 marks and 25 marks are assigned for the presentation of the report and subsequent viva-voce session. This is done in two stages. In the first stage the examiners only are supposed to ask questions. Out of these projects five are selected and a second round of assessment is done. During this any other student can ^{also} ask questions to the participants. It may be of interest to note some of the topics taken up for project work

1. Primary education and literacy in the region.
2. Rearing of cattle in Kayyoor village.
3. Rearing of rabbits.
4. Snake bite cases in Kayyoor village.
5. Problems/difficulties of fishermen and
6. Opinion survey of people regarding politics related activities, the Miss World Beauty Contest in Bangalore.

The modus operandi was getting the information through a questionnaire or interview or both. This type of project work helps them to study and understand different aspects of life in their own surroundings as a good many of them dealt with human life and environment related to the local region. It also develops the skill of observation, quantification, analysis, interpretation and problem solving, though on a smaller scale. The ability of the participants to present his project to a group of people and defend his work are the issues which are being assessed. Such project work and a similar two-tier screening formed part of the proceedings for high school level also. The quality of the project work could be improved if the participants are given some training in the aspects related to such work. The handbook in Malayalam entitled 'Projects for School Students - What? How?' published in 1995 under the auspices of Bharath Gyan Vignan Samithi (Kerala branch) and KSSP can be used as a source book for this purpose. The teachers who guide project work may also need some orientation towards this purpose.

One other important feature of this project exercise is that these chosen five participants will have opportunity to participate in ^a district level 'Bala Sastra Congress' organised as a summer camp where they are given further training in conducting investigatory/survey projects and on preparation of project reports, its presentation and defending.

Do and Infer activities :

As we have mentioned earlier the quiz programme was aimed at not just testing the bookish knowledge and rapid response through recall but to test the understanding and application of various scientific principles . The senior students at the high school level really need to be tested in such higher level of learning. Four or five various activities were set up at different places in the school compound and the students were to go through one by one , and see or do the activity himself and infer certain things by applying the knowledge he has acquired . By placing these at different location in the school compound care was taken ^{that} to see the students do not exchange ideas among themselves after completing one activity. One such item was based on the forces of surface tension of liquids and another was to judge the comparative masses of four objects suspended in air. Here the students have to blow air across the mass and decide which one is more heavy compared to the other and so on. Herein again comes the application of the basic principles of physics studied in the class.

Local Survey

The second day activity started with a survey work. Students were divided into groups and accompanied by one or two volunteers. They went for survey work in the Kodakkad village. The survey was to be conducted on sanitation, geographical features of the area, drinking water facility, etc. Later time was allotted for each group to prepare reports.

A Science Lesson

Next, both the high school and the upper primary level students were exposed to illuminative and exciting science class by one of the teachers. Certain preliminary instructions were given to the students regarding the class. The teacher told them in advance that there will be no title given by him to the subject matter. The students are supposed to give a title at the end. They should listen carefully, take part in the discussion and later on prepare a write up on the class including a suitable title. Another warning given to them was that there may be lot of discontinuities, the talk may not be sequential: it may start somewhere and may end elsewhere. It is for the students to put them in proper order. The written reports were later gone through by some teachers and assessed.

Dramatisation

Education should not just confine to the four walls of the classroom. It does not end in memorising a few passages and solving a few hundred problems. One of the aims of education is to mould the individual to enable him to take up the responsibility bestowed on him by the society, to make him a responsible citizen who would uphold the cultural heritage and identity of his people and to serve the people of his nation. The diversified manner in which the quiz programme is planned should certainly become a guide and a model for similar pursuit by voluntary organisations elsewhere. Another major item of the competition, aimed toward this goal, was to encourage and bring out the capabilities of the children in the area of dramatics. Both the UP and HS students were given separate passages, published in the KSSP magazine, Eureka. One of them, given to the high school was in the background of Mahatma Gandhi's birthday and highlighted the freedom struggle and the sacrifices made by the people of India. The other passage given to the upper primary children also had the freedom struggle in the background. Names of veteran freedom fighters like Lokmanya

Balagangadhar Tilak, Bhagat Singh and Chandrasekhar Azad figured in the passage. The children were divided into groups of six or eight and they had to formulate a dramatic version of the passage and then to enact the same. They had to distribute the roles among group mates, decide on the dialogue, stage setting, etc. Some supervisory assistance was given by one or two activists/teachers to each group. We could observe the enthusiasm and the seriousness with which the children practised and enacted the scene. Surely, given proper guidance and encouragement, today's children can definitely grow up to be tomorrow's great citizens taking the country to fame and prosperity.

Addendum to a Poem

The KSSP has rightly included in this multifaceted diversified quiz programme a small feast for the literary oriented minds also. A few lines of interesting, meaningful and rhyming couplet were written on the board. The UP section should use further words to add four more lines to complete the poem according to their imagination, but meaningfully and logically. A similar exercise with six lines to be added was given to the secondary section participants. Though not all students can be expected to be talented in such literary pursuit, such activities will definitely act as an encouragement to the 'future poets'.

These instances are just some of the samples included in the quiz programme called Festival of Knowledge. In addition to these special activities, the usual question - answer session had a variety of items covering all fields of knowledge. There were quiz items to be answered after carefully watching a scientific activity. There were jumbling of words, jumbling of cut pieces of paper to bring out the hidden map of India, estimation of measurement, etc.

News/Wall Magazine

The last item of the testing programme for the block level was the preparation of a news magazine by the high school level participants on Vignantsavam as the theme and a wall magazine for UP section. This again was a group work where each group of six to seven students prepared a news / wall magazine.

The concluding session of the festival was a short function wherein the top scorers were presented with prizes and certificates to all participants. Many parents and Panchayat board members were present on the occasion to cheer the participants.

Comments and Suggestions

1. it is indeed a laudable effort to conduct a programme of this type throughout Kerala on the same day. A lot of effort must have gone into the planning and organisational aspect of it. But then the KSSP has spread its wings throughout the length and breadth of Kerala and its active members and activists have taken lot of interest in implementing the programme successfully. The three occasions which we covered happened to take place in the rural background of Kerala. The local public and parents of the students have also contributed their mite toward the success of the festival of knowledge. The participation of the community in general and parents in particular makes the school a community centre wherein the future citizens of our great country are moulded.
2. The distinguishing feature of the question paper is that the questions in it are of integrated type as they cover all fields of knowledge like science, general knowledge, language, local environment, etc. The questions were not of the rote-memory type but goes to the level of understanding and application. Creative abilities of the students are also assessed to a certain extent. In addition to this inculcation of certain values like national identity, cultural heritage, equality of sexes, protection of environment,

removal of social barriers, scientific temper, etc. have also been given importance while framing the questions and other activities. Hence, the evaluation could be considered as really 'comprehensive'.

3. Considerable care has been taken into to see that the evaluation is objective, still in a programme of this type some element of subjectivity is unavoidable. But then the whole aim of it is not to rank anyone as first , second, third, etc. it is the spirit of participation and involvement which is of prime importance. Toward this end we could see that the efforts of KSSP has been really fruitful. In some cases instructions have been given in the question paper itself on how to do the evaluation when part of the answer is correct. Similar instructions have been given on the assessment scheme to be followed with respect to items like project report, presentation of the report, dramatisation which are evaluated by a team of three persons.
4. Another special feature of evaluation process is the prompt and efficient way the scoring is completed then and there without the aid any computer network as we see in the TV quiz programmes. The volunteers check each and every answer then and there and marks are entered. In some cases the students themselves are allowed to write the marks after getting the correct answers and ^{the} quiz master gives the key for allotment of marks. Sufficient number of volunteers were assigned to each room for this purpose.
5. Yet, some items were apparently left to be scored by the quiz masters. To some extent such items might have contributed to some subjectivity in the assessment. Local survey report, report on the science lesson, assessment of craft work, etc. are some of them. For such items in order not to disappoint the participants at least some minimum marks is always allotted irrespective of the merit as per the instructions of the KSSP. Some amount of thinking may be put into the idea of standardising such scoring to minimise the element of subjectivity as far as possible.
6. While considering evaluation another aspect was causing some concern to us. In the Panchayat level competition, the achievement in terms of marks remained almost around average and above average in case of

some students whereas high performance was almost absent. Given such enthusiastic group of students one should expect the top scorers to reach 80 to 90 percent. We do not have a detailed analysis of the data in this regard to draw any final conclusion. But it would be worthwhile for the KSSP to make a detailed item-wise analysis of achievement taking several samples distributed throughout the state. Does it have anything to do with the reported backwardness of these regions? Or are there hidden factors not apparent to superficial observation, but which can be probed/ explored by means of a detailed analysis including statistical methods? Results of such feed back can be made available to the paper setters in the coming years.

7. One or two specific item need mentioning. In the school level competition there was one visual question at LP level where an event associated with a total solar eclipse is given and the student is expected to identify and name the phenomenon wherein such a sight is observed. The wording of the question in Malayalam was 'Prathibhasam' for phenomenon. It is very doubtful whether an average student at the primary level knows the meaning of the word 'Prathibhasam'. Similarly in the Panchayat level competition(LP Section)there is an item on the jumbled letters. The solution is related to the wise statement : " Excess eating is injurious to health " . This idea is couched in ^a two-word statement with nine letters. Looking at the jumbled order the students have to identify the actual statement, We found that this proved exceedingly hard to the students. Providing illustrations also did not prove to be of help. Could it be that one of the words, " amithabhakshanam " (meaning excess food) being uncommon, was beyond the comprehension of the students at this level? Or the structure of the sentence dropping the verb was too stylistic for them? Or they could not guess that it could be of two words? Reasons may be many; linguistic apart, it might be related to the basic idea itself. However, the KSSP experts can devote sometime to analyse the item-wise impact of the question paper on students. This feed back may further improve the quality of the question paper, which is excellent even now in many respects. But ultimately the efficacy of any question paper has to

be measured in terms of the reaction it makes on the students and their performance levels.

8. Another important aspect is the combining of two or three classes into one group. For example the upper primary level corresponds to standard VI to VIII and the students of VIII standard definitely has an edge over their juniors. This discrepancy can be felt in all levels of the competition. For example there was one item where a coin is placed in a tray containing some water. The students are given a tumbler, some waste paper and a box of matches. The coin should be removed without wetting the hands with water. The trick refers to one of the concepts they learn in chemistry. It is quite likely that children of the lower classes in the UP level are unable to do this as they may lack the requisite knowledge related to this. Like this there may be other instances also where X standard students have an edge over the ^{students of 18 standard.} It is also impractical to treat each standard as an individual group. Some thought should go into the framing of the questions taking this aspect into consideration.
9. A test usually concludes with the students leaving the hall one by one in different moods depending upon the way he or she has performed. But here we witnessed a different scene. The finale of the Panchayat level competition saw the students attending a community song session where the key- word of the song was the question " What beyond ". Each of us being confined to some given area of specialisation our sphere of activity and thinking becomes limited. Many of us are analogous to the " Frog in the deep well "(A common saying in Malayalam). The particular song exploited this image , not to underscore the idea of limitation, but to awaken our attention to other areas as well. It is true that we are all prisoners confined to certain territory; yet this does not and should not restrict us from entertaining dreams about other spheres. The quest for more knowledges should continue always wondering what is beyond and what is further beyond. The message of the song may be too abstract for the children for immediate assimilation. Yet the catchy tune would have caught their attention and at least a few seeds of the spirit of unending enquiry would have been sown in their minds. If at least one or two of

these seeds yield results in the future, it is a great achievement for the KSSP.

What next ?

The observers are of the firm opinion that the time they spent at the venues of Vignanotsavam in three levels was fully rewarding and refreshing.

A few questions that agitate the minds the KSSP activists and ours are whether this type of comprehensive evaluation with an integrated (Multi-disciplinary) approach can percolate into actual classrooms and whether it is desirable etc. The observers strongly opine in the affirmative. Students tend to learnⁱⁿ the ways they are tested. If our question paper reflect our objectives of formal education and if education is regarded as what is left after what has been forgotten then a breakthrough as envisaged by the KSSP is worth experimenting. Also, all teaching understandably happens to be geared towards coaching the students for examinations as a major goal. Any improvement in education primarily requires reformation in examination system - a reoriented approach to and awareness of what is desired to be developed and evaluated in children. A collaboration of the state educational authorities with non-governmental agencies such as the KSSP working for betterment of standards in education may work to be highly beneficial in bringing about the desired reformation in the examination system keeping in mind the broader objectives than testing mere rote-learning.

Kerala reportedly has achieved a total quantitative breakthrough in the field of education. What is now required is, therefore, endeavours towards qualitative improvement. Nice that the KSSP has taken upon itself initiatives to make interventions in the educational field to promote the qualitative improvement. This sort of intervention, the observers feel, is worthy of emulation by other states as well. *Good luck* .

ANNEXURE I

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF K.S.S.P. - A REVIEW

Education has been one of the major spheres of activity for the Kerala Sastrasahitya Parishat. For the past three decades, KSSP has been intervening in the formal education system, supplementing it by activities in non-formal education, particularly in science communication. Our intervention in formal education has become more systematic and organised in the past few years. A major example for this is our contribution to the restructuring of primary education through Panchayat school complexes being set up in different parts of the State. The background for the increasing participation of KSSP in the formal education system will have to be outlined.

Intervention of Education - Early Phase

KSSP came into being as an organisation of science writers in Malayalam. Problems of Science Communication in Malayalam, particularly to children attracted the attention of the organisation. The discussion on the use of technical terms in Malayalam (1967) and the effort to develop suitable forms of communications through science magazines for children and adults were part of the effort to resolve the problem. It is possible to argue that such efforts to develop an effective method of science communication led the KSSP to examine the problems of Science education in particular and education in general.

After the introduction of NCERT Syllabi in schools (1964) the members of KSSP organised classes for teachers to introduce them to the new feature of the syllabi. This was the first intervention of KSSP in the process of formal education. This experience resulted in the beginning of a serious discussion on school curriculum. It was pointed out that science teaching in school was extremely drab and was unable to develop scientific outlook among children.

Teaching was purely examination-oriented and children depended on guides to pass examinations. New methods had to be devised to inspire children to develop scientific outlook and experiment new forms of testing the knowledge levels of children. The 11th annual conference of the KSSP decided to form 1000 science clubs in schools. Science Clubs provided a major entry point in schools. This was followed by the beginning of Eureka Talent Test in 1974, which was started as a pilot project among primary school children in Trissur district. The Eureka Test was conducted State-wide in 1975. Sastra Keralam Quiz competition for High School children was also conducted along side. Vacation classes for introducing various aspects of science to school children was also started. These experiments were meant to check the tendency among schools to treat school teaching as more 'coaching sessions' and introduce a certain level of creativity and innovations in learning.

Efforts were made to extend these experiments into Higher education also. The Sastragathi examination for college students presented a totally different design in the conduct of examinations. Sastragathi Science forums began to get organised. However, these efforts did not meet with the same level of success as in the case of school level examinations.

The intervention of the KSSP on formal education system took a significantly different turn by the end of the seventies. KSSP had taken important steps in the dissemination of scientific knowledge among the people, by conducting the 'Nature, science, society' classes and conducting the first Kala Jatha in 1977. KSSP also started organising children through Eureka Balavedis and Sastra Keralam Clubs in 1978-79. Initially these clubs were formed around schools, but they were taken out of schools from 1980-81.

These activities familiarised the organisation with the problems taking the crucial inter-linkage between education and society. The problems of

social ability of education was first discussed, and it was argued that the school curriculum is not conducive to give children gainful employment. Forms of vocational education was experimented with the establishment of START. KSSP also took interest in literacy programmes and submitted the first comprehensive literacy project in 1978.

The Education Document of 1982

The experience of the Parishat inside and outside the formal educational institutions resulted in the increasing awareness among Parishat workers that piecemeal remedial measures would not suffice. A comprehensive approach regarding the structure and content of education would be required as a basis for any effective intervention. The "Document on Education" which was discussed and finalised at the 19th. Annual Conference at Mancheri (1982) was a direct consequence of the efforts in this direction. The document mainly concentrated on school education. The main issues raised in the document were the following:

- 1) The objective of education is to enable the individual to develop his/her inherent capacities so that he/she is able to carryout efficiently all the duties and responsibilities assigned to him/her by society, to contribute to social progress, to imbibe and enjoy the cultural heritage of his /her people and mankind as a whole and to fight those forces that impede the achievement of these aims.
- 2) The present education does not enable us to achieve these objectives. Instead of assisting social development, it alienates the student from his/her own culture and social production.
- 3) The present methods of teaching destroys the inquisitiveness of the student. Examinations serve as the scene to eliminate the poor and the downtrodden sections of the people. Although the primary classes enrol students from all classes, higher education, particularly, professional education, is presently elitist.

- 4) The education system mainly caters to the sustenance of competitive social order. Instead of assisting social transformation, it acts as an obstacle to progress.

Based on these general formulations, the document proceeds to criticise the irrelevance of the curriculum, in scientific teaching methods, lack of proper educational facilities, outmoded examination system, the influence of caste and religious interest and government policies that foster elitism and privatisation. It also gave suggestions for an alternative educational structure which includes a self sufficient +2 stage with emphasis on vocational training, mobility between various streams through short term courses, specialisation and research in the universities and autonomy to education sector with academic councils for school district and it also suggested that medium of primary education should be strictly Mother Tongue.

Although further elaboration of several parts of the document through detailed studies was envisaged, it could not be undertaken. An attempt to revise and update the document was made in 1990 - 91 which also could not be completed. However, these efforts enabled the KSSP to formulate and classify its positions on a number of issues and develop its methods of intervening in the formal education system in a much more concrete manner.

Intervention in Education - Later Phase

During the eighties, KSSP's educational activities proceeded in two distinct directions:

1. Intervention in debates concerned with the structure of education which included agitation against some of the government policies.
2. Intervention in the content of education, particularly in developing methods through which learning becomes a source of enjoyment.

The eighties witnessed the introduction of a number of 'reforms' by the Government, which were criticised by the KSSP as detrimental to the education system. These included efforts to promote the private sector, the spread of unaided elite private schools, marked increase in corruption, degeneration in Higher Education that included the breakdown in the examination system and undermining of university autonomy. A number of teachers and student organisations came together to resist these policies. The KSSP also participated in the agitation. The KSSP workers organised thousands of classes and public teachers on education and organised school protection committees. During 1984, an Education Enquiry Commission headed by C.Achutha Menon toured the district documenting the rampant corruption. During the subsequent year an educational institutional survey was also conducted.

Intervention in the content of education took several forms. One was the programme called 'Pathanam Pasakaram' (learning is enjoyable) which consisted of lecture demonstrations by Parishat activists in schools. The second was the conduct of 'Balolsavams' (which later developed into the children's Science festival) where children camped and were given lectures, demonstrations, practical projects and were taught several skills, the activities being based on the school curriculum. Balolsava Jathas toured all over Kerala, which used school lessons to demonstrate them in a much more enjoyable fashion, using songs, dances, play, painting and puppets. The programmes were a great success and the innovative methodologies used in them were widely appreciated. This encouraged the KSSP workers to conduct much more detailed experiments in innovative teaching which included vacation camps for school science teaching and environmental education.

Total Literacy and After

The educational activities of the KSSP reached the mass level with the introduction of the Total Literacy programme in Ernakulam district during

1989 - 90 which was followed by the Aksharakeralam programme for Total Literacy in Kerala State. KSSP played a leading role in both these programmes and was responsible for the academic input into them. The innovative teaching methods so far experimented by KSSP, combined with the techniques of non-formal education, succeeded in arousing the interests of the learners and making the programme a grand success.

The total involvement of KSSP in the literacy programme brought the KSSP workers face to face with the problems of formal education and the crucial inter-phase of society and education system. Many of the problems already stated in the education document of 1982 now confronted the KSSP as grim realities. Even as total literacy was being achieved, the growing elitism and alienation of the system from the socio-economic realities of the time had resulted in the down grading of the common school system, including the Govt. and private aided schools. The anarchic academic conditions prevailing in such schools meant that the children coming from the poor and downtrodden sections of the population, often first generation learners, were unable to meet the existing standards in quality. Nowhere was it more apparent than in the acquisition of the three rupees. A survey conducted in Trivandrum district showed that 30% of the primary school children were unable to meet the minimum requirements of literacy. Similar studies with similar results were conducted in districts like Kasaragode and Kannur also. This resulted in a revival of intervention in the formal education system, with the formation of 'Aksharavedis' for ensuring literacy within primary schools. Kasaragode had a programme called 'Aksharapulari' conducted by the DIET in association with KSSP, which provided the model pedagogic tools for the entire State. A beginning was made in teaching Arithmetic for primary school children also called 'Ganithavedi'.

The experience of Aksharavedi and Ganithavedis resulted in the increasing awareness that a comprehensive intervention in primary education

was necessary. This need was more apparent because the Government programmes for improving quality of education were not meeting with the desired success. The experience of total literacy programmes demonstrated that efforts in this direction would meet with success only when they were conducted as programmes with people's participation because often. The vital impediments in the system lay in the inter-phase of education and society. Efforts began in the direction experimenting with comprehensive quality improvement programmes for primary school children using the Panchayat school complexes as a unit (see for details the paper by C.Ramakrishnan on Panchayat' school complexes appended herewith). Experiments were conducted in Madikkal in Kasaragod district, Swapuram in Kannur district and Mezhuweli in Pathanamthitta district. Though is a slightly different from vain the 'Vignanavedi' experiment in Trivandrum district was also an effort in this direction.

Such intervention was followed by a more co-ordinated state level effort at producing improved teaching aids, that would encourage more teachers to undertake similar experiments. It cannot be claimed that this effort also met with comparable success, but some innovative efforts were made particularly in teaching Malayalam language in the I standard and in producing a work book for environmental education for the I and II standards.

While these efforts were going on and other interesting experiments was being conducted in the field of evaluation. It was being widely felt that the Eureka Talent Test while was being conducted as a part of the formal system was undergoing the problem that could be experienced in a programme of examination oriented coaching normally conducted in schools. The Eureka and Sastra Keralam Tests were being treated as avenues for similar "coaching". Commercial publishers were even bringing out 'guides' for Eureka Tests. Realising that these tendencies would defeat the every purpose of conducting these tests, it was decided to take these tests out of

formal education and conduct them as Annual 'Vignanotsavam' in which school children participated. The normal testing was given up and the children were asked to undertake projects and experiments in a festival atmosphere. The success of 'Vignanotsavam' and the ever increasing participation of children from all types of schools demonstrated the effectiveness of these innovation methods and was a clear reflection on the prosaic and shifting knitter of the formal education system. (for details see the paper in 'Vignanotsavam' appended herewith).

A curious, but unavoidable, contradiction was entailed in these experiments. Even as the KSSP was making more co-ordinated inroads into the formal education system, a crucial aspect of an earlier intervention, in the evaluation system was now being taken out of formal education. That is, while the passage in primary education has been from non-formal to formal, the passage in the evaluation methods has been from formal to non-formal. At the same time these experiments convinced the KSSP workers that the present system had already reached a point of dissidence, and it catered to no more than a few elite schools and even they are nothing but coaching institutions, unable to develop new ideas and lacking innovative here. The vital problems of social function of education along with accountability also surfaced.

Now there is a general consensus regarding the crisis of education in Kerala, a consensus apparently shared even by government agencies and political parties. However, the perspectives from which the crisis has been analysed have not been the same and the suggestions to get ourselves out of this morass have also not been the same. But the concerns of the KSSP regarding the quality of education and creating a mass education system that caters to the majority that is the poor and the downtrodden people have received attention from the same quarters. Can we develop a series of viable programmes that would strengthen the common school system and ensure

quality education for all? Can we develop education institutions that would have social responsibility and accountability? Can we develop an educational system, that will not be categorised as 'formal and non-formal would ensure dissemination of knowledge that caters to the development of an equitable and just and egalitarian society and would also fulfil the human power needs of social development? These are some of the questions that the KSSP workers had to answer in the course of their activities which provided the rationale for the establishment of a people's Education Commission.

ANNEXURE II

SIXTH ALL INDIA PEOPLE'S SCIENCE CONGRESS

February 23-25, 1994. - Hyderabad

KSSP'S EXPERIMENTS IN FORMAL EDUCATION

C.Ramakrishnan

K.S.S.P.

Introduction

KSSP is a voluntary organisation established in 1962 as a Forum of Science Writers, having the limited aim of popularising science through mother tongue, Malayalam. Now it has grown into an organisation having a membership of over 60,000 indulging in a wide spectrum of activities.

Education had always been one of the important areas of interest for KSSP. This is partly because it was a movement initiated essentially by teachers. Even today the single largest category of its activists are teachers. The essence of our organisation's approach to education is the joy of learning and optimistic attitude towards life. Education should enable the individual to carry out responsibilities bestowed on him by the society and make him capable of inheriting the cultural heritage of the entire humanity, thus enriching both the individual and societal life on a continued and sustained basis. Further it should empower the individual to fight and defeat the antisocial forces which stand in his way in achieving these objectives.

The basic functions of learning and teaching are not taking place in the educational institutions. It is quite natural that the system has degenerated. As things stood, we felt that the best course of action would be to intervene at the centre stage, to transform the teaching - learning process

into something enjoyable for both students and teachers. With this objective in view, KSSP had been carrying out a few experiments.

An early attempt has been the starting of Eureka Talent Test for primary children, Sastrakeralam Quiz for high school students to find out talented pupils from the school children. Three years ago the whole exercise of conducting Eureka Talent Test and Sastrakeralam Quiz was stopped, only to go in for a more comprehensive and scientific system of talent search examination named 'Vignanotsavam' - Festival of Knowledge.

KSSP looks at the present day scenario in a special way. There are many structural and policy aspects in education which have to be vehemently objected to. Hence a strong public opinion has to be developed among the masses on the problems of educational sector. This conscientization would lead to people forming a united front to fight against the establishment.

However, there is no point in just fighting these evils if one does not process any alternation in the present system. Hence, KSSP took up a two-pronged policy - externally, fight the wrong policies of the Government as well as fight internally within the system - wheels to generate a set of committed teachers and students without compromising the principles.

Examples of the former type of activities are many - agitation against Pre-degree board, Polytechnic agitation, Commission in Unearth Corrupt Practices in Private Management, etc. are only a few.

This paper tries to enlist the second type of activities where our activists fought internally within the system.

Historical Perspectives

As already stated quality improvement in education was one of the earliest works of KSSP. As an initial step to this we started publishing the

science journals - Sastrakerala, Eureka and Sastragathi. Science teachers were under training in science club activities through out the State. Enrichment classes for high school pupils were undertaken during the summer vacation of the school year. This was later transformed into 'Living with Science' camps (Sastra Sahavasa Camp) and 'Living with Nature' camps all of which had a component of national integration in it.

A direct involvement in the day to day classroom activities was effected by the publication of a teachers' handbook in Physics for high school classes. However, the formation of Aksharavedi, a forum wherein under-literate pupils of primary classes are made to learn through effective teaching techniques, was a turning point of a basic nature. In primary education in the State, a survey conducted by our Thiruvananthapuram District Committee for primary classes of that district revealed the fact that about 30 to 35 percent of the primary school students could not write in their mother tongue properly. This sad state of affairs forced us to intervene in the teaching of Malayalam in primary classes. It may be noted that Aksharavedi learning materials prepared by KSSP has a catalytic effect in the field of primary education. By this academic year, there are at least 13 independent materials prepared by various DIETs of the State available for diagnostic and remedial learning of the mother tongue (Malayalam) following the pattern of our Aksharavedi handbook.

Our Balavedi (Children's Forum) has also played a key role in formulating the various strategies adopted by the organisation inside the classroom. Identifying the learner as the key person in the learning situation of the classrooms, making them learn how to learn, making learning a joyous activity for children and making teaching a joyous exercise for teachers, learning through activities and play way are only a few multi-pronged strategies employed by this organisation in Balavedis.

Vignanotsavam

Vignanotsavam has been a refreshing experience for KSSP as well as the teaching community. Children are usually afraid of examinations. Even then they participate in Vignanotsavams with joy. It is conducted at Panchayat level and pupils from various schools in a Panchayat are brought to one place (usually a high school) by their teachers. On the average their number will be around four hundred. (There are Panchayats where the number exceeded a thousand.) They sing group songs and play special plays with the guidance of KSSP workers. Then they are grouped into small groups of about 30 to 40 children and the examination begins.

The examination is quite different from the conventional ones. They don't have to think about what they meet in their daily life. For example, they are allowed to smell, taste, hear and to identify them. Thus they are asked to identify plants by observing their seeds, leaves and flowers. An elephant without tail is exhibited on the wall and each of the students is asked to cut a piece of the twine provided to them so that it has sufficient length to fit in place of the elephant's tail/. They are given coconut palm leaves and asked to make some toys or play things. They are then asked to write a caption for a cartoon or narrate what a cartoon series depicts. These are only a few of the activities. All the pupils get absorbed in their activities and they forget that it is an examination. They don't feel depressed even when they score low marks. Examination truly becomes a learning process.

Fifteen students from each panchayat are selected for higher level (Block level) "Vignanotsav" and they have to complete a project work and bring its result when they come for the higher examination. This year the lower primary students were asked to germinate seeds of grams or beans for ten days and note their observations. They had to bring ten samples of seedlings from one day to ten days growth together with their observations. The UP and high school students were asked to study medicinal plants available in their neighbourhoods, paste a small of branch of each in a page

of a note book, name this, describe their properties, use and where they are available, etc.

The enthusiasm shown by the students and parents in this kind activities is tremendous and gives rise to hope that they are ready to play a positive role in transforming our educational system if somebody is to guide them. This year more than 4 lakhs students and 65000 teachers participated in "Vignanotsav" conducted by KSSP and next year we expect much more than this.

The School Complex Programme

KSSP wanted to utilise all its expertise and experience acquired from its various educational activities. The idea of school complex was seeded in Sivapuram High School of Kannur District during the last academic year. The complex is an inter-linking of several lower and upper primary schools with the high schools, where in the high school forms the nucleus for providing physical infrastructure and educational aids and the high school teachers providing the guidance and leadership to other teachers in terms of teaching, notes preparation, etc. The education schedule is uniformly implemented through out the complex. This year Madikal Panchayat Complex (Kasargod) and Kalliasseri Complex (Kannur District) were started. It may be noted that Madikal and Kalliasseri are the first ever panchayat level educational complex of the country.

Objectives:

The most important objectives of the complex programme are to show

- a. that learning can be an enjoyable experience for children.
- b. that even under the conventional schemes of examination all children can score better marks.
- c. that wastage in education can be considerably reduced.
- d. that teaching can become a pleasurable job for teachers.
- e. that all these requires no additional teaching hour than what is obtained today, and

- f. to explore the possibilities of effective enhancement of the country in the academic and various other auxiliary activities in the schools and to create a model for societal involvement in formal schooling.

Implementation:

As a first step, during last academic year Akshara Vedis were formed in all schools for the complexes - from this academic year an active intervention in the classroom teaching- learning process was undertaken using learning modules developed by KSSP. Apart from the cognitive domain, the affective domain as well as the psychomotor domain have also been well cared for in the classroom.

A detailed year plan helped the teachers to draw up the plans as per local level resources. Learning was made competency based. These competencies were measured through specially developed tools. The philosophy employed in Vignanotsavam - activities, open book examination, etc. - was experimented in the examination system. Various camps which aim at affecting the affective domain apart from the cognitive domain were planned. These have turned out to be very effective.

Although a very clear picture is yet to emerge, some of the rare examples of people's participation in education have emerged at Madikal and Kalliasseri. Formation of mother PTAs (Mathru Sangami) is one of them. Here, mothers of children assemble on a specified day and we discuss with them the problems of their children's education, how they can help in the healthy growth of children socially, mentally and physically, etc.

Implementation Agencies

In both the districts, Kasargod and Kannur where the programme is being implemented, there was a district level organisational committee with President of the District Council as the Chairman and Chair Person of the

standing Committee on Education of the District Council as the Convenor. Apart from this there was an Academic Committee at the district level with the Principal of DIET as Chairman and an educational activist as Convenor. In the Panchayat also where the programme is being implemented, similar committees have been formed at the Panchayat level. President of the Panchayat was the Chairman of the organising committee and the Headmaster of the high school which was made the nucleus of all activities of the complex was made the Convenor.

Monitoring

Effective monitoring is the most important component of the venture. Two types of monitoring are going on apart from the regular departmental inspection.

A teacher of the nucleus school is made in charge of each school of the complex. He visits regularly the concerned school and helps the teachers to implement the programme. He reports regularly to his Headmaster about the problems and progress who in turn presents them to the appropriate committees.

The accountability of the teachers to the society is a unique feature of the programme. The representatives of the Panchayat (President and ward members) visit the schools. This also helps them bring in rapport between the people's representatives and the school.

Examination

The examinations are said to be the main hurdle in any educational reform. Without reforming, no reform can work. But it is not that easy a job. So efforts were made to make the framing of questions, scientific with the help of DIETs. Questions were competency based and practical work was made an essential component of the examination. The types of questions

that we introduced in Vignanotsavam were widely appreciated by both teachers And students.

Possibilities

1. Though the new Panchayat Raj Bill and the CABE committee on decentralisation in education headed by Shri. Veerappa Moily have repeatedly stressed the importance of people's participation for bringing in quality education, we don't yet have a model to emulate. Even the present one developed has to be thoroughly reformed. Our experience has shown that the school complex system can be a better alternative to the present one, both in terms of quality and better infrastructure.
2. How this system could be taken forward for the continuing education of the society as a whole has to be examined thoroughly. The continuing education now being conducted by a separate agency (say Saksharatha Samiti) may be examined.
3. We strongly believe that in order to effect radical changes in the education system, the teachers should play the leading role and our activities in the field of education are aimed at achieving this goal. Bringing teachers, students, parents and officials together in educational activities has helped us to understand the problems in a better way and this has helped the teachers to come forward to contribute their might for reforming the educational system.

Limitations

1. The most important of all limitations is that people's participation is still desired. Although Madikal is better in this aspect, there is still 'inhibition' on the part of both the school and the people as to how exactly the people role can be defined. Only the constant work using the mechanism can answer this problem.

2. The high school which is the nucleus of all activities of the complex programme does not show enough programme for the complex. This creates a situation wherein they have to be 'fed' with programmes.
3. The teachers' community needs intensive training in practising the techniques suggested by complex academic committees.

At present Kerala is facing a boom of English medium schools both recognised and unrecognised. Even the rural areas are not spared from this epidemic. Parents are attracted by these institutions. Even middle class and lower middle class parents are ready to spend any amount of money to get admission for their wards to these schools which actually alienate the students from the society. The parents feel that they got better education in these schools. KSSP believes that mere propaganda against this trend will not have the desired effect. The only way to combat or counter trend is by enhancing the quality of education in ordinary schools. For that a lot of work has to be done to retrain the teachers, to get the co-operation of the parents and to attract the students through the new methods of teaching. Our work is a humble beginning to this end.