

सेवावर्धिनी



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Sevavardhini- A Trusted Partner!

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Foreword

Greetings,

In the fourth edition of Seva -Varta, we are delighted to once again introduce you to various inspiring seva organizations. The successful initiatives of these organizations, operating in both urban and remote areas, will surely inspire you to identify seva opportunities within your own fields and implement them effectively.

In today's times, the issue of fuel and energy affects everyone's life in various ways. As an effective and eco-friendly solution to this problem, Biogas projects can prove to be extremely useful. It is the need of the hour to urgently set up such projects wherever possible. Notably, considering the long-term savings these projects offer, they can easily be established even without external financial assistance.

Along with this, information regarding Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) - a powerful tool - will be useful in setting priorities of essential development work in your area and completing them successfully through community participation. We intend to organize a training program on this subject soon.

Often, social work triggered by a small incident transforms into a widespread movement. Although the upbringing and care of children with special needs is a relatively neglected subject in society, the inspiring journey of finding a way through it touches the heart and creates a sense of new perspective.

The 'Institutional Evaluation' initiative started last year has been relaunched this year with renewed zeal. The new registration process has begun, and we humbly request you all to contact us and take full advantage of this initiative.

“Let us help one another, and together follow the path of righteousness.”

॥ एकमेका सहाय्य करू । अवघे धरू सुपंथ ॥

- Shri. Vikram Pandit
Executive Committee Member,
Sevavardhini.

2 - Social Organizations and Their Impact

2.1 - Lokvikas Foundation: Empowering Dreams of Communities

Pune is widely regarded as the center of education and culture. However, within this very city lie several urban settlements (Vastis) where children's dreams await the right direction and opportunity. Guided by the motto "Nation Building through Individual Development," the 'Lokvikas Social Foundation' has ushered in a new dawn of transformation



in these areas. The organization has become a cornerstone in bringing the underprivileged and marginalized sections of society into the mainstream.

The foundation's work primarily focuses on Child Development and Women Empowerment. Its operations span across 63 vastis in areas surrounding Pune University, including Shivajinagar, Gokhale Nagar, Aundh, Bopodi, Pashan, and Baner-Balewadi. Based on the four pillars of Health, Education, Values (Sanskar), and Self-reliance, Lokvikas Foundation today reaches households through 96 diverse initiatives.

Children in these settlements possess immense talent and a willingness to work hard, yet they often lack a nurturing environment. The 'Bal unnati Project' bridges this gap. Due to cramped housing, many children have no space to study, and parents, busy with labor, often cannot devote enough time to them. In such circumstances, these Kendras have become a rightful place for children.

Beyond textbooks, children's personalities are shaped through sports, songs, storytelling, and meditation. Values of discipline, confidence, and team spirit are instilled through Indian festivals, the teachings of great icons, and patriotic values. A significant success of this project is that children have moved away from excessive screen time to embrace outdoor games and creative activities.

Recognizing that academic progress is as vital as values, the foundation's 'Abhyasika' focuses on improving the educational quality of children. With the help of 'Smart Abhyasika Kits,' children are joyfully learning reading, writing, and mathematics. The expert guidance of teachers (Tai) and interactions with successful individuals have ignited a genuine interest in education among students.

Furthermore, keeping pace with the changing times, the foundation has launched a 'Drone Repair and Maintenance Training Center' to equip youth with technical skills and make them self-reliant.

It is crucial to channelize the energy of girls aged 12 to 18 correctly. Through the 'Kishori Vikas Prkalp ,' girls receive scientific information regarding physical and mental changes in adolescence. Discussions in a friendly atmosphere, trips, and lectures have significantly boosted their moral.

Simultaneously, the 'Women entrepreneurship and Training Center' provides vocational guidance to women in these settlements. Thanks to skill-based training, many women have now become self reliant. Their financial independence has become a vital support system for their families.

Understanding of stress and depression in settlement life, the Foundation's 'Counseling Center' provides essential support. Individuals struggling with negative thoughts, fear, or family issues receive expert guidance here. The hallmark of this center is empowering the person to solve their problems with the right support.

The success of these projects lies in the hands of the volunteers. The Foundation has involved educated youth from the settlements itself. More than 75 volunteers undergo monthly training to carry out this mission with dedication. A particularly heartening fact is that girls who once attended these classes as students are now graduates and serving as teachers in the same centers. This is the greatest strength of the organization's work.

The sapling planted by Lokvikas Social Foundation is now growing into a Banyan tree. Whether it is Shivrajyabhishek Din or Science Day, every initiative brings a new spark in the children's eyes. The distribution of school kits, winter camps, and annual gatherings have made the atmosphere in these communities vibrant.

To further strengthen this mission, the support of society is essential. You can celebrate your moments of joy with these children. By sponsoring a project, adopting a settlement, volunteering your time, or providing financial aid, you can contribute your share to this noble endeavor.

Let us join this journey of seva that empowers the dreams of children in urban vastis. In this sacred task of "Nation Building through Individual Development," let us all play our role.

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Sustainable Development of Rural-Tribal Areas

2.2 - Nimad Abhyudaya Rural Management and Development Association (NARMADA)

The Nimar Abhyudaya Rural Management and Development Association (NARMADA) was established with the objective of working towards the development of tribal and rural areas, with a special focus on education and the holistic development of women. Through various schemes and initiatives, the organization is paving a "highway of progress" for rural development.

Introduction

Nimar Abhyudaya was founded in 2010 by Smt. Bharti tai Thakur. She laid the foundation of this institution after completing the sacred Narmada Parikrama. The primary goal of the organization is to achieve the all-round development of rural and tribal communities. The institution actively works in the sectors of education, skill development, health, women's empowerment, and sustainable livelihoods.



Vision

- To spread quality education and increase social awareness.
- To empower women through education and sustainable livelihood opportunities.
- To develop leadership qualities among women and children.
- To encourage community participation.
- To build sustainable and self-reliant livelihood systems.

Mission

- To implement long-term projects in the fields of education, health, environment, and skill development.
- To organize various campaigns and workshops for social awareness.
- To provide employment-oriented educational opportunities.
- To develop an ideal model for sustainable rural development.

Key Initiatives

Narmada Kaushal Rath (Skills on Wheels)

- A mobile training unit designed to bridge the gap in skill training within rural and remote tribal areas.
- This 'Rath' (van) travels from village to village providing practical training in trades such as plumbing, carpentry, electrical work, fabrication, and masonry.
- Equipped with an in-built generator, it ensures uninterrupted training even in areas without electricity.
- Impact: More than 1,500 youth have been trained to date.



Vivekananda Institute of Rural Technology (VIRT)

- Established in May 2022, this institute provides skill-based education to rural youth.
- It offers specialized courses like DBRT (Diploma in Basic Rural Technology).

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3 - Livelihood Resources

3.1 Mulewadi Model: The 'Biogas' Revolution



The backbone of any social initiative is financial sustainability and the tangible, long-term impact it creates for the most vulnerable sections of society. The 'Shri Datta Yogiraj Multi-purpose Social Foundation' in Mulewadi (Ahilyanagar district) stands as a beacon of such change. While the foundation has long been dedicated to bringing the light of knowledge to orphans and the children of sugarcane harvesters, it has now set a new standard in environmental friendship and economic savings through a collaboration with 'Suyash Solutions' and 'Sevavardhini.'

Currently, the Mulewadi campus is home to more than 250 boys and girls. These are children whose parents endure the grueling hardship of sugarcane labor - children who have been rendered orphaned or destitute by their circumstances. Providing two square meals a day for 250 children was a massive logistical and financial challenge for the institution. The primary hurdle was the cost of cooking fuel; the kitchen required approximately 8 commercial gas cylinders every month. Balancing the rising prices of LPG with the basic needs of the children was becoming an exhausting struggle for the foundation.

In this time of need, an innovative solution emerged through 'Suyash Solutions': the Biogas Project. Under the expert guidance of SevaVardhini, four biogas units were commissioned at the Mulewadi site. While it may look like a simple mechanical system, it has proven to be a divine blessing for the organization.

Where the institution previously required 8 cylinders, they now manage with just one. The saving of 7 cylinders per month is invaluable. This saved fund is now being utilized for the children's education and healthcare. Instead of relying on choking firewood smoke or expensive commercial gas, biogas - produced from organic waste - has emerged as a safe, pollution-free alternative. This project serves as a practical lesson in self-reliance for the children, demonstrating how energy can be generated using resources available within their own premises.

Beyond the machinery, the foundation benefits from Sevavardhini's meticulous planning and consistent support. This is a shining example of how technology can be effectively harnessed to improve the quality of life in rural India.

The Mulewadi Biogas Project is a beautiful harmony of human compassion and modern technology. As the children of sugarcane workers dream of a better tomorrow, projects like these provide the strength to turn those dreams into reality. This success story proves that when Innovation, Collaboration, and the Spirit of Service come together, magic happens. The journey of Mulewadi is no longer limited to one institution; it has become a roadmap for society at large.



"When you are responsible for feeding 250 children, every single rupee counts. Thanks to Biogas, our fuel expenses have been slashed by nearly 80%. This saving is a significant investment in the bright future of our children. We are deeply grateful to Suyash Solutions and SevaVardhini for their unwavering support."

- Foundation Official

3.2 Energy Sustainability

Atal Urja Biogas Project: Palaskhel (Tal. Atpadi, Dist. Sangli)



Palaskhel, located in the Atpadi taluka of Sangli district, is a drought-prone village. Since 2015, the village has been progressing toward sustainable development with the cooperation of 'Sevavardhini'.

The 'Biogas Project' stands as an ideal example of making Palaskhel self-reliant in terms of energy. Under this scheme, the installation of 20 biogas plants has been completed so far, and the planning for the next 20 plants is currently underway. Clean and renewable energy is generated using organic waste obtained from agriculture and animal husbandry. This project complements the Central Government's 'Gobardhan' scheme, which has boosted waste management, pollution control, and organic farming in rural areas.

The Dawn of Transformation

Palaskhel is a low-rainfall village situated about a hundred kilometers from Sangli. Despite frequent droughts and difficult geographical conditions, the youth and villagers here have embraced modern technology. Due to the large livestock population in the village, the raw material (dung/waste) required for biogas is available in abundance. Many families were previously dependent on expensive LPG or health-hazardous firewood. However, biogas is now providing both health protection and economic benefits.

Key highlights include:

- Protection of women from harmful smoke.
- Savings in fuel expenditure.
- Availability of biogas slurry (excellent organic fertilizer) for farming.
- Fulfillment of Project Objectives
- Total Self-reliance: By installing biogas in the remaining 40 houses, the entire village has been made self-reliant for fuel. (10 units were already successful).
- Sustainable Agriculture: The use of biogas slurry has increased, leading to a reduction in the use of chemical fertilizers.
- Health Improvement: Indoor air pollution has decreased, resulting in a reduction in respiratory diseases among women and children.
- Economic Savings: Families are saving approximately ₹800 to ₹1,000 per month on fuel costs.

Impact of the Scheme

- Environment: Conversion of more than 1 thousand kg of dung waste into pure energy daily. Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.
- Health: Improvement in women's health due to smoke-free kitchens.
- Agriculture: Improvement in soil texture and increase in crop yield due to organic slurry.
- Social: Training in technology handling provided to more than 50 youth and women, leading to local skill development.

Proposed Measures

- The project will be implemented in two phases over 12 months:
- Phase 1 (1-6 Months): Baseline survey, beneficiary selection, livestock assessment, procurement of materials, and phased installation of 40 units.
- Phase 2 (7-12 Months): Technical monitoring, maintenance training, establishment of the 'Gram Biogas Committee,' and documentation of the project's success stories.
- Estimated Cost: With an estimated cost of ₹24 lakh18 thousand Palaskhel has emerged as an 'Energy-Sustainable' model in rural India.

Criteria for Measuring Project Success

- Successful operational efficiency of more than 95% of the units.
- 100% cessation of the use of firewood.
- A minimum saving of ₹800 in the monthly expenditure of families.
- Maintaining project continuity through the 'Gram Biogas Committee.'

The Role of Sevavardhini

Sevavardhini possesses approximately 25 years of experience in rural development. In Palaskhel, it has previously worked successfully to overcome water scarcity through the 'Jaldoot' project. Sevavardhini is fully committed to providing technical guidance, training, and transparent implementation for this project.

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4 - Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA):

4.1 The Sustainable Formula for Rural Development

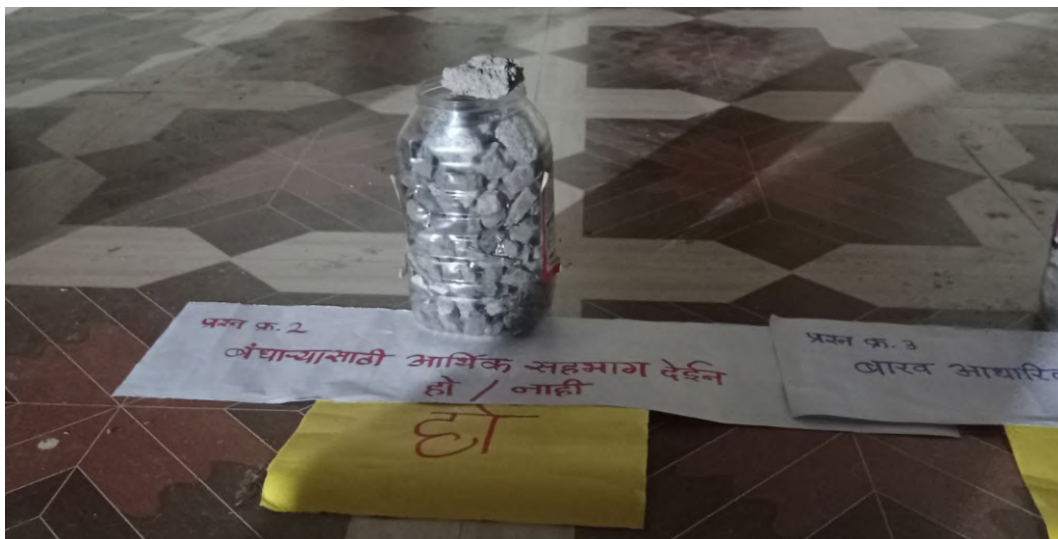
Village Development, People's Participation - A New Democratic Journey of Progress.

Village development is not merely about constructing cement roads, tall water tanks, or concrete buildings; it is about bringing a positive change to the life of the last person in the village. This transformation is only possible when the reins of development are in the hands of the villagers themselves. **Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)** is a highly effective tool born from this democratic ideal. To



ensure that "Our Village, Our Development" does not remain just a slogan but becomes a living reality, the concept of PRA is essential. Historical records in India show that even ancient kings used similar participatory techniques to govern with the involvement of their subjects.

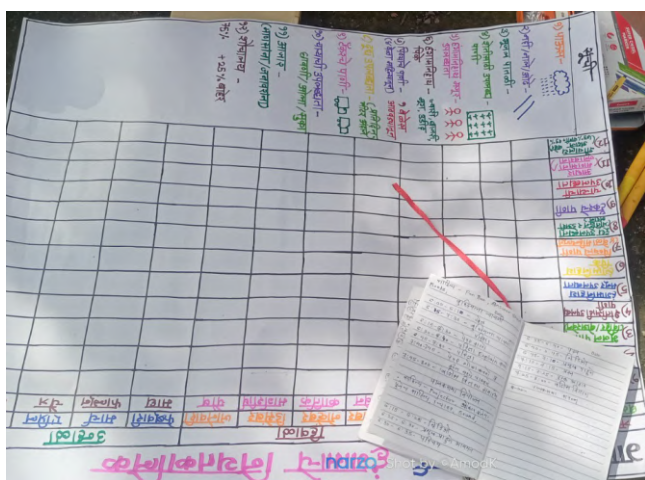
Every village has its own unique culture, geography, soil quality, and local needs. While government agencies or external experts can suggest superficial solutions, the true essence of a village's problems is best understood only by those who have lived there for generations. PRA honors this ancestral experience of the citizens. This is not about pushing bureaucratic paperwork; it is a manifesto for the future, written by the villagers while sitting on farm embankments, in temples, or at the village square. In this process, 'humanity' and 'mutual dialogue' take precedence over technical complexities, ensuring that development goals are achieved easily and sustainably.



Key Features of PRA and Insights into Village Life

Relationship of Trust and Friendly Dialogue: The first step of PRA is to mingle with the citizens and build their confidence before starting any work. Villagers are the greatest resource of a village. When project representatives blend in and become one with the community, the true dreams and fears of the villagers come to the surface. To foster this closeness, meetings are organized at times convenient for both men and women.

The Living Map of the Village: This map is not just lines drawn on the ground; it is the heart of the village. Villagers use rangoli or stones to intricately plot the location of houses, roads, schools, clinics, wells, and public spaces. Looking at this map provides a clear picture of which areas lack facilities and where urgent attention is needed.



Footprints of Time: A village has its own personality, which unfolds through its history. Old-timers sharing stories like "Our stream used to flow twelve months a year" or "How we survived that specific drought" reveal the social and economic history of the village. Learning this history helps in avoiding past mistakes when planning for the future and reconnects the community with nature.

Relationship between Nature and Man: Villagers possess microscopic knowledge of their fields-where the rocky soil is, where the fertile black soil lies, which areas are irrigated, and how rainwater flows along the slopes. When water conservation or plantation plans are created using this local wisdom, they become naturally successful. A balance sheet of soil types and water sources helps determine future cropping patterns.

Shivarferi: A Walking Pilgrimage of Experience: 'Shivarferi' involves walking through the fields and hamlets alongside the villagers to inspect the land. Physically moving across the terrain helps identify where soil erosion is occurring or where a bund is needed on a stream, bringing accuracy to the planning. The discussions held during this walk are far more realistic than any debate held within four walls.

Seasonal Cycles and the Laborer's Calculus: Rural life depends on the cycles of nature. A 'Seasonal Calendar' helps track which months lack work, when illnesses increase, and when water crises become severe. Whether it is the issue of migration or fodder for livestock, the answers are found within these seasonal patterns.

Institutional Relationships: Various institutions like the Gram Panchayat, schools, banks, and self-help groups operate in the village. The influence of these institutions on the lives of the villagers and their mutual communication is mapped through a 'Chapatis Diagram' (Venn diagram). This identifies which institution will be most effective for specific development goals.

Observation of Livelihoods and Future Opportunities: Development is not just about building roads; citizens need sustainable livelihoods. This process examines the existing income sources of families, the difficulties they face, and explores new industries (e.g., dairy, processing units). New opportunities for employment are discovered through local experience and skills.

The Water Balance Sheet: In a state like Maharashtra, harvesting and planning for rainwater is crucial. The 'Water Balance Sheet' calculates how much rain falls in the village and how much is consumed. Villagers receive training on prioritizing drinking water and planning irrigation for agriculture based on this data.

Special Precautions for the PRA Process

To ensure this process is a 'journey of transformation' rather than just a one-time 'event', the following precautions are vital.

1. **Be Ready to Listen:** It is crucial to maintain a humble stance - we are not here as experts to teach the people, but to learn from their experience.
2. **Active Participation of Women:** Since women manage the household hearth and water, they have the deepest understanding of water and health issues. Their participation should not be mere attendance; they must be encouraged to speak up.
3. **Simple and Fluid Language:** Avoid heavy, technical jargon. When communication happens in the local dialect using symbols they understand, people express their problems more openly.
4. **Clear Misconceptions:** Do not let rumors spread that PRA is just a way to get government subsidies or that it is a very difficult technique. Clarify that this process belongs to everyone and is for everyone.
5. **Confidentiality and Truth:** For sensitive issues (like addiction or sanitation habits), use 'informal voting' or private discussions to ensure accurate data comes forward.

PRA Report and Implementation

All the information, maps, and expectations gathered from the process are compiled into a detailed report. This report is not a file meant to gather dust; it is the 'Action Plan' for the village's development. Progress is reviewed at every stage of the project according to this plan. Maps are drawn on cloth and displayed in the Gram Panchayat or public places to constantly remind citizens of their goals.

PRA is a movement to awaken the collective strength of rural areas. When villagers resolve to transform their village through their own intellect, hard work, and experience, they no longer need external forces to lean on. PRA is a transparent and living medium to

turn the dream of "Gramrajya to Ramrajya" into reality. The more honestly this process is implemented, the more sustainable, self-reliant, and dignified the village development will be.

Through the PRA process, villagers gain a new identity for the wealth in their fields and their ancestral knowledge. A true self-awakening (Swabodh) will be ignited within them. This spiritual confidence will inspire the villagers to solve their own problems rather than relying solely on government aid. From this, the path for the village to become self-reliant (Aatmanirbhar) will become wider. Thus, when citizens take the lead in planning, village development becomes truly sustainable and self-supporting. This is a proven experience. Proper planning of local resources and the use of collective labor will be the key to bringing true prosperity to the village. To ensure this movement of people's participation gives the village the mantra of self-reliance and leads it toward new heights of progress, PRA will effectively play the role of a guide and pathfinder.

5 - Seva-Vrati

5.1 - Mira Badve : Nivant's Path of Light

With inadequate education, no family support, no place to live, and literal darkness before their eyes, the task of illuminating the lives of such young men and women is a formidable one. Smt. Mira Badve, who has dedicated her body, mind, and wealth to this cause, has set an exemplary standard. Her journey, embodying the proverb 'Where there is a will, there is a way,' was never easy (Nivant), but it certainly provided the ease and peace of mind that her visually impaired friends needed to learn and live.



Swami Vivekananda defined that true education is the development of humanity within a person. The work of Mira Badve and her 'Nivant Andh Mukta Vikalasaya' in Pune is a successful realization of this very vision. A well-educated woman from a Marathi family, Miratai was a professor of English. While balancing her teaching career and family responsibilities, she came into contact with a school for the blind in Koregaon Park through her husband, Shri. Anand Badve, who used to provide financial aid to the institution. Despite facing their own financial struggles during the early days of their business, Miratai felt a deep urge to visit the place her husband supported.

During her visit, a life-altering incident occurred. As she was climbing the stairs, a group of children was coming down. A small boy bumped into her and suddenly clung to her tightly. He thought his mother had arrived. Feeling the "touch" of his mother, he began to cry. Often, a single moment can change the course of one's entire life; for Miratai, this was it. As the child wept in her arms, tears rolled down her eyes as well. Upon returning home, she told her husband, "I want to do something for these children. Not just by providing external help, but by working there personally." She made it clear, however, that she would not take any salary or profit from this work.

Shri. Anand Badve assured her that he would handle the family's financial responsibilities and gave her his full support. Subsequently, Miratai began visiting the school regularly, helping with teaching. While teaching the children, she herself became a student; she learned Braille and began to understand the world through the eyes of these specially-abled youth. She befriended the students, but over time, the structured limitations of the school felt restrictive. She stopped the daily school routine but continued her support.

Such schools must operate within the framework of government regulations, one of which is that a student can only remain there until the age of eighteen. After that, their education often comes to an abrupt halt. Frequently, parents enroll their children so late that they have hardly completed much schooling by eighteen. The question of "what next?" becomes a daunting one. The search for answers to such questions led to the birth of 'Nivant Andh Mukta Vikalasaya'.

'Nivant' was actually the name of the Badve family home. One day, a boy named Siddharth Gaikwad arrived at their doorstep. His parents could not take responsibility for him, and he had been studying at the blind school until he turned eighteen. Having only reached the ninth grade, he was suddenly forced onto the streets and felt utterly lost. After spending three days wandering and sleeping under bridges, he found Miratai's address. When she saw him, he looked like a mere skeleton. She first fed him and gave him solace. As a teacher, she felt a deep sense of responsibility. She realized that if Siddharth were to stand on his own feet, education was the only way.

Believing that God had given her the chance to be a mother to this boy, Miratai resolved not to step back. Her family supported her, Siddharth trusted her completely, and the mission began. To prepare him for his 10th-grade exams, Miratai herself had to learn subjects like Mathematics and Science. Through her efforts, Siddharth passed his exams and is now well-settled in life, married with two children. Siddharth opened the doors of 'Nivant' for many others seeking light. Following his experience, 70 students arrived the next year, convinced by his words: "No matter how much trouble you are in, go there; you will definitely find help."

As Nivant grew, the path remained difficult. Initially, society did not believe that these students could study beyond the 10th grade. The students had the will and the capacity for hard work, but the hurdles were many. They wanted careers in diverse fields—from Commerce and Library Science to Law and Yoga. They explored numerous career paths at Nivant and emerged successful.



To ensure no one doubted their capabilities, Miratai would meet college principals, university vice-chancellors, and department heads at the start of every academic year. She would explain their potential and limitations, giving a personal guarantee: "These children are mine, and I take full responsibility for their success or failure." By the end of the year, she would be invited back with honor to celebrate the achievements of her talented students. Inspired, the students began entering even more diverse branches of study with the motto: Annat Amuchi Dhyeyashakti, Annat An Asha ("Endless is our ambition, and endless are our hopes.")

Recognizing the need for academic materials, Miratai moved beyond audiobooks to produce Braille books. Initially handwritten, the process became easier a decade later with the arrival of a Braille printer. Along with textbooks, literary works were also transcribed. Through Nivant's initiative, a dedicated Braille library was established in Maharashtra.

The 'Swa-Lekhan' Project

Visually impaired students require writers during exams. While many sighted people volunteer, negative experiences sometimes affect the students' results. To solve this, Anand Badve and their daughter, Uma, developed the 'Swa-Lekhan' application. It allows students to type by speaking. In the future, this could be used in exams, making the students completely self-reliant.

At Nivant, the focus is on holistic development. Thanks to the tireless, foundational work of Miratai and her team, students are now professionals in fields like Dance, Music, Computer Science, Bakery/Confectionery, Law, Library Science, BCA, and Commerce. Over the last 27–28 years, Nivant has transformed the lives of more than 3,500 visually impaired individuals. Miratai gives all the credit to the students, saying, "If I put in 100% effort, the children put in 300%."

Societal Recognition

Many organizations have recognized Miratai's selfless service with prestigious awards. However, the true validation of her work lies in the conscious, capable citizens Nivant has produced—individuals who are now eager to give back to society.

“(The above details have been taken from the book ‘Kartya Karavitya’ published by the Baya Karve Centre for Women’s Studies, Maharshi Karve Stree Shikshan Sanstha, Pune.)”

5.2 - Padmaja Godbole :

'Prasanna' The Struggle For Autistic Children

At a time when neither society nor parents truly understood what autism was, Smt. Padmaja Godbole dedicated her life to the education of these children. Through the 'Prasanna Autism Centre', she secured dignity for these children and provided solace to their parents. Even after Padmaja Tai's passing, the institution continues to move forward tirelessly on the path she paved. The birth of a "special" child is no one's fault, and the exact causes are still not fully understood. However, through education tailored to their abilities and early diagnosis, these children can be made largely self-reliant. At 'Prasanna', everyone strives to bring these children into the mainstream of education.



For years, India has seen significant work in the education and vocational training of economically backward or physically disabled children. However, the awareness that intellectual challenges and emotional disabilities are also critical issues requiring specialized schools and training was absent in Indian society until recently. It was Smt. Padmaja Godbole who, about 40–45 years ago, first recognized the needs of children with learning disabilities due to autism or intellectual challenges (now referred to as 'Special Children').

This realization was a result of her stay in England. After marriage, she moved to England with her husband. Having completed her B.Ed. in Pune, she was determined to work in the field of education. In England, she secured a teaching job, but it was in a school for special children. This experience gave her a close view of the challenges these children face and the various methods available to empower them. Her interest grew, leading her to complete a course in teaching methods for special children in Canada. Upon returning to India, she enrolled in an M.Ed. program, focusing her research on 'Teaching Methods and Subjects for Special Children.' Her experiences abroad and her research solidified her resolve.

In 1990, this determination took shape with the establishment of the 'Prism Foundation' with the help of like-minded friends. Smt. Padmaja Tai knew the journey would be difficult. Explaining to parents that learning disability is not a "disease" but a condition that can be improved with effort was a Herculean task. For the common man, it was even harder to comprehend.

Initially, the Prism Foundation's school was mockingly called a "school for failures" or a "school for the mad." Ignoring these slurs, Smt. Padmaja Tai and her team persevered. They noticed that the children's disabilities varied - some were slow learners, some struggled with language or math, and others couldn't sit still. However, some children were different; they wouldn't speak to anyone, had great memories but couldn't make eye contact, or would spend hours playing with a single thread or dry leaves. Drawing from her studies in Canada, Smt. Padmaja Tai suspected these children were Autistic.

Realizing the need for a dedicated space for autism, she participated in national and international conferences, joined the National Autistic Society, and contacted American organizations. On June 5, 2000, she started the Prasanna Autism Centre in her own home.

Due to widespread ignorance, Padmaja Tai travelled from town to town conducting workshops to explain what autism is, how to identify it, and what kind of education is required. Gradually, awareness grew. Her next task was training teachers, for which she developed a specialized curriculum. She laid the foundation of the centre without government grants.

At Prasanna, every child has unique needs, requiring a high teacher-to-student ratio. Upon admission, a child's habits and abilities are studied to create a personalized daily schedule. They are taught simple tasks like wearing shoes, opening a door, or eating-with immense patience through constant imitation. The school operates from 9:30 AM to 3:30 PM, including prayers, lessons, crafts, yoga, speech therapy, and occupational therapy. They are also provided a balanced diet based on a nutritionist's advice.

Progress here isn't measured by standard report cards. Daily logs are maintained for every child, and parents are updated every week or fortnight on how to further the child's development.

After a decade of success, a Pre-Vocational Training Centre was added on August 1, 2012. Here, children aged 13 to 17 receive training in making greeting cards, envelopes, candles, and operating flour mills. This skill-building aims to make them self-reliant. Following this mission, three more wings - 'Lark' (for multiple disabilities), 'Benue' (for parent and teacher training), and 'Srijanrang' (for expression through arts) became operational.



The success of Prasanna is evident in its students. Raghav Krishnan set a record by swimming for 13 hours and 12 minutes. Ashutosh Ramesh Salunkhe passed his 10th-grade exams with 67% and later cleared his 12th-grade exams. Despite being allowed a writer, he wrote his papers himself. He passed four levels of Harmonium exams. As one of the earliest institutions of its kind in India, Prasanna attracts parents from across the country and abroad, including the US, UK, and Singapore. Even parents from Sudan enrolled their twins here. Currently, 43 children aged 3 to 17 are being educated in Marathi, Hindi, and English.

After Padmaja Tai's passing on February 3, 2015, the momentum did not slow down. This was because her daughter-in-law, Smt. Sadhanatai Godbole, a psychologist, had been involved from the start. Having seen the journey from volunteer to leader, Sadhana Tai took over the responsibility. The bond between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is beautifully reflected in the growth of Prasanna.

Today, Sadhana Tai continues to manage the centre and raise awareness. She acknowledges that while awards have come their way, the responsibility has only increased. There is still a lingering sadness that society's perspective hasn't changed enough. However, Prasanna has proven that every autistic child has at least one unique talent. By discovering and nurturing that talent, these children can lead a life of dignity and self-reliance. With the continued support of donors and the dedication of the team, the future of these children remains bright.

“(The above details have been taken from the book ‘Kartya Karavitya’ published by the Baya Karve Centre for Women’s Studies, Maharshi Karve Stree Shikshan Sanstha, Pune.)”

6 - Seva News

6.1 - Seva hai Yagyakunda

A two-day state-level conference titled 'Seva Tarang 2026' was organized by SevaVardhini, a cornerstone for voluntary organizations. Held at the BAIF Bhavan in Warje, near Pune, the conference served as a bridge for dialogue, facilitating a profound exchange of thoughts on various social subjects. Here is a brief overview of the proceedings.

The primary objective of 'Seva Tarang 2026' was to strengthen Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) through the exchange of information and knowledge, effective mutual coordination, and institutional capacity building. Out of total 126 NGOs registered for the event, with 106 organizations from nearly 25 districts across the state actively participated. Notably, the conference was attended by 162 delegates.



The Inaugural Session

The inauguration ceremony featured Shree. Ravi Pandit, Co-founder of KPIT, as the Chief Guest. He inaugurated the conference by worshipping Bharat Mata and Deepprajwalan. The session opened with an inspiring 'Dhyeya-Geet' (Mission Song), reflecting the spirit of service and commitment to social development.

Dignitaries present included Shri. Suhas Lunkad (Executive President, Sevavardhini), Shri. Shailendra Kawade (Joint Executive President), Shri. Somdatta Patwardhan (Secretary), Shri. Vikram Pandit (Executive Committee Member), and Shri. Girish Degavkar (CEO).

In his introductory speech, Secretary Somdatta Patwardhan highlighted Sevavardhini's diverse initiatives. He explained that beyond training, the organization implements field projects to build the capacity of social Organisation. Sevavardhini currently supports over 500 partner organizations and is active in sectors such as water conservation, the 'Ek Mooth Anaj' campaign, renewable energy, and Integrated rural development.

Shri. Suhas Lunkad described SevaVardhini as a "Mother Organisation," emphasizing its role in supporting grassroots organizations. He pointed out that approximately 40% of donations across the country come from the middle class and underscored the need to increase donor participation to address the challenges faced by rural NGOs.

Shri. Ravi Pandit emphasized the importance of sustainable development practices. He particularly appreciated the spirit of the volunteers, who considered themselves not as officers, but as dedicated grassroots workers committed to social change.

The inaugural session was followed by case study presentations where various organizations shared their success stories. Smt. Manisha Ghule of Navchetana Vikas Kendra (Beed) presented her work on sustainable livelihoods involving nearly

55 thousand women.

Insights into Social and Service Initiatives

Detailed information was shared on several social themes:

- **Shri. Prasad Shirsikar (Seva International):** The "Magical Piggy Bank" Jadui Gullak initiative to instill saving habits in school children.
- **Dr. Tushar Bhelke (Seva Arogya Foundation):** Community health initiatives.
- **Shri. Deepak Awadh (Sevavardhini):** Solar-powered irrigation and tribal development.
- **Smt. Vidyagauri Kulkarni (Sevavardhini):** Water conservation under the 'Varshakosh' project.

The second day commenced with a session by Sandeep Shauche, who explained Sevavardhini's role as a networking and incubation platform. He detailed the five core pillars of the organization: Training, Institutional Assessment, Joint Projects, Resource Mobilization, and Fundraising.

Financial Management and Technology

In a session dedicated to financial transparency, experts guided NGOs on CSR rules, FCRA laws, and auditing. Shri. CA Shashank Patki and Shri. CA Somdatt Lad emphasized the necessity of financial discipline.

Furthermore, experts from C-TARA (IIT Bombay) provided guidance on using appropriate technology to solve rural problems. Dr. Anand Rao stated that technology should not be limited to industries but must be utilized to simplify and improve rural life.

Concluding Session

The concluding session featured a dialogue with Padma Shri Dr. Himmatrao Bawaskar, who shared inspiring experiences from his journey in public health. Shri. Suhas Bhagwat (Paschim Kshetra Sah-Seva Pramukh) emphasized collective responsibility as the key to social transformation.

Seva Tarang 2026 proved to be a vital platform for NGOs to learn and connect. Through this conference, SevaVardhini reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening collaborations in the social sector in the years to come.





SEVA VARTA

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