

How Young People Are Transforming Government Schools in Haryana

Growing up, we all have held a strong sense of connection to our schools which centres around how we students feel, see and experience our learning in schools. Children going to government schools often spend their school years with little or no sense of belonging or pride. Government schools further fail to create a visibility around learning and teaching despite how effective their methods or results may be.

With both parents and children turning away from government schools and the numerous incentives by the government failing to attract children's imagination, one cannot help but wonder how do we bring back the sense of pride in those who study in government schools.

With this question ringing in their minds, four young developmental professionals came together to begin a journey of change; to bring back the glory of state-run school education in rural India. This mission to transform the government schools into model schools and fill the students and villagers with pride in their school, **Varitra foundation** created Project SEARCH (Strengthening Quality Education Access for Rural Children of Haryana) in Gharaunda block, Karnal district in January, 2018. Upon visiting 25 villages across this region, the team found that the learning levels of many backward villages continue to be low and need priority intervention.

Currently, Project SEARCH is being run in six villages and is in the process of scaling up to 15 villages by the end of August. Varitra also runs post-school Learning Enhancement Centres to provide remedial learning facilities for children. Due to the low learning levels of children, teachers face difficulties in regular classes. Hence, Remedial classes at the learning centre will help teachers to teach in classes. Varitra has also trained 15 local women across these villages as para-teachers who run Learning Enhancement Centres. Varitra aims to transform education in rural Haryana through building leadership among local women from villages.

Additionally, Varitra is also painting these schools with the method of BALA painting (as learning aid) to make the schools attractive and student-friendly. The Education Department and local panchayats are

also supporting the programmes. Varitra has also partnered with five national-level NGOs who are supporting the programme in teachers' training, library set-up, learning toys, curriculum design and management of learning centres, etc.

Emphasising on the need of villagers to come and support their village's government schools, Baljeet Yadav (Co-founder, Varitra Foundation) asks, *"I often used to think, if one person can run a private school, why can't an entire village together run the government school in their village? This very question has inspired us to start this initiative. No child from a rural area should ever feel restricted to dream just because they lack a sense of pride in where they study. It is important that we restore the faith in our government schools through the villagers themselves. It is the need of the hour as the government institution is the most sustainable way of providing any kind of basic facility to people."*

Ayeshna Kalyan (co-founder, Varitra Foundation) says, *"When an NGO comes and works in an area, they often end up making the local people conditioned to their presence. This makes them dependent. Through Varitra, we want to create projects which can be led by the local people with us as a support in the backdrop. This led us to create an all-local women team on the field who shall become independent change-makers. As an NGO, we had an option of creating or supporting parallel systems for education. But we wanted to address the very root of the issue. And what better way of doing so than through our local government schools?"*