

Elementary Education in Arunachal Pradesh

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Arunachal Pradesh

The importance of books in the process of socialisation is unquestionable. The key to reading is literacy, and this is endorsed in the document *Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat*, launched by the Government of India, on 26th August 2014. The document endorses reading as a key strategy for realization of academic goods, and recommends that all states and union territories should provide graded reading series and children's literature for children to browse in classrooms, particularly for Classes I and II.

India being a multicultural and multilingual country, it is of utmost importance for children to learn about other people, different customs and parallel cultures. This is possible only through education, in the widest sense of the word. It includes poems, narratives and an awareness of numbers in the mother tongue,

moving on to other languages and new concepts in school education and higher stages of learning. The roots of India's literacy tradition can be traced to the rich oral literatures of the tribes. The folk tales are expressions of the close contact between the world of nature and the world of human existence.

The survey of Indian languages carried out by Bhasha Research and Publication Centre shows that the country in the early '60s had 1,100 languages out of which 220 have disappeared by now. In other words, India has lost around 20 per cent of its languages in the past five decades. This just shows how much indigenous languages have suffered because of urbanization. The present situation for some indigenous languages in the northeast indicates that all is not well.

Arunachal Pradesh is unique in that it has a large number of tribes, both

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major and minor, with an equally large number of languages and dialects. The languages of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh come from different language families. Furthermore, these languages are extremely diverse in terms of morphology, phonology and syntax. In terms of the number of speakers of the language, each of them could be treated as a linguistic minority. In the context of the recommendations of Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat, a new graded reading series was planned for children of Classes I and II. Due to its multilingual landscape, the series was planned in English.

The project reflects collaboration of both State and Centre levels. A five-day workshop was organised from 17-21 November 2014, by the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) Arunachal Pradesh, at Naharlagun, for the development of the series. The role of the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT), was to provide critical academic support for the initiative. This involved creating an awareness of the importance of familiarizing children with tribal identity and culture, followed by sessions on the parameters of selection for children's literature. Representatives from the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh were invited by SSA for this purpose. Each of them was asked to write at least three stories suitable for young children prior to the workshop, and bring them along for discussion. Representatives from thirteen major

tribes finally made it to the workshop. By the end of the workshop, thirty stories were finalised.

The new series when distributed in government schools in Arunachal Pradesh will be read by children from tribal as well as non-tribal families. *Orchids* has thirty folktales in all, spread over three levels. The number of sentences and the complexity of the plots in the stories increase as one moves upwards across the levels. The tribes, from which these tales were chosen, are thirteen: Nyishi, Adi, Longchang, Khampti, Sherdukphen, Nokte, Singpo, Galo, Apatami, Mishmi, Nuepa, Sajolang, Miji and Tagin. The tales were chosen after much discussion.

The series is the first of its kind in India, as children in government schools in Arunachal Pradesh will have access to the folk tales of thirteen different tribes of their state. SSA Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh has been granted funds from MHRD for the printing of *Orchids*, and it is expected that it will be disseminated later this year. In a way, the series would provide a counter-balance to modern education which is deficient in many ways; it is the oral tradition which fills the gap by inculcating universal and human values. The preservation of tribal identity, culture and values remains a point of concern in today's world, and the series hopes to address this issue and in its own small way.