

## Summary of Gifted and Talented Education in India

During the summer of 2005, Kerrie Proulx, one of NAGTY's PhD students, carried out a number of school visits in India, focusing on schools specifically catering for gifted and talented students.

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### Background

India is the second most populous country in the world with a population of 1.08 billion. The UN predicts that by 2025 India will have surpassed China as the most populous nation. Life expectancy is 64 years. The country is divided into 28 States and seven Union Territories, each with their own elected or appointed governments. The following religions are practised;

- Hindu (80.5%)
- Muslim (13.4%)
- Christian (2.3%)
- Sikh (1.9%)

About 70% of Indians live in rural villages, which are often very remote; 64.8% of adults are literate, 75.3% of males, and 53.7% of females. Kerala is the only state that is completely literate. Officially, 23 languages are recognized by the constitution but over 840 dialects are spoken. Hindi and English are the national languages used by the central government.

### Education system

There are approximately 888,000 educational institutions in India enrolling around 189.2 million students. A strong importance is placed on education across all social and economic strata of Indian society, reflected in the policies and practices of the state and central governments, because it is widely viewed as the source of social and economic change.

Primary school education in India, in accordance with the constitution, should be provided to all children free of cost (from ages 6 to 13 approximately). The following two years consist of lower secondary education, preparing students for technical schools, and higher secondary education, which leads to college/university entrance.

In its commitment to raise the quality of education, the central government has been steadily increasing the education budget since Independence in 1947. The goal is to allocate to it at least 6% of GDP (currently approximately 4% of GDP makes up the education budget). From this budget, 86% goes to support higher education explaining in part India's world-class management and IT

institutes. As a result India produces an elite number of highly educated graduates, but at the same time is struggling to meet basic educational goals including universal primary education, the total eradication of illiteracy and improving access and the quality of education in rural areas. Many states have still not introduced any measure of compulsory primary education and the quality of education and facilities in rural schools is extremely low compared to urban schools.

Navodaya Vidyalaya: government schools for the gifted

### Introduction

In accordance with the National Policy of Education (1986), the central government envisaged a scheme in which intellectually gifted and talented rural students would be provided with quality residential education free of cost. The government made the decision to invest in gifted children because they are viewed as crucial to the social and economic development of India. One anticipated outcome of this scheme is that students will return to their rural villages in the future as professionals (for example teachers and doctors) and thereby help to raise the overall standard of living in their communities. The scheme was started in 1986 with the opening of the first two Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV) schools. This has grown to 515 schools at present serving 158,897 gifted and talented students. The goal is to have at least one JNV in each district of India.

**Students during free time at JNV Shimla**

### **Student dormitories at JNV Anantnag**

JNV schools are co-educational residential schools for students aged 11–17. Education is free for all enrolled students including all residential care, uniforms, textbooks, medical care, and travel fares home. Many of the students come from uneducated and illiterate families, a trend which has never before occurred in Indian education. Admission of the 80 new students to each school each year is made on the basis of a selection test administered by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). It aims to be an objective, class-neutral test designed to ensure fairness regardless of prior educational attainment and is offered in 20 languages. It includes three sections covering mental ability, arithmetic and language, consisting of a total of 100 multiple-choice questions. Admission is extremely competitive, the national acceptance rate being roughly 4%.

Due to the poor communication facilities in most rural areas, special care is taken to raise awareness of JNV schools. Quotas are set for the numbers of places to be reserved for the following different cohorts of students;

- Rural students
- Female students
- Scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students (otherwise known as 'backward castes')
- Disabled students

## JNV Objectives and Curriculum

The JNV head office in New Delhi provided the following list of JNV key objectives:

- **Quality education:** to provide a quality education including a strong component of culture, societal values, awareness of the environment and extracurricular activities to intellectually talented students from predominantly rural areas
- **Language skills:** to ensure that all students attain a reasonable level of competency in three languages (i.e. Hindi, English and one regional language)
- **National integration:** to promote national integration through the migration programme, a one-year exchange program in which students from Hindi speaking districts attend a JNV in a non-Hindi speaking district and vice-versa
- **Social responsibility:** to improve the quality of education in all schools in each district by sharing JNV facilities, programmes and expertise

All JNV schools follow the standard national CBSE curriculum which includes at least two languages, general studies, work experience, physical and health education and three of the following; mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, biotechnology, economics, political science, history, geography, business studies, accountancy, fine arts, agriculture, computer science, multimedia and web technology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, physical education, music and dance, entrepreneurship or fashion studies. The curriculum is not accelerated, but students are provided with enrichment opportunities. These are;

### **Class VI students at JNV Nasik**

- **Three languages:** students will have been educated in their mother tongue / regional language in their village school and at secondary level at a JNV school they are instructed in English for maths and science, and Hindi for social studies. As a result students are fluent in at least three languages
- **Computer education:** each JNV school has a computer lab to which all students have access and all students take computer classes. In addition there is at least one JNV 'Smart School' in each state with additional IT resources and expertise including teacher training for the staff of other schools
- **Migration programme:** this exchange programme promotes national integration
- **Extracurricular activities:** sport plays an important role in schools. Each morning consists of an hour of yoga and a wide range of other sports are offered. The JNV head office organises regional and national sports meetings which also provide an extended community for JNV students. An 'Art in Education' programme is also offered which is led by invited guests and other extracurricular activities include Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, debating clubs, traditional dance, speech and song competitions, and a youth parliament

All students sit exams at the end of Class X (age 15) and Class XII (age 17), which are extremely rigorous and competitive and they have been criticized for promoting rote-learning in Indian schools. JNV students have successively scored much higher than the national averages in these exams.

Teaching staff at JNV schools live on the rural campus with the students which facilitates a close-knit community. Incentives are provided to encourage good applicants to apply for the teaching posts, such as rent-free housing at the school and the enrolment of two sons/daughters without having to sit the entrance test. The JNV head office organises extensive teacher training and workshops to upgrade skills and identify teacher needs. In addition staff receive extensive computer training in collaboration with IT organisations.

JNV schools also provide educational opportunities to students attending local schools in the district as the goal is to raise the overall quality of rural education by extending JNV services and facilities to local teachers and students. For example, JNV 'Smart Schools' are part of a computer literacy programme that have been given the responsibility of providing computer training to students at 10 local schools. To date over 9000 rural students have benefited from this programme. JNV schools also support their local communities by providing free access to their libraries, by allowing local teachers to participate in the workshops and seminars organised by JNV, and also by providing health and hygiene services to local residents. JNV students are also encouraged to use their strengths and skills to contribute to their local communities and teaching staff expressed the view that these students were part of a unique community that would open the door to many future possibilities. They encouraged the students to recognise this opportunity they were given and to search for ways in which they could help those less fortunate.

#### **Library at JNV Nasik**

JNV schools also face challenges which exist more broadly across India. For instance parents have withdrawn young girls for arranged marriage contracts. In Kashmir there are very few female members of staff as women do not usually work outside the home. Kashmir also has a peculiarly low enrolment rate as it is a conservative society where parents are often reluctant to send their children away to school. Issues such as these have raised the need for a special counselling programme in the schools which at present does not exist. Since JNV students come from rural areas and many from uneducated families, they often lack knowledge about higher education and professional careers and there is also therefore a need for careers counsellors and mentors, which at present is also not part of the programme. However, there is an awareness at the JNV head office of the necessity of incorporating these elements.

Jnana Prabodhini: private school for gifted students

Introduction

Jnana Prabodhini (meaning 'awakener of knowledge') is a private school in Pune that offers an enrichment programme for gifted students. It was founded in 1962 and was the first school for intellectually gifted and talented students in India. The school initially faced some criticism of elitism. The admission test was developed by the school's psychology department and consists of a battery of seven psychological tests. Students who perform well in this are then invited for interview. The school reserves 50% of its places for female students, but since it is not government funded, it does not have to follow the government quotas for other student cohorts.

**Jnana Prabodhini  
School, Pune**

Jnana Prabodhini Curriculum

The school follows the national CBSE curriculum in grades IX and X when students have to prepare for the national exams, but has evolved its own curriculum for classes V – VIII (ages 11 -13), to suit the demands of their enrichment programme. Maths and science are taught in English, social science in Hindi and Marathi, and in addition students take courses in the classical language of Sanskrit. At each class level teachers are encouraged to promote different areas of intellectual development: class V teachers focus on enhancing students' curiosity, sensitivity and observation; class VI teachers focus on student fluency, flexibility and originality; class VII teachers focus on divergent thinking skills; and class VIII teachers promote creative problem solving. At least two periods a week consist of classes in music, dance, creative writing, drama, model making and crafts. Each evening there are sports and other extracurricular activities. There are no school uniforms in order to help students feel free to be themselves and think creatively and there is a relaxed relationship with staff to encourage students to express themselves.

The school has incorporated many interesting activities into their curriculum, many of which encourage students to interact with the wider community. School literature states that;

'If a student has to learn to put society before self, he must first know the society and try to be in unison with the social currents, upheavals, tragedies and symbols of social pride. This can be achieved through study tours and relief work.' (From Value-Oriented Education Concept and Practice in Jnana Prabodhini).

For instance a 'futurology' course involves students visiting and living with a local family in a small village and preparing a detailed report on what the village will look like in 10 years time, as well as explaining what they would do to improve the quality of life there. There is also a 100-day school for children of sugar cane farmers. Supervised by school alumni a group of current students go to a small village for four to five days to provide elementary education to the children of these migrating farmers. Such activities are fundamental to the school's curriculum and philosophy because they view their students as the future leaders of India and they hope to equip their students with problem-solving skills and insight with

**Jnana Prabodhini violin  
lesson**

respect to dealing with India's societal and economic issues. The school therefore views extracurricular activities as being of equal importance with academic activities and it is hard to separate the two. It is therefore truly an enriched educational programme for the gifted.

Tuition fees equate with the national average for private education in India and bursaries are offered to students with financial need (approximately 15–20% of students). The school also receives substantial private donations from alumni.

The school's psychology department has a research wing which has conducted a long-term research project on gifted students concluding that gifted children who did not participate in an enriched education programme were at a disadvantage. The research department also publishes a lot of material on gifted education and has presented papers at international conferences. Their holistic approach to gifted education and their strong emphasis on philosophy and meditation are among some of the ways in which their research differs from that of most western countries.

#### Concluding remarks

What was most striking about the schools visited was the importance that they gave to community involvement, social responsibility and social concern. The walls of the JNV schools had phrases such as 'I promise to be a good citizen' painted on them and students themselves showed an acute awareness of social issues. There was a different approach to the notion of giftedness in the schools visited however. Government-funded JNV schools underplayed the fact that students were gifted and hardly ever used the label. JNV schools in particular demonstrate a progressive, egalitarian and inspiring model of gifted education despite encountering funding issues and other setbacks and challenges. They are keen however to continue to grow and improve their provision.

Staff at the private Jnana Prabodhini school used the gifted label frequently and in a way that could be seen to encourage elitism. There was also a lot of rhetoric at Jnana Prabodhini about the students being future leaders and focus on motivation and attitude formation were therefore an integral part of the school's philosophy. However this is still founded on the following belief;

'To put the welfare of the nation and the good of society before the welfare of one-self is the most predominant value in the educational philosophy of Jnana Prabodhini'. (From Value-Oriented Education Concept and Practice in Jnana Prabodhini).

#### **Gate at JNV School Shimla**

A key feature of the model of gifted and talented education in India is that it is a holistic one, uniting academic development with character formation and the development of social responsibility, and viewing the individual as first and foremost a part of society. However this should not be divorced from the contextual issues of Indian society and the views presented by government officials, teachers and students alike that education was crucial to social and economic change. Schools dedicated to the education of gifted and talented students are seen not only as a means of educating an elite group of gifted individuals who will go on to improve the quality of life in their communities, but centres of excellence from which the local community can draw on in a wide variety of ways.

