

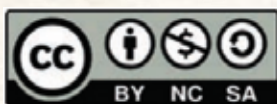


Azim Premji  
Foundation

# COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRE

Kodegaon Rayat: a community shows the way





**© 2021 Azim Premji Foundation.**

This publication may be reproduced by any method without fee for teaching or non-profit purposes. The publication shall not be used for commercial purposes. Rights are reserved under Creative Common Licence. Any derivative works shall also be protected under the same licence. Rights are reserved under Creative Common Licence: Attribution + Non-Commercial + Share Alike. For copying in any other circumstances, or for reuse in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, prior written permission must be obtained from the publisher.

**Disclaimer:** The analysis and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author and may not represent the views of the Foundation.



# Community Learning Centre



Kodegaon Rayat: a community shows the way



**An idea can change the world. Especially when it is powered by dedication and hard work.**

Kodegaon Rayat, a remote village in Chhattisgarh's Dhamtari block, is where one can see the inspiring journey of an idea... in the shape of a Community Learning Centre (CLC) launched in May 2022.

Given its geographical location, the task of developing the CLC in Kodegaon Rayat was far from easy. And this is exactly what makes the initiative stand out, in terms of community participation and collective effort.

Surrounded by forests, hills and a large dam, Kodegaon Rayat, a largely Adivasi village, has limited access to basic facilities such as healthcare and education. It has only one primary school and one middle school. The nearest high school is eight km away, in the village of Akladongri.



Another high school in Charama, a small town in Kanker district, is 18 km from Kodegaon Rayat. The daily commute to both these schools is difficult. As a result, few students from Kodegaon Rayat manage to continue studies beyond middle school. Most of them end up as daily wage workers.

For generations, the residents of Kodegaon Rayat have depended on the surrounding forests for livelihood. The income from daily labour or paddy cultivation is too meagre to improve their lives. Education, sadly, is rarely a family's top priority under such circumstances. However, the people of Kodegaon Rayat are acutely aware of the importance of education. This is evident from the fact that many of them send their children ...especially daughters --- to nearby towns for higher studies.

Keeping this in mind, a group of teachers posted at Kodegaon Rayat's primary and middle schools want to make education a part of the village's ecosystem, encouraging not just students but also their families to embrace learning. The opening of the CLC is a definitive step in that direction.



A humble classroom is where the idea of the CLC was born. The year was 2013, and the teachers of Kodegaon Rayat, some of whom have been engaged with the Azim Premji Foundation, gathered to discuss the opening of a teacher's library at the village. This was part of a plan to develop resources for clusters, for the benefit of teachers and students.

One discussion led to the next and many others. The idea took wings and travelled to the District Institute of the Azim Premji Foundation. With guidance and inputs from the Foundation, the Kodegaon Rayat teachers, led by Trilochan sir, expanded their idea of a library into a centre on the lines of the Foundation's Teacher Learning Centres. They envisioned it as a place where students and villagers could read, discuss and hold group activities.



The progression to reality took time. Instead of losing patience or hope, the teachers kept the discussions alive. With every passing day at Kodegaon Rayat... a place where catching a signal for mobile phones is a challenge... their resolve to help students and their families strengthened. Trilochan sir, for instance, spent hours at the only desktop computer in the village to compile inputs from various people on the facilities that a CLC should provide.

Not just teachers and people from the Foundation, even former residents of the village and alumni of the same school came forward with their ideas. One of them is Anil, an Army personnel who continues to visit his alma mater in Kodegaon Rayat and interact with students and teachers. Trilochan sir roped in Anil to inspire students with the story of his own uphill journey of joining the Army.

Each time Trilochan sir stepped out of the village on work... fetching books and learning materials from places, for instance... he reflected on the difficulties a Kodegaon student faces in pursuing a dream. When he cycled back from towns almost 60 km away, Trilochan sir realised the role the teachers must play in bridging the yawning gap between Kodegaon Rayat and the world outside. It only motivated him and his colleagues to try harder and make the CLC a reality.

## **The pandemic effect**

In March 2020, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, India declared a nationwide lockdown. Trilochan sir and his colleagues, along with members of the Foundation at Dhamtari, were forced to put their plans for the CLC aside and get involved in relief operations. But the pressing need for a CLC became more obvious to them as they immersed themselves in the COVID-19 response work.

While schools switched to online classes due to the lockdown, learning loss among students in backward areas assumed alarming proportions. This was particularly true of Kodegaon Rayat, which has a high population of Gond tribespeople.

The vaccination programme gave Foundation members a chance to work with the teachers once again. The CLC discussions resumed with greater enthusiasm. The teachers wanted the CLC to fill in the gap caused by learning loss and the absence of a library apart from being a platform for discussions of matters such as vaccine hesitancy, child marriage, education for women and so on. The work begins

Taking this forward, the teachers allocated a hall of the existing middle school building for the CLC. And then started the all-important work of involving the entire community in the effort. The teachers, along with some students who had returned to the village due to closure of schools and colleges, went door to door, urging members of every household to come forward and contribute to the initiative. In a village as poor as Kodegaon Rayat, monetary donations are too much to ask for. But the people surprised the team with their generosity. They donated in cash and kind.





Sacks of rice, tamarind and mahua flowers piled up at the school compound while the teachers took their donation drive to nearby towns such as Charama. An 80-year-old Kodegaon villager ... a woman with no source of income ... donated INR 520 to the cause. When the teachers initially refused to accept the sum, she insisted that the village's needs were greater than hers. Another elderly woman gave away a sizeable chunk of her mahua produce to the effort. The bamboo for the CLC set-up in the school building came from one man's garden in the village. He also planted saplings of mango trees in the school compound.

With INR 29,000 in the CLC kitty, teachers and members of the Foundation next focused on the actual set-up, with detailed discussions on the books and learning materials in the library, maintenance and upkeep of the place as well as forming a committee for handling day-to-day activities. With additional support from the Foundation, the shelves of the library soon filled up with books, including personal collections from people involved in the effort. Along with Munshi Premchand's books, other titles in the 650+ collection cover children's literature, folk tales, history and autobiographies. The CLC also subscribed to magazines to help students prepare for competitive exams. The hall also filled up with study tables, chairs and other items such as accession registers for making an inventory of books.

The CLC was finally ready to launch, marking a milestone in the history of Kodegaon Rayat and the six revenue villages under it.

## **The launch and more...**

Amid song, dance, rounds of loud applause and cheer, the CLC was formally inaugurated on 6 May 2022. The villagers thronged the school compound in traditional Gond attire and danced to the beat of the drums to laud the efforts of the team that had worked day and night to set up the centre.

Within days after the launch, the CLC turned into a nerve centre of the village. Apart from students, their families, too, started frequenting it for various activities.

While some show an interest in storytelling and book-reading sessions, others want to know about news from the outside world and discuss social and political issues with teachers. Through talks, teachers encourage the visitors to support the education of their children, focus on basic health and hygiene and improve social harmony among neighbours and the community.

Several weekly activities are of great interest to the students. Being an Adivasi village, many inhabitants of Kodegaon Rayat have a deep knowledge of folk art and music. The CLC invites them, along with artisans and artists from neighbouring villages and towns, to speak to students on various forms of art. This helps the community preserve the oral history that has been passed down countless generations.





The CLC sessions of book-reading also focus on the lives of eminent personalities such as Mahatma Gandhi, Savitribai Phule, Fatima Sheikh, BR Ambedkar and Birsa Munda. People turn up in good numbers for these sessions and borrow biographies from the library. Umabharti Sewte, a student of Std VIII, is hugely inspired by the biography of Birsa Munda, the freedom fighter and folk hero from present-day Jharkhand. She took home a book on the man and read out his story to her parents and grandparents. She also narrated the story to a group of attendees at the CLC and requested the teachers to add more books to the folk history section.

The works of Munshi Premchand, too, are of great interest to students. If things go as planned, the teachers will soon organise plays based on iconic Premchand novels such as Godaan.

They also seek to use the CLC as an information centre for students seeking higher education and job opportunities outside the village. Apart from counselling on various subject areas to choose from, the teachers are also keen on having internet facilities at the centre... so that no student must cycle 18 km to fill up an online form or browse websites of universities.

A core committee of the sarpanch, teachers and Foundation members take care of the CLC's administrative and financial matters. Apart from maintaining absolute transparency in financial matters, the committee also holds general body meetings for matters that require the consensus of the community. This gives the people a sense of ownership towards the CLC, making them more invested in running it smoothly. The students, especially those from the middle school, are particularly attached to the centre. They come forward to help with maintaining the register of the library, arranging books and keeping the premises clean. The committee specifically encourages women from the village to visit the CLC and participate in activities. Generally deprived of any say in family matters, the CLC is a platform for women and young girls to voice their opinion, concerns and aspirations.



Girl students have played an important role in the founding of the CLC. One of their goals is a Youth Club. They see it as an entity that will connect them to Kodegaon students in schools and colleges outside the village.

## **The road ahead**

The CLC in Kodegaon Rayat is not just a physical space. It is a dream come true for the teachers who have toiled day and night. It is a beacon of hope for young students who want a life free of poverty and deprivation. This means that the CLC must grow ... in size, strength and facilities ... in order to rewrite the history of Kodegaon Rayat.

The evolution may happen over the years, but a new building is on the cards. It will give the CLC the space to grow into a convergence centre where the government can hold capacity-building programmes for the youth and other population groups.

The CLC is already a bright example of a community initiative for other village across the country. The onward journey, we hope, is even more inspiring and fruitful.





**Azim Premji Foundation**

#134 Doddakannelli, Next to Wipro Corporate Office  
Sarjapur Road, Bengaluru – 560035

+91 80 6614 4900/01/02  
[azimpremjifoundation.org](http://azimpremjifoundation.org)

