DECODING GYANODAYA: A DIGITAL MOVEMENT MITIGATING INDIA'S URBAN-RURAL KNOWLEDGE DIVIDE

SMART CLASSROOMS DELIVERING CUTTING-EDGE CURRICULUM TO GODDA, A SLEEPY TRIBAL DISTRICT IN JHARKHAND, THROUGH ADANI FOUNDATION-LED PROJECT MAKES FOR A GREAT CASE STUDY TO BE REPLICATED ACROSS INDIA.

The youth of a nation are trustees of a prosperous future. India currently has the highest young population in the world (approximately 600 million) and will continue to do so for the next decade, at the least. To reap its demographic dividend, the country needs to tap into and harness the youth's potential. A stepping stone to achieving this is ensuring quality education and skill development for them.

Gyanodaya (Smart Classes), launched by the Adani Foundation – the CSR-arm of the Adani Group, is one such digital learning mission transforming thousands of lives in Jharkhand's Godda district. The project, a prominent part of the group's Corporate Social Responsibility in the tribal district, demonstrates that the huge gap between urban and rural education systems can be, and has begun to be, bridged with technology. The project was launched in July 2018 through collaboration between Adani Foundation, Godda district administration and Ecko-vation Solutions Pvt. Ltd – to promote e-learning in middle and secondary schools. "Now, more than ever, there is a need for voluntary organizations and corporate houses to join hands and align their work with the nation's agenda as well as the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Many governments and organizations are looking at Gyanodaya as a model to make quality education accessible in India's remotest areas," says Dr. Priti Adani, Chairperson, Adani Foundation.

At least 617 million children worldwide lack the basic proficiency to read and solve mathematical problems. Given the gravity of 'Quality Education' as one of the documented United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, Gyanodaya targets to usher in an educational revolution, in keeping with the vision of 'Digital India'. Its smart classes focus on Science, Maths and English by using digital tools to facilitate smart learning for the children in Godda – a district which is declared 'aspirational' by Niti Ayog. It is one of the 115 such districts identified across 28 states for enhancement of the Human Development Index and reduction in the significant inter-state and inter-district variations in development.

In Godda, an educational opportunity is not easily accessible to the tribal population. According to a report published by the Journal of Economic & Social Development in 2013, total dropout rate in the elementary level is 62%, about 88% among SC and ST students, and 91% in girls. Poverty in the area forces children to drop out of school. Since the district already had provision of smart classrooms under a government scheme, what was needed was a strong and meaningful curriculum that would empower students as well teachers. "This learning model and its content has been developed to work with the available TVs and mobile phones in school. Students first understand the concepts through videos – these are animated and in the native language that is easy to comprehend. The second step is assessment," says Ritesh Singh, CEO and co-founder, Eckovation. Based on the performance in assessment, students are given feedback as to how they can improve.

To spark initial interest, students were shown documentaries, movies and sports clips. The project currently covers 607 govt. schools of Godda spread across 200 villages, supporting more than 2500 teachers and reaching out to 70,000 students studying in 6th to 12th standards. "Smart Classes have not only provided a tool for the students to understand difficult concepts but also helped teachers to explain the concepts more effectively," shares Neelima Kumari, a social science teacher at KGBV Pathar Gama. Similarly, with the introduction of virtual reality (VR), students are experiencing interactive learning. This is the first instance of government schools implementing this technology in academics. A student of KGBV Sunderpahari Manisha Pahadi says, "Till today we have only read about the solar system in textbooks but now we can experience it through the VR class. We are always excited for the VR classes."

The visually appealing, easy-to-grasp and retairable concepts covered in the study materials led to an increase in school attendance from 21% to 50%. There is also a significant reduction in dependency on tuition class-es and 40% students who used to score around 40%, have now shifted into 60-80% marks bracket. "Previously, my parents were searching for an English tuition teacher for me. Now with Gyanodaya class, I am able to learn English and find the subject to be easy," says Madhu Kumari, a student of Baksara School.

The self-activated learning in kids has brought Godda district up to 14th rank from 20th in the 2019 Class 10 Board Examinations. Ravindra Nath Singh, principal of Raghunathpur High School says, "90% of the students in my school are underprivileged and haven't ever seen a television. Yet, they are the ones who are aware about their interests and their future. Gyanodaya has made students eager to attend classes and this is definitely noticeable in the annual results."

While e-learning has largely been a supplementary tool to enhance mainstream academics in urban areas, it has great potential to become the future of education, especially in rural areas. A case in point is the remarkable transformation seen in students benefitted by Gyanodaya. Smt. Kiran Kumar Pasi shares, "the progressive increase in the learning level and attendance of students is getting reflected in schools. There is an expected increase in the overall education level of the district."

The pioneering project has received recognition from the Jharkhand government – it has been decided that the project will be replicated in other districts of the state as well. This is a testament to the scalability of the Gyanodaya model. E-learning is thriving in India thanks to increasing reliability on internet, effective performance measurement tools and quick and easy preparation for competitive exams. By targeting outdated curriculum, high costs and lack of resources, projects like Gyanodaya have the potential to make education accessible to millions of underprivileged children in developing nations.