

## Pre-Primary Education: A Case study of KPS Murukwad

-By SSK Research Team

Murukwad, a village at the foothills of western Ghats, situated at around 100 kms from Sirsi Educational district headquarters, is a lively village with around 2500-3000 population. Covered with dense forests and good water facilities, people are mostly employed in paddy cultivation and areca nut. The nearest town is Haliyal, which is around 13 KMs from Murukwad. The government school in Murukwad is one of the schools which provide quality education to nearby villages. The school is in Haliyal Taluk, Sirsi education district (Uttar Kannada). This school has more than 80 years of history. As of 2020, there are 2 aided and 4 unaided schools within 10 km distance from Murukwad School. However, even with the competition from private schools, KPS Murukwad has remained hugely popular for providing quality education. Many parents in nearby villages prefer KPS Murukwad over other aided and unaided school.

In 2018-19 the government proposed to open Pre-primary sections in all the 276 Karnataka Public Schools (KPS). Early childhood education (ECE) programs are being introduced as part of the Samagra Shikshana Karnataka - an overarching program for the school education sector extending from pre-school to class 12. The government also ensured to support the schools in every manner to make this program successful. As a part of this program, KPS Murukwad also started the pre-primary section. In Murukwad gram panchayat limits, early childhood education is mainly provided by anganwadis. There are 4 anganwadis, of which one is co-located anganwadi with KPS Murukwad. Each anganwadi has approximately 25 children attending every day. The co-located anganwadi now can ensure the continuity from anganwadi to pre-university education. There is also a private unaided school which also provides pre-primary class. "It initially looked like a challenge for the school management to attract children of this age group to our pre-primary section, but the department officials guided us throughout" says the principal, Mr Pramod.

The government had asked all the KPS's to identify a classroom which is empty, to be used as a pre-primary classroom. In order to ensure an attractive ambience to children and parents, these classrooms were repainted in accordance with Bala-Snehi norms i.e. using colourful paints which use non-hazardous chemicals in it, to provide children with rich colourful

environment for learning. A separate grant to prepare the classroom in the school was also given by SSK. KPS Murukwad implemented these orders and ensured that a separate, well-lit and colourful classroom is ready for pre-primary section.

## Classroom Preparation and Publicity

Preparing and modifying normal classroom to an attractive and colourful classroom was the first step which Mr Pramod- the Principal of the school undertook. He personally supervised directed how the painting in the class should be made. In his words, "Private schools create attractive classrooms and supporting environment and hence attract more students. Our KPS has also tried to provide these facilities in order to encourage parents to send their children to KPS, and we don't ask fees from parents to overburden them".

Next step was to hire a qualified teacher. The President of the SDMC personally shared the information about hiring new teachers for the pre-primary section. The school management organized interviews for the eligible candidates in May 2019 and Mrs Ratna V was selected as the teacher for the pre-primary section. Mrs Ratna has experience as a primary school teacher. She was working in the nearby unaided primary school and was teaching English language there. She has completed her B. A and D.El.Ed. Ms Pavithra C was appointed as a caretaker to support the teacher. She has studied till PUC and was earlier working with a private school as a caretaker. The initial orientation was given by the principal of the KPS. Also, in July 2019, Samagra Shikshana Karnataka provided three-day orientation in Bengaluru.

Soon after the teacher hiring process, school management decided for a publicity campaign for the pre-primary enrolment. In Murukwad, most of the residents of the village were into agriculture and daily wage work. Some of them were employed in the sugar factory in Haliyal, and paper mill in Dandeli which is 10 km and 22 km from Murukwad respectively. Mr Pramod and the president of the SDMC, Mr Pisheppa Shinde visited nearby villages personally at a time when most of the villagers are available. As the president says "The principal and I visited the nearby villages : Mugadkoppa, Mundwada, Navanagara and Murukwada and visited many houses and distributed some pamphlets about the school and the pre-primary section which will be introduced this current year. We answered the questions of the parents about the care which we will provide". The publicity drive was conducted for two days in different villages.

Along with publicity drives, principal Mr Pramod was also successful in involving the community for getting round tables for the pre-primary classes and chairs which suit the toddlers. The chairs and the round tables are colourful and light, so that it can be easily kept in the corner whenever the teacher wants to do an activity in the middle of the class.

The efforts of Mr Pramod, Mr Pishappa and other school authorities bore fruit when they received more than 50 applications for the pre-primary class. Samagra Shikshana Karnataka had given clear guidelines to restrict the intake of students to 30, to maintain the quality. It was difficult to convince the parents about the limited student intake. Finally, it was decided that, in the presence of parents and teachers, chits will be taken to select the students who will be given admission. Though there was dissatisfaction among the parents of the kids whose name didn't appear in the chit, 30 students were selected. The students are from the surrounding villages like Mugadkoppa, Mundwada, Navanagara and Murukwada.

## **The Grand Opening**

On 22 June 2019, with the august presence of the then district in charge minister Mr R V Deshpande, the pre-primary class was inaugurated with much fanfare. The uniforms were stitched earlier by taking measurements of all the students. As Mrs Ratna had tailoring experience too, she took the initiative to stitch the uniforms for her students. The back side of the t-shirts has the logo and name of the school. Uniforms and books were distributed to the students.



## Teacher – Student interaction

For a successful handling of the class, it is necessary that the teacher connects with the students positively. The initial orientation by the principal and the three-day training to the teachers in Bengaluru came as a great help to Mrs Ratna V. “The trainers in the orientation program were very friendly and cleared all our doubts. The important questions regarding hygienic environment, class preparation, organizing teaching learning materials (TLM), organizing the class, organizing toys, maintaining records, hygienic food and resting regime of the children were answered very clearly”, as Mrs Ratna opines. Equipped with this training, Mrs Ratna was confident to handle the class with care. Class timing for pre-primary was decided as from 9.30AM to 3.30PM. Mrs Ratna also improvised on the training given to her and tried to introduce other activities which the children loved. Some of the activities which she performs in the class are : make the children sit in circle and pass the ball, colouring, pasting some of the items like pawns, cloth pieces to the paintings done, making paper boats, colouring the paper fishes, kites etc. She sometimes demonstrates these activities with Mrs Pavitra and children follow them. She says “children love all the materials provided by the department. Especially the toy house. The materials also help me teach.” The craft works created by the children are also used as Teaching Learning Materials (TLM) and are showcased in the class. Some of the class decorations are also done using the craft and learning activities

which the children did in the class. Ratna has also taken students outside the class: to market nearby, to a nearby field, and to the nearby veterinary hospital to show the animals. Mrs Ratna also has made few TLM's herself by purchasing locally available items.









Mrs Ratna has also given importance to development of teaching learning materials as an indoor activity with the students. The children made family tree with photos of their parents and siblings. This is also displayed in the class. Her previous experience in the private primary school came in handy in many occasions, she opined. For eg: the initial syllabus given was for only 3 months. She taught the prescribed syllabus for three months and later she taught from her old experience. “the students now can say English alphabets and tell the number up to 10” she says proudly. Mrs Ratna also constantly keeps in contact with the parents of the children to inform them about the progress. “the biggest challenge I faced with the parents was that they expect me to give homework every day. It was hard

to convince them that in pre-primary level there is no homework. Now I tell students to get something from home like grains, flowers etc as homework.” Says Mrs Ratna. She has actively visited some of the homes of the children and dropped few children home when their parents were late in picking them up. Due to her friendliness, she is a popular teacher and children absolutely love her. “Children love coming to school. They say they feel bored on Sundays and on holidays as it will be a holiday for school. Once Priya, a student, was suffering from chicken pox, and she couldn’t come to school. Her mother called me and asked me to talk to her. Priyas main concern was she will not be able to meet me the next day in school. I consoled her that she can come to school as soon as she is fit and fine” Ratna says.

Pre-primary children enjoy being in the school campus. Some of the children go home with their siblings who are studying in the older classes and for some of them, parents take the responsibility of taking the children home. For Swati, Maruti, Keerthana, Devu, Raju and Ravi, whose siblings’ study in older classes, wait until they get free, to go home. They spend more time in the school and play once their class is over. Many other teachers teaching older classes say “we feel so happy when we see the pre-primary children jump and play in the campus. Whenever we are free, we just go near the pre-primary class to see them play and we also feel happy”.

## **Nutrition – Health - Community support in the school**

Mid-day meal program is running successfully in the school. The pre-primary children are also given the nutritious meal. Along with the meal, the children are also given sweets like chikki and fruits from time to time. The children are made to sleep for some time everyday so that they are refreshed and not burdened in the school. Mrs Ratna has taught the children about the importance of washing hands before eating. Before every meal/snack in the class, the students go and wash hands. She has also taught the basics of cleanliness to the children, like taking bath everyday and cutting nails etc.

KPS Murukwad has sought the help of local primary health centre for the routine health check up of the children. As also done in the anganwadis, PHC nurses and doctors visit the pre-primary section for the check-up regularly. During the academic year vitamin A tablets, de worming tablets are distributed. “There was also a spike in the chicken pox cases in the



village. We called PHC doctors to examine our children also, as a safeguarding measure” said Mr Pramod. The nurses who come to the pre-primary section are very friendly. They also teach the basic cleanliness values to children.





The school authorities constantly keep in touch with the parents about the progress of the children. They also educate parents on teaching basics like singing, speaking, holding pen and other items in hand, scribbling etc. The parents keenly observe the children and when in doubt ask the teacher for appropriate action.

## Community involvement

Being one of the oldest schools in the village, KPS Murukwad enjoys the goodwill among the people. The community has been involved in every aspect when it comes to the matter of pre-primary section. The furniture in the class, school bags and uniforms are given by the active involvement of the community. Many individuals have donated for the purchase of toys to the pre-primary section.

Good schools are not built in a day. They take years of efforts from teachers, community, and the government. KPS Murukwad has set an example in this regard.