

About Barli Development Institute For Rural Women, Indore

Barli Development Institute for Rural Women is a Bahá'í-inspired NGO established in early 1980's. 'Barli' is a very common name among tribal women in the districts where many trainees come from. Barli denotes 'Central Pillar' which supports the tribal house typical of these areas, highlighting the belief of the Institute that women are the central pillars of society.

The Institute works to empower women as agents of change in the process of development and empowering them to become actors in their communities through education and re-evaluating their position in society discovering their capabilities, responsibilities and entitlements.

The Institute trains underprivileged, rural and tribal women, 15 to 30 years of age, mainly from southwest Madhya Pradesh and as far as Bihar and northeast India. The target population has previously had no opportunities to basic education, has never gone to school, and is illiterate; a vulnerable group, highly susceptible to exploitation.

Barli conducts a training programme for Community Volunteers who are illiterate or semi-literate, and another programme for Grassroots Trainers who have either passed high school or have dropped out and who, during their training, serve as peer tutors. Trainees undergo a six-month residential training to enhance their knowledge, skills and experience of literacy, health, environmental education and personality development. They are also taught income generating and vocational skills to improve the quality of life for themselves, their families and their communities. At the end of the course the trainees appear in a Vocational Exam under the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS).

The Institute encourages local entrepreneurship, leadership, the value of human rights, the use of consultation in decision-making, and equality of men and women by helping its trainees acquire an awareness of their own innate worth and practical ability through a flexible Hindi literacy course, basic life skills like health, nutrition and diet, environmental education, income generation skills, building self esteem, self-confidence, spiritual qualities, and a dignified and empowered demeanor. Since 1985, the Institute has trained over 4000 women from over 450 villages and has opened three outreach centres in Chattisgarh.

With trainees coming from 450 communities, the number of indirect beneficiaries spreads to a minimum of 45,000, as each trainee returns to her community (of approximately 100 people) taking with her the information she has learnt, passing on knowledge of social values, health and hygiene which are beneficial to all. Graduates of the institute go on to contribute to economic development and productivity when setting up their own businesses and taking legitimate paid employment. Without this training the women would most likely have to migrate to find labour and would be more susceptible to exploitation, sexual harassment, rape, HIV/AIDS, etc.

Development of Institute's curriculum

The Institute's curriculum is designed to achieve the following goals and objectives:

- To facilitate change to traditional attitudes and practices which block or impede the efforts of men and women to live in equality, with dignity and security.
- To facilitate the initiation and execution of development activities in the communities.
- To increase awareness and knowledge of the potential for improving social and economic conditions in the communities.
- To impart the skills and knowledge needed to initiate development activities, improve health and nutrition, raise household income, increase literacy, and protect the environment.

The following key elements were given importance in developing this holistic curriculum:

- Curriculum must be grown organically based on the understanding that has developed from hands-on application;
- Theoretical and practical knowledge and experience go hand in hand;
- Learning processes leading to action, research and training;
- Curriculum must be relevant and meaningful to the trainees lives;
- Curriculum must empower students to enable them to make their own decisions in developing a common vision, based on their own needs;
- It must prepare the trainees to identify their own goals, their own roles and responsibilities in utilizing their own resources. This will lead to sustainable development. They can become entrepreneurs, have their own environment and area specific work on community resource development and make appropriate technological choices accordingly;
- Curriculum must foster creativity in learning;
- Learning must be participatory, interesting, and joyful rather than a burden.
- A holistic programme of training, which does not encourage women to move to cities and engage in industrial/commercial sector employment. The institute's approach is to work with improving the traditional lifestyle of the women in their home settings. It balances traditional practices and attitudes with beneficial modern advances in a way that fosters harmony in the family and community.
- The institute has systematically and organically developed its own curriculum. The books have been published and translated into Hindi, English and Marathi (for use by Anganwadi workers). The curricula have been specifically designed for the trainees by taking into account cultural heritage, specific needs and existing socio-economic conditions. For example, medical remedies in the *Learning to Teach Health* book take into account the knowledge, attitude, practices, beliefs, and accessibility of resources e.g. common herbs and vegetables etc.

About the Literacy Manual: Aao Padhna-Likhna Sikhen aur Sikhanyen

(Come Let us Learn and Teach Reading & Writing)

Development of the Book

Literacy is an integral part of the training programme at the Barli Institute. The training methodology and the programme is inspired by the Bahá'í Writings. 'Bahá'u'lláh has announced that inasmuch as ignorance and lack of education are barriers of separation among mankind, all must receive training and instruction.'

The Institute's Literacy Manual has been developed over the period of more than 20 years. Barli Institute's priority target population being approximately 80% of the illiterate tribal women it would be hard to achieve the main objective of the Institute – 'empower women as agents of change in the process of development and empowering them to become actors in their communities'. Hence it became necessary to include a strong component of literacy training and integrate it with all the training components at the Institute, such as Cutting & Tailoring, Learning to Develop Myself and My Community, Health and Environment.

In addition, Barli Institute prepares its students for successful passing of the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) Examination; therefore it has made a systematic effort to align its curricula according to the requirements of NIOS. National Institute of Open Schooling is an autonomous organisation of Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

This required literacy material to fulfil the specific needs of the trainees. The Literacy Manual, similar to the development of other curriculum materials at the Institute, has been developed following a rigorous interactive process of writing, field-testing, and consultation with experts in the field, and rewriting, and the material thus documented has been refined over the years.

Objectives of the Literacy Manual

Education has been specified as one of the Fundamental Rights of all citizens in the Constitutions of India. The main objective of Literacy Manual is to, along with training them in the skills of reading and writing, bring about social, moral, and spiritual transformation in them.

Following are some of the other objectives of the Manual:

- To empower women to become socially and financially self-sufficient.
- To enhance the understanding capability of the women and develop their capacity to become human resources within their own communities.
- To enhance the capacity of the women in a way that they assist in the development of their families and their villages, work towards the eradication of social evils such as blind-beliefs, and untouchability.
- To develop their literacy skills and make them capable of reading the Holy Writings and thus understand the purpose of their lives and become self-reliant.
- They become trained to appear for the 'Cutting & Tailoring Exam' of the National Institute of Open Schooling.

- To encourage others in their village to become literate.

Organization of the Manual

As the title of the Manual reflects, it is used both for learning literacy and for facilitating literacy classes for adults. That means, the Manual includes both the exercises for the participants and the step-wise instructions for the facilitator of literacy classes. The book begins with a discussion of the importance and benefits of Literacy and of becoming literate. The purpose is to ensure that the trainees become the owners of their own learning.

There are a total of 26 lessons, which are completed in 89 sessions. Each lesson begins with a brief recap of the previous lesson, followed by a discussion of the theme and the learning goals of the lesson. Each lesson is completed in 3-4 sessions, each session is completed in one hour. In addition, one hour of review is also done of each session to reinforce the learning. Each session also begins with the recap of the previous session and lists the skills the participants will learn during the session. Each session is further broken into several steps and clear directions/instructions for the facilitator are provided in a simple language. The participants are able to follow the progress of their own learning and thus remain motivated throughout.

A test is given after the study of some lessons, to assess the progress being made by each participant, and to review the understanding of the concepts being studied.

Through this curriculum the Barli Institute develops the skills of reading, writing and simple mathematical functions, which would help the trainees in establishing and sustaining their income-generating efforts – purchasing materials needed for their business at proper and correct market rates, maintaining proper accounts, using the bank facilities, such as depositing and withdrawing money, etc. Thus they would utilize these skills and improve their own life and communities.

“Aao Padhna-Likhna Sikhien aur Sikhanyen” Manual is distinguished because of following reasons:

- The Literacy Manual has been developed especially for the tribal and rural women.
- Trainees are taught, with the help of this Manual, to read, write and speak Hindi.
- The language is very simple and can be understood easily. With over 20 years of experience of the Institute, the book is planned so that a facilitator can easily use it to hold literacy classes and teach the participant literacy skills in three months.
- The Manual also includes learning numbers 1-100 and simple arithmetic functions such as addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.
- **Methodology:** The methodology for teaching literacy used in the Manual is simple and easy.
 - **Peer Teaching:** The participants themselves play a significant role in peer teaching. The participants are divided into smaller groups of 2-3. The tasks that the participants in smaller groups undertake are discussing a picture, reading letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs, learning numbers and doing mathematical functions. Each lesson includes these activities.
 - **Playing Games:** The participants play a major role in games too. Games provide the participants with excitement, cooperation and fun. They also enable the participants to use letters and practice what they have learnt. Each lesson includes some games.
 - The facilitator plays the key role in introducing and explaining any new things as they come up in the lessons such as new letters, conjunct letter, punctuation, math operations, etc.