

# PRATHAM Report 2014

Library-in-a-classroom' Grant



## Background

The Library in a Classroom Grant, announced by Pratham in 2013 was an opportunity for Bookworm to gain access to books in regional languages that were not a significant part of the Bookworm collection. The impetus to apply was on the back of the population that Bookworm serves through the Mobile Outreach Program (MOP). Children with home languages in Kannada, Urdu, Telugu and Hindi are part of the demographic distribution of MOP. It was anticipated that the collection through the grant would enable children to have access to books in their home language.





## Objective/Purpose

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The **Mobile Outreach Program ( MOP)** vision is to take books and the library experience to children who have no access to reading resources. The objectives are to enrich children's after school experience with access and provisioning of a library program that builds a relationship with story in the printed form and builds on meaningful reading and engagement with literacy practices.

The target groups of MOP mean that all children are marginalized by language amongst other forms of marginalization and therefore bridging home language and the language of the school/ power are necessary conditions in our sensitive approach.



The presence of multi lingual books that reflect the languages of the children was a good step in that process/ approach for which the Library in Classroom grant was an advantage.

Objectives of the Grant were conceptualized as under:

- ✓ **Link Home Language** - Children engaged in the Mobile Outreach Program at Chimbel (designated MOP site) speak a range of languages – Kannada, Telugu, Urdu, and Konkani. Bookworm introduces reading in English through building a context which the child can relate to. The availability of multi lingual books would take the program one step forward and engage the child in reading in his/her home language and leverage comprehension and relationships with print.



- ✓ **Build connect with script** - The Roman script used for English is different from the script used in the home languages of the children. The multilingual books ensured that a script in the home language is introduced in the environment. The objective was to build connect with a script in a familiar language and extend that to an unfamiliar script in an unfamiliar language.
  
- ✓ **Position print in the community** - An important condition for children to be able to have access to story in print. Bookworm introduced this in Chimbel through the community library through high quality, child friendly but a largely English collection that could be taken home. Multilingual books would allow children to borrow books in their own language and find readers in the home, thereby linking both story and reading in the home environment.
  
- ✓ **Build a link between library and home** - From a English language collection in the library which did not echo the home language, the grant would create a link by not only having a collection of multilingual books but also through its uses. Children could take these books home and have an adult in the house read to them. This was in great difference from the English texts which could be mostly only read by resource persons of Bookworm because most children were first generation learners of English in their families and had no one else at home to read in English.



## About Chimbel- Stats in relation to home language

The Chimbel population has an approximate size of 11,983 residents with Hindi, Kannada, Telugu and Urdu as the primary language and Hindi as a secondary language. At the time of applying for the grant children members were in the age groups of 2-5 years (5 children), 6-8 years (33 children), 9-11 years (57 children), 12-15 years (37 children) and 15 years (15 children).

When the books were first introduced into the program there was a sense of wonder and joy. Books were actively browsed through, there were comments “Urdu book..

kannad book.." but after about a month or so of active engagement there was a drop in enthusiasm from some of the children.

We followed this observation with closer observations and included questions about the multi lingual books in our home visits and member interviews.

### Reflections on the books:

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English as a language has been associated with aspirations of obtaining higher social status.

English is the Mol in Goa and the lone language that enables students to complete their basic education and obtain a 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Certification. It thus is a language of social mobility and educational aspiration.

Given this reality, borrowing a non-English book was considered by children and their families as negating the efforts made towards achieving the aspirations of ascending in social status. *There is a sense of pride in being enabled into the library program for many children and this became evident one day when a mini fight broke out at the time of borrowing books. One child was taking 2 regional language books and found her friend taking 2 English books. She cautioned her that the rule was 1 English – 1 Regional Language to which her friend replied, in our house 'we only speak English'. On hearing this another 2 children burst out laughing and called the girl names and said her mother speaks Kannada! This needed a Resource Person to intervene and restore peace, but it also indicated the sense of identity that young children already have with home language versus language of power.*

To address this, Bookworm changed its policy to allow borrowing of two books at a time, one in English and the other in another language. This generated a great enthusiasm among children and led to a spate of furious borrowing. *Loss of books over 5 months that have been analysed show a fairly high number of missing Pratham books which children claim are misplaced. Over the years, the Library Program loses around 4% of books every term. At the Chimbhel library the % is closer to 13% because of the socio economic group and high turnover in this site. Bookworm has made peace with these losses, recognizing them to be program costs and holding on to the belief that SOMEWHERE, SOMEONE is reading a missing book!*

However, while in some homes, children had family members who could read the language, many came from homes where although this was the home language, family members were unable to read the script. *Fiza came back to the library just as we were closing up one evening, thrusting a book back at us and saying she wants to change her book as her didi cannot read this Urdu book and wants a simpler one. Home visits later, we learnt that the Urdu her didi reads is of a different kind ( she goes to the Madrassa) and many words in the book are written differently and are hard for her to understand.*

Another finding was the difference between the language of the book and spoken language in terms of structure and Standardisation. The language of the book was not the language spoken at home and this led to struggles with understanding the book. However, the illustrations and quality of the book in terms of design, use of paper etc. was deeply appreciated and found rather attractive by the children. *One*



*member once found Susheela's Kollam in the Kannada collection and read Susheela with great confidence. A library teacher remarked that it was nice to see him reading in Kannada to which he replied he could not read Kannada but he knew the book in English, recognized the cover and title and his mother's name is Susheela so he remembered the name!*

Books which had an English counterpart and was discovered by the children in another language among the collection elicited eagerness and an instant connection with the children who were excited to discover how the same story had been represented. *When a boy found Daddy's Mo which was read aloud in English months earlier, now in Kannada, there was much happiness and sharing and also a quick browsing to check if the story had remained intact in its linguistic migration!.* Later, similar bi-lingual books were found to be heartily welcomed.

Additional to these learnings what has also been a challenge is the absence of literates in regional scripts other than Devanagari among the team at Bookworm. This meant that the books in other languages could not be read to the children by the team at Bookworm and a great dependency was placed on the family or community fulfilling the role of guiding reading at home. Thus, the desired link with print was not strengthened by the MOP program due to a lack of literates in regional language within the team. It also indicated that sometimes or rather often times access alone is not the answer to building strong relationships with books. The books need to be mediated, brought alive, discussed and shared.

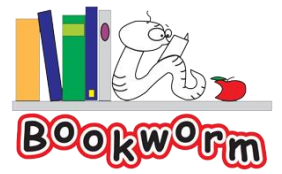
It is desired that the same gap will be slowly closed as new Resource Persons join Bookworm with more diverse literacies.

## Conclusion

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Receiving the Library in Classroom Grant was a timely opportunity for Bookworm's MOP program to infuse the collection with books in regional languages and begin to understand the complexity that comes from multi-script and standard and non-standard language issues when connecting home and library resources. It must also however be noted that there was multiple copies of the same title in the collection with strict written agreement to not divide/ distribute books across sites as well as not enough of rich literature within the collection to truly enthuse and immerse children into the books. The Non-Fiction titles were well received and had much



richer content and possibility of engagement than the fiction titles. It is hoped that Pratham receives this feedback in light of the serious need to immerse children into reading with a strong focus on reading good books that have an every lasting quality and impact on all dimensions of the human experience.

Bookworm deeply acknowledges the vision and support from Pratham in recognising it's work and awarding the Libraries in Classroom Grant to the organisation.

Bookworm,

May, 2014.