

# Pahal

# 2020





Education is not  
the learning of  
facts, but the  
training of the  
mind to think.

- Albert Einstein

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# TEAM PAHAL



Mohan Karra  
General Coordinator



Onkar Sadekar  
General Coordinator



Anisha Kamil  
Editing Coordinator



Bishal Ghosh  
Design Coordinator



Nishant Baruah  
Design Coordinator



Pranav SR  
Design Coordinator



Omkar Golatkar  
Design Core team



Pavitra Batra  
Design Core team



Shivani Verma  
Design Volunteer



Namasivayam Sankar  
Design Volunteer



Reetish Padhi  
Design Volunteer



Subham Samal  
Design Volunteer

# EDITORIAL

Here we present the much-awaited 2020 edition of Pahal. This edition is a special one, marking ten years since the formation of Disha. From a small effort of IISER students teaching children in a local vasti, we have come a long way. In this period where time has warped into an endless sea while our own undercurrents run deeper and more erratic, we take a pensive moment to look back on our journey and turn a fresh face to the future of Disha with optimism and resolve.

With this edition of Pahal we have highlighted the many programs Disha undertakes. We cover all the different aspects of the programs, their achievements, the challenges they faced and their plans for the future. We also have inspiring and insightful articles from different organisations helping underprivileged communities gain access to education.

We at Pahal hope you enjoy reading this edition as much as we did making it!

Team Pahal



# A note From GLs



“You cannot change your destination overnight, but you can change your direction overnight.”

-Jim Rohn

We know from our daily experience that it's not just the speed that matters but also the direction whenever you are on any journey. If you google “direction quotes”, you will find numerous fascinating and meaningful quotes (like the one above) explaining how direction is important in Life. Probably the founders of Disha, had those thoughts going through their mind, when they decided to name Disha. For those who are still wondering what direction has to do with Disha, keep looking in all directions and you will find your answer. Probably being the only students from fourth year to be still coordinators in some club, naturally raises the question ‘Why?’ Why Disha? Is it different from other activities at IISER? What started all of this? This and so many other questions have bothered both of us from the start. We don't claim here that our answers are the only correct answers, neither do we claim that we are special because we chose to do this. All we are doing is putting our opinions in front of you, with the hope that we debate about them and come to better answers together!



What began as a small activity for construction workers ten years back, has now turned into a giant umbrella of 11 active programs and more than a 100 volunteers. As most of you would be knowing, the activities range from abhyasika to talk for twenty covering many aspects of the social issues specific to education in our society. You would of course find more insights about them in this magazine. What we would like to point out here is the idea behind all of this. Each of the programs began because someone thought why not do this and other like minded people joined the effort. Disha has continued despite many setbacks and challenges owing to this idea “let's do it!” If you find the idea interesting, go ahead!

When one is incharge of a big organization, trade-offs are part and parcel of decision making. And no exception, we also faced quite a few of these seeming trade-offs. As a student club, there are numerous constraints on the dedication and time that one can give for an extra-curricular activities. However, since we also interact with the outside IISER world, we need to be aware of the good or bad impact that we are making on other people's lives. One of the major philosophies of Disha has been about the volunteer experience and exposing them to real life issues present in the society. But, since we are investing so much money and efforts into any program, it's necessary to see if it's making any impact on the target audience. In other words, is the “program successful?” Reading the above reasoning, it may feel that only one of volunteer experience or program success can be achieved. We

spent a lot of time debating about this and never reached a conclusion. Until, we realized why not try to combine both. Very often even in real life, we start with some assumption when dealing with some problem. Only to realize later that, the assumption was what was hindering the progress. We always thought that those two things are mutually exclusive, but why can't both be simultaneously doable? And the more we thought about it, the more we realized that these two things can be integrated...

Another thing that frequently pops up in almost all Disha related discussions, is how important are values or reasons compared to practicality. Even between the two of us, we had many intense discussions whenever such a choice was presented. Compromises are part and parcel of Disha coordinatorship and both of us had to compromise on a few things that we believed in, but had to go the other way. However, in hindsight, we do believe that we learned a lot from those instances and now are better equipped to deal with any problem that comes up in future! The important thing that we realized was that no matter the differences, the goal is still the same. We all are working towards the common goal and each individual may have a different way to go about it and that's okay too!

This year is almost over, but we still have few questions to think about for next year. Disha provides this unique platform to try out your ideas with all resources at hand and with minimum possible risk of screwing over things. So far, this ideology has led to some brilliant ideas to come from the coordinators. But, this year, we realized that for few of the programs, because of frequent changes in structure, the results are actually not turning out to be good. And there we have another unresolved trade-off. Giving up the freedom to try out new ideas or sticking to original plans to increase impact. Like all other times, we hope that we figure out the way as we go along!



One of the major things that both of us wanted was to go beyond the education sector. We certainly don't claim that we have revolutionized the education sector and all problems are solved. No. Rather we want students here to get exposed to more varied problems and discuss inter-disciplinary ideas. Broadly speaking the theme that we decided was 'Science and Society'. And we are glad that we at least started the conversation for a few of you. We are hoping that this catches up and more people from more diverse backgrounds come with their expertise and discuss the problems that are present. Having this broad overview of issues present in our society is one of our long term goals and we would really like to see it grow!

Connecting to the previous paragraph, we realize that a lot of work needs to be done for the goals that we have in our mind. It's a long journey. But we are at least glad that there is a high chance that we are moving in the right direction and we have so many dedicated volunteers and coordinators to lead this path further.

We enjoyed a lot in these four years at Disha and we are definitely going to miss all the small-small things associated with Disha. But, what's the use of direction if we are not moving ahead....?

-Mohan Karra and Onkar Sadekar



# DISHA

## The 10 Year Journey

### Aug-2010 to Aug-2011

Three Abhyasikas started at Someshwarwadi, Janwadi, and Lamanvasti after discussion between the founders. Disha had a humble beginning with only a handful of regular volunteers initially.

### Aug-2011 to May-2012

Spread the Smile, the flagship program of Disha and Vigyan Mela, aimed to bridge the gap between the Abhyasika communities, were started. The organization was also formally named as Disha.

### May-2012 to Aug-2012

Continuing on the hard work and social drive of enthusiastic volunteers, Weekend program (Science communication), Talk for Twenty (Exchange of ideas), and Resource Team (Organization of Resources) were started with very diverse goals. Unfortunately, Janwadi Abhyasika stopped due to poor response.







## Aug-2012 to Aug-2013

The First Jigyasa camp took place at IISER. Consequently, Pahal was started as a monthly newsletter (which later expanded to Annual Magazine). The tradition of outbound -- going outside campus to brainstorm ideas was initiated. The first outcome of the outbound was the well-thought constitution.

## 2015 to 2017

Someshwarwadi Abhyasika stopped due to increased awareness of parents to send kids to tuitions. Mindspark was started with the aim to help kids with competitive exams. The Resource Team was rejuvenated to help with the increasing work of STS, while the weekend program was rebranded as Science Nurture Program with broader goals and more diverse target audience.

## Aug-2017 to Aug-2018

Prerna, with the vision of helping 11th-12th students crack the competitive exams and Pradnya with the hope of providing sincere Abhyasika kids more personalized attention were started. A much needed Mental health talk series was organized for IISERites.

## Aug-2018 to Aug-2019

Record Breaking participation in STS ever, with more than 150 volunteers. Translation Team formed to help all programs with their language barrier. Disha Room was shifted to a bigger room in the PhD hostel in front of the Art room.

Spread

The Smile

Abhyasika

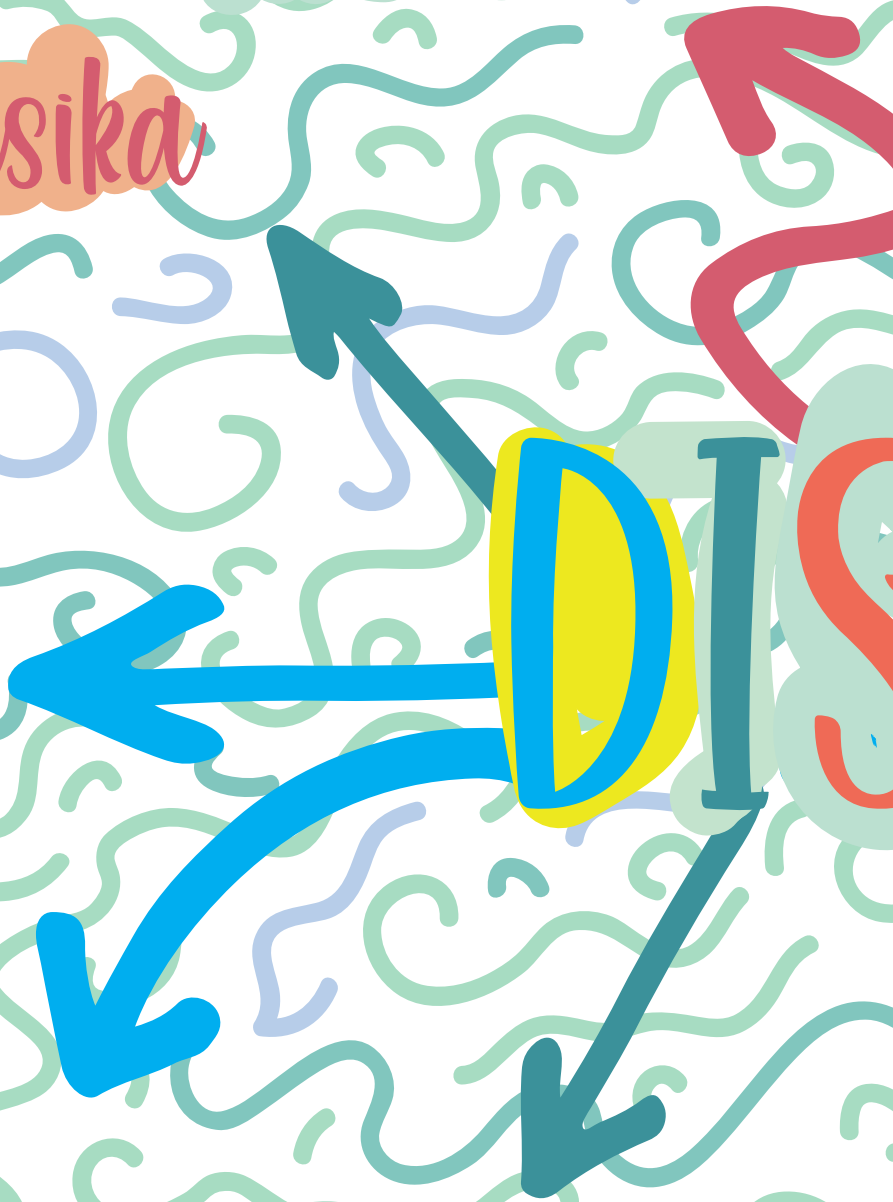
Resource

team

Mindspark

Translation

team



Pradnya

Talk

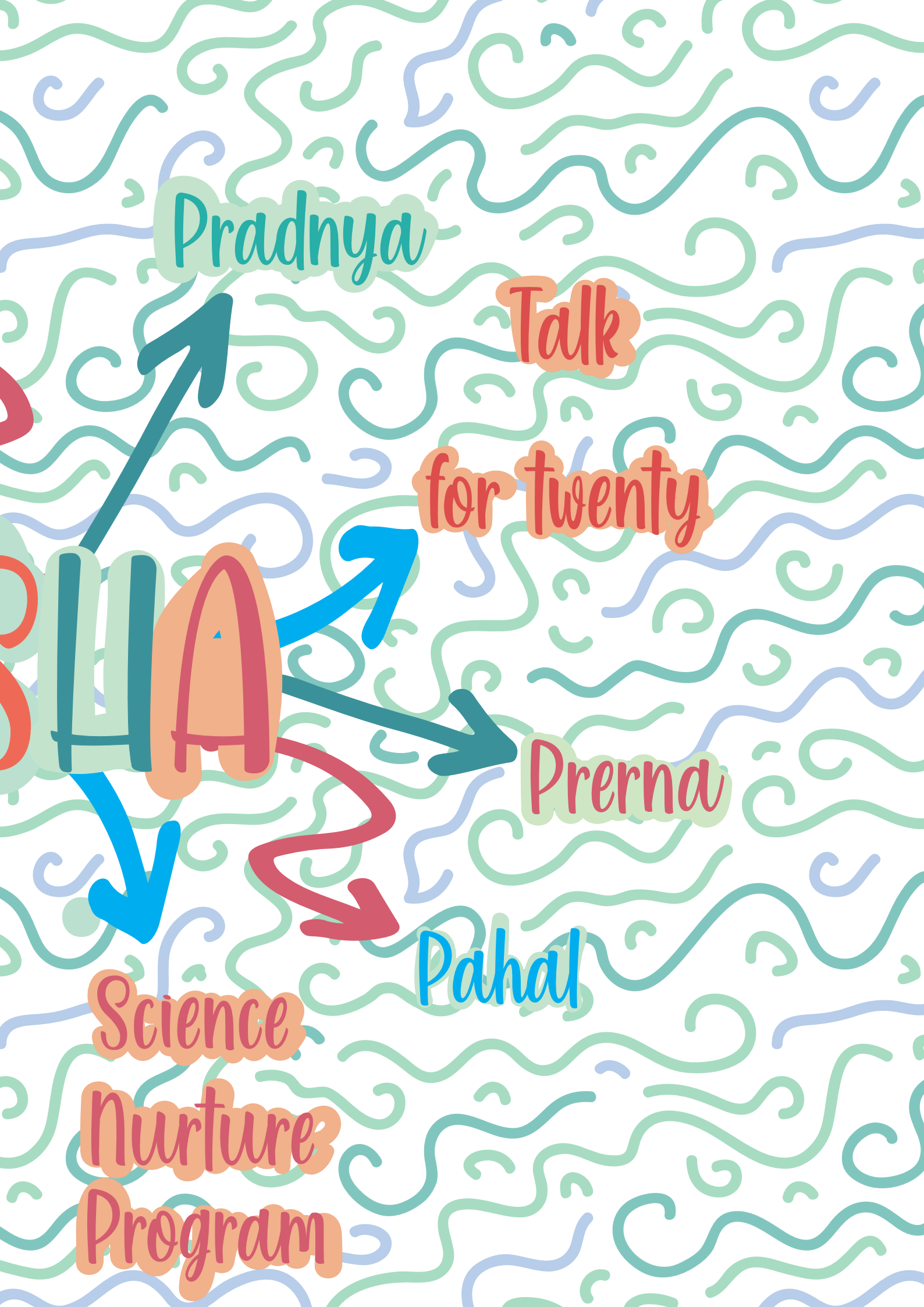
for twenty

Prerna

Pahal

Science

Nurture  
Program



R E S O U R C E

T E A M

## Rapid Evolution

-Goirik Chakrabarty, Karthik Suraj Vasisht, Sailleish Chinnaraj

This is what describes 'The Resource Team.' The Resource Team is a Disha Programme that mainly deals with creating models, sessions, and teaching aids for the volunteers of Disha. However, it wasn't always that way. It started as a group of individuals who managed the Disha Room, where all activities/models and materials are kept. It created session documents, i.e., rough outlines of how we conduct demonstrations of concept. And from then on, every year, things started changing.

The year that passed was the year of conception. Initially, the program was tasked with providing sessions for STS (Spread the Smile). However, the restructuring of STS allowed it to become relatively self-sufficient, and it is this incident gave us the chance to explore new frontiers.

The product of the efforts of the team this year was threefold. The first goal, which has been there since its inception, is to create these session documents that are useful for other programs. This goal often couples well with model-making. Visual aids are an immense boon for teaching, as picturization often aids comprehension. These models would be useful for other programs.

The second goal is to create educational videos on various topics. These videos aim to provide volunteers with an example of how to and brief explanations of concepts. Another class of videos that can be made is for students themselves. Animation can make many concepts more understandable, thus aiding their learning.

Finally, we have volunteer engagement and training (pan-Disha). This is being done under Disha Connect's banner, a periodic meet of Disha volunteers and coordinators to



exchange ideas and think about various topics. We believe that the discussions and workshops that are held will allow volunteers to introspect their teaching and content creation methods to help themselves help others.

The path that led to this result was in no way linear. At the start of the year, we coordinators had rough ideas for what we wanted to do. Still, it was only much later that these ideas became more concrete. We attempted things such as video making with collaboration with IISER's Science Media Centre, database creation, and session restructuring. To an extent, these took off, but more than actual work, there was more concretization of the idea. This concretization did seem dormant at the time, but we are sure it will prove to be a perfect trampoline with the new team coming in.

The main event this year was STS. We were able to put together 9-10 different activities for students of over five villages. We hope to play a larger part in volunteer preparation next year.

Personally, as coordinators, we have grown a lot. The experience has allowed us to interact with many juniors and build a great relationship with them. While it is true that RT this year has nothing physical to show for its efforts, we believe that the struggles that led to its rebirth as a new program will soon enable it to be what it is meant to be: the backbone of Disha. We have the utmost confidence that our juniors will enthusiastically build on the foundations we have set as a team. We proudly pass the baton on to them.



# VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

I joined the Resource Team because I couldn't teach but still wanted to contribute to the cause of Disha and saw them as a perfect fit. Indeed, it was a perfect fit, and for reasons beyond the one I mentioned. I didn't volunteer much during the first part of the semester as I couldn't handle academics well. But the people were very supportive (especially coordinators), and even though I didn't contribute much, I still felt a part of the team. The memorable parts for me were the Spread The Smile (STS) preparations and volunteer training meetings. For STS, we had to pack materials for weekends, so we met on Thursdays and Fridays to do the work. We brought some cardboard from the parking lot, checked the material for experiments, and explained to volunteers their work. It was a great learning experience to develop new experiments when some of the existing ones didn't work.

In volunteer training discussions, we discussed various topics which sometimes went to philosophical regimes. All of us had enough time to think about as these discussions happened during the start of the pandemic. We met for about 2 hours every week and initially analyzed the feedback we got from volunteers about what they wanted to change or had problems with and came up with solutions for the issues. This experience was pleasant as I learned that teaching is much more than just a person lecturing; it also involves many skills on the lecturer's part. I also got to see the real world in logistic issues and limitations due to finances. Overall working with RT has been very fun, and the people involved are fantastic.

-Raghav Sharma



# VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

I remember the Disha orientation last year when the second-year (current third years) students came after the lectures into LHC101 and started talking about Disha. I chose the resource team. After all, I'd have liked to create models, activities, and sessions, especially the models, because I thought having a visual representation of various ideas made them much easier to learn for many kids. Karthik introduced us to him and the other coordinators, Goirik and SAILLESH, and made us introduce ourselves. The first task we were given was to create a session, where I met Purva and collaborated with Jezer. Then started the incredible journey through the year where we made many sessions, models, and experiments. During the fall semester, we reorganized the Disha room and planned activities and experiments. We did have a lot of fun chatting and learning how to use "cutting-edge technologies" (tools with the cutting edge(s), like scissors, knives, and retractable blades). It was during the coming winter semester that we did put our skills to work. I remember scavenging the basement for materials, making periscopes, and doing a lot of experimental chemistry. Overall, I am incredibly grateful for getting the opportunity to work with beautiful people, for beautiful people (the kids included), and I learned a lot. I was thrilled that I could contribute to others' learning. Working for Disha was a humbling experience. On my end of things, I was glad to improve my hand skills and learn a lot of new concepts and experiments.

We are looking forward to a bright future for Disha.

-Abhijith Hari Menon



# A B H Y A S I K A

## Down the Lamanvasti Road

-Anuja, Riddhi, Swastik

Abhyasika, the program which saw the transformation of Disha from a small initiative to a full-fledged Student Organisation, has grown from being a teaching classroom for the Lamanvasti kids to a platform where they can develop academically, socially, and morally. We had a gradual but significant change in education perception in the Vasti population over the years. Some of the program's positive influx include a steady number of volunteers, lower resistance from parents, a higher fraction of students pursuing studies after class 7, and an amicable relationship between the IISER community and the Vasti. This has allowed us to plan and achieve more complex goals for further development of the program.

This year we focused on having more productive sessions by implementing some new strategies. These include reducing the number of sessions to 4 per week that allowed for a consistent amount of 8-10 volunteers per session. The volunteers actively participated in doing several modules -- Social Science, Mathematics, and English. We divided students into various levels based on how much they know in a particular subject, and we proceeded to teach them according to what we had in our modules for that specific level. Students' discipline always poses a challenge in education, and Abhyasika was no exception.

To reduce the kids' chaos, we implemented a door-keeping system that allowed only those eager to learn and whose parents were well-informed about our initiative. We encouraged the kids to maintain silence and cleanliness in the mandir, where we conducted our classes. We took regular attendance of the kids and divided them into various groups based on their levels. Volunteers that were assigned to groups were expected to plan the session accordingly. We provided slates to assist the teaching





process. A regular volunteers' meeting was held once in two weeks to help all volunteers to keep track of what was happening in sessions.

Volunteer training sessions, implementation of an ID-system for students, distribution of notebooks to the students for Abhyasika classwork are some measures that can be carried out to improve this teaching initiative both for volunteers and students. Finally, we intend to revive Vigyan Mela, an annual day for Abhyasika kids, which couldn't be held this year due to the pandemic. We welcome the vasti kids to IISER for participating in various events, albeit sports or talent shows or so on. Such an event helps the kids realize the world beyond the vasti and solidifies our relationship with the community.

Abhyasika remains to be ever challenging but also a pleasure. The problems of Lamanvasti could fill up another report on its own, and we'd rather not write about it here. The warmth with which kids greet us gives even more rationale to carry on. Love and dedication hold this program together and give us an incentive to hustle more for what we want to accomplish for the kids.



# VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

It was a session like any other, with the usual hustle and bustle. I wanted to teach them Mathematics, and convincing them to study ratios and proportions that day was impossible. So, I used what I now call the 'Biryani Method.' I told them that they had to prepare Biryani, and for that, they had to go around the city to get stuff. I took them on an imaginary trip across Pune, me performing the roles of a bus conductor, an auto driver, and a tomato vendor, each time modulating the voice to suit each character and asking them to calculate the money for each commodity/ticket. I had to convince them by saying that the Bus conductor was their mathematics teacher in disguise and he wouldn't let them alight the bus if they didn't answer his questions. Even today, if the kids get bored, they tell me, "Bhaiyya bis (20) rupay Tomato karo".

- Prathith Bhargav



# VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

I do not know what expectations I had from Abhyasika. All I knew were the stories the seniors had told us during the Orientation session. I missed the first session because there were too many volunteers. They came back with the cutest of pictures and funniest of stories. It is inevitable in any Abhyasika story to mention how the kids make you comfortable. I had doubts about the language, and if I'd be fun enough to keep the kids engaged, would they like me? All these questions were rendered dumb. The kids have their way of communicating, and you build your language in talking to them. Liking was never an issue; their excitement to meet new Bhaiya's and Didi's flare far higher than your self-doubt. I have learned the most outstanding example of co-evolution in Abhyasika. With time, the relationships grew stronger. Some of us volunteers were fortunate enough to be their confidante. They devised new tricks and funny ways, and we invented more unique ways to try controlling them. Double-underline "try." I guess that is why Abhyasika will be an unforgettable memory for any volunteer.

My best memory is that of being the doorkeeper. As we were trying out a new system to tackle messy sessions after a couple of unfortunate events, a doorkeeper was necessary. The only way I have ever learned the kids' names also made me a public figure among the kids (they would've voted for me in an election.) The lessons of 'saam, daam, dand,bhed' were all used; maybe we invented more. We have seen the best and worst of the sessions. Few have left some volunteers devastated and exhausted. But nothing disheartened us. All it did was motivate us to go back and right the wrong. Abhyasika will always remain the memory closest to my heart from IISER because I wouldn't have been this person if not for the sessions, terribly long meetings, and chitchats with seniors. Even amidst the pandemic, as we continue with online sessions for some kids, we look forward to going back to the Vasti and having fun with them. It's going to be different. We would be seniors, and juniors would follow us. Maybe I'll get to relive my memories through them.

-Manav Sivaram



# P R A D N Y A

-Lakshmi Sriram, Vasudha Aher

Pradnya is one of Disha's youngest programs, aiming to provide a structured learning environment for promising kids from Abhyasika, teaching them Math and English. For math, we usually start by introducing a concept in class. Over the next few sessions, we try to explain it differently and solve problems that use that concept. Sometimes we also play games based on it.

For English: We introduce vocabulary about a particular theme and then try to get the students to use them as they speak. We also revise these words using flashcards and send them home with flashcards so that the kids can practice them as often as they need. Additionally, we also play simple word-construction games (which the kids seem to enjoy!) and do reading comprehension exercises. We also give them storybooks to read and try to discuss what they have read in class. In the last academic year, we expanded the number of students we teach to 10. We also arranged for an auto-rickshaw service for the students' commute, which improved attendance. We managed to get some students interested in language learning and practice. We also arranged for storybooks to get them interested in recreational reading (while short-lived because of the pandemic, the response we got was promising).

When we took charge of Pradnya, the number of volunteers was small. However, their dedication and enthusiasm were incredible, and it was the main reason we were successful. They formed strong bonds with the kids, so strong that they would routinely reach out to us during the lockdown just to chat!

One possible goal we are currently trying to set for ourselves is to serve as a transition program from Abhyasika to Mindspark (to bring confident Abhyasika kids up to the level they need to be at to start attending Mindspark). We also wish to increase the number of female students we have (currently, we have none).

For us as coordinators, a big takeaway is that teaching kids isn't easy! Figuring out



how to help them understand concepts is one thing, but understanding how to work with them and gently discipline them is a significant challenge on its own. There are good days and bad ones. Days where the kids come in and settle down quickly, seem to enjoy all the activities we've planned, and understand what we're teaching. But there are also days where it takes ages to get them to settle down properly, and they don't understand much of what you're teaching them. We've learned more about the importance of being hopeful and patient. We've known to be as kind as possible and work together within the Pradnya team to overcome these challenges to the best of our ability.



A huge reflection for both of us is how wonderfully the kids consider us to be an essential part of their lives. Both of us, and several of our volunteers, have been subject to multiple surprise video calls from our kids this entire quarantine period. :)

We dedicate a few hours of our week to helping these kids. These kids, in turn, treat us like their older siblings. Sometimes, you don't realize the impact you make on people by being kind and helping them. If that's not an incentive to treat people around us more kindly, I don't know what is.

Another important thing we have learned is the enormous impact that the environment has on learning. Most of our kids face difficulties at home that we could not have imagined. It has taught us to appreciate what we have, approach our teaching with a broad perspective, and be kind. We have tried to provide a safe environment where students can talk to us about problems they face, and even that small amount of care and attention makes a difference in how comfortable they feel with us, which also reflects on how well they do in class.

# VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

I joined Pradnya as a first-time volunteer (for any Disha program) at the beginning of my second year. I love hanging out with kids, and I was sure it'd be fun, and boy, is that an understatement. Throughout sessions in both the semester, we've had so much fun (outbursts of teenage energy) and games. I also learned to innovate in teaching, look for ways and activities to make learning mundane concepts fun. Vasudha and Lakshmi were super fun and dedicated people to volunteer under, and the enthusiasm of the kids was incomparable! I hope Srijay and I can make some sort of difference this year and take it forward as the new coordinators!

- Shivani Deshpande

# VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

As someone who believes that every student deserves personal attention and tutoring explicitly catered to their needs, Pradnya was comfortably my top choice program to volunteer for. At Pradnya, we interlace classroom teaching and one on one interaction to enhance education. Each student receives personalized guidance from not teachers but older friends. And it's not only the students that learn in the classrooms on Pradnya. We understand and grow as educators too. The art of deconstructing and elucidating concepts, making learning fun by incorporating activities and games, and the patience to deal with the children are skills that we have to hone in every lesson. My year with Pradnya helped me realize how much I enjoy teaching and working with students. And that's definitely due to the unique structure of Pradnya; it is a space where both the students and the educators go at their own pace and collaborate to make learning accessible. Lakshmi and Vasudha were fabulous coordinators who made the entire experience seamless, and the volunteer team was terrific. We had a delightful year, and I'm looking forward to the next time we all assemble inside a classroom!

- Siddharth G.J. Mohapatra.



S C I E N C E

N U R T U R E

P R O G R A M

-Pavitra Batra, Animesh Anand

There are two main aims of the Science Nurture Program:

1. To inculcate scientific thinking in students so that they approach any problem rationally. (say they see an advertisement in which one can question the validity of claims or say they hear some data from a politician they ought to understand the implications of the claims, and so on.).
2. To popularise science in a way so that they can enjoy and appreciate science.

We take students from 9th standard, generally with less privileged backgrounds, from schools in the vicinity of IISER. We try to have around 30 students from 2-3 schools. We have two sessions every Sunday, spanning from 11:00 A.M to 3:30 P.M with a break in between. The sessions are conducted by volunteers (IISER students) and are generally around 1 hr 30 min long. In general, one of the sessions is a discussion style (1 volunteer: 2-4 kids), which is discussion/ thought intensive, and the other is an activities-based session for popularization. The sessions take place in classrooms of the Lecture Hall Complex (LHC), IISER. We meet twice per week to decide what we will teach the students and in what way, i.e., plan the session.

In the last academic year, we taught students from Hutatma school (HBS), Modern School (Shivajinagar and Ganeshkhind), KC Thackeray School for the two semesters. We changed the original sessions' structure by introducing discussion sessions to increase one-on-one interaction with students, tried implementing feedback techniques, and focused on the scientific thinking aim.





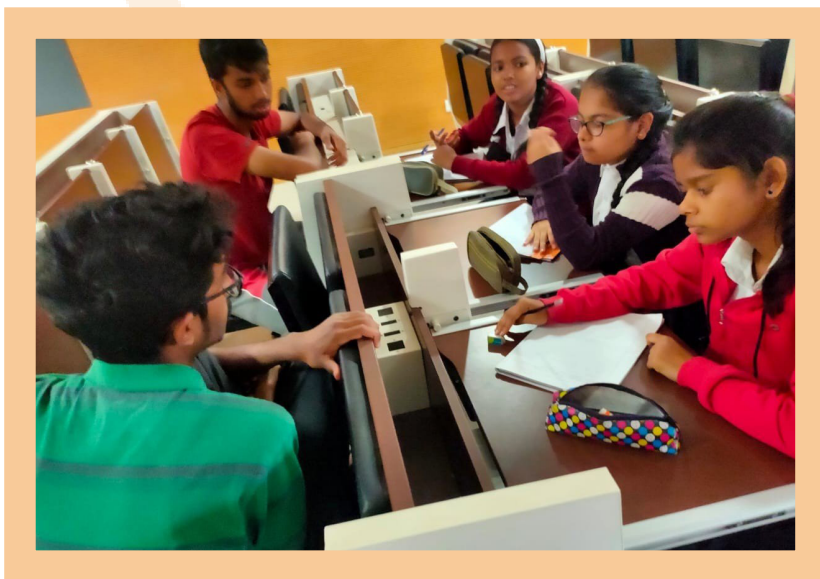
We took 19 sessions throughout the two semesters. Our volunteers were mainly 1st and 2nd-year BS-MS students with occasional sessions taken by seniors (3rd 4th years or Ph.D. students). We had around 8-12 volunteers working every week. It was fun working with all the volunteers who gave nearly 3-4 hours of their week for the program.



The program hopes to achieve the following in the upcoming year(s)

1. To develop testing parameters to measure the change in kids, i.e., the effectiveness of the program.
2. To increase the effectiveness in the scientific thinking department.
3. Introducing more activities to make sessions more interactive and exciting.
4. To develop a method for getting proper and useful feedback from both kids and volunteers on the sessions.

It was fun to work with people, getting to know about them, and trying to solve problems. Sorting out the problems and practical aspects of the program was a great learning experience.



The SNP program this year has been an incredibly fascinating one as it changed its operational goals. Thus, we had the opportunity to be part of a program and continue the tradition and create a whole new tradition altogether. This initially sounded like a daunting task and along the journey gave us all our fair share of headaches, the coordinators perhaps more so than the volunteers, but in hindsight, the work seems well worth it.

I was personally involved in the various facets of planning the program for the year and also taught classes for the program. As volunteers, we were allowed to do much more than just teach the classes. From presenting live demonstrations to taking students to lunch, this year's SNP program was unique as volunteers were involved in every facet of planning and execution. Over the past year, we mentored these students and were sometimes able to forge friendships with them. Taking blackboard classes gave me a whole new perspective on teaching and how it is much more like theatre art than a simple mechanical activity. It was one of the most engaging processes for me, and I've certainly made some great memories in the past year.

Teaching students who are not much younger than yourself has undoubtedly been a surreal experience. The SNP team's openness to new ideas made it a great learning experience for the team and, hopefully, the students. Volunteering for a social institution like Disha has taught me much more about the emotional intelligence required to implement change in this world and most certainly made me a more empathetic person.

-Kartik Sharma

I joined SNP because of my interest in teaching. I liked the aim of SNP, which is to increase the scientific temper of the kids from some nearby local schools. We try to give them opportunities to learn science joyfully. In my 1st semester, I was volunteering for four groups like SNP, which was too much to handle. It started to affect my studies, so I was thinking of leaving at least two of them. SNP was one of these.

It was a hard decision which one to choose. Next week I took a session on biology. I prepared it well and gave my best. The interaction of kids with me was lovely. In my discussion session, I taught two kids. A week later, those two kids insisted only on being taught by me in the discussion session. I felt so special about this. I wanted to teach them again at my best. I could not leave SNP at that time, and now I don't want to.

In SNP, we sharpen our teaching skills, and we learn more from that, make new bonding with kids, and so much more. We always seek the most effective and joyful way of teaching the kids.

-Vishal Panchal





SNP- Science Nurture Program, a program under DISHA. As the name suggests, people come here to nurture science. In the initial days of IISER-P, as a first-year student, I came across many club orientations. As I like teaching, I want to clear the concepts of children who go on asking questions. Considering this, I have chosen the SNP, where I am going to nurture science.

Initially, the first Sunday sessions of SNP had taken by senior students to show us (first-years) how to teach, handle, and create interest in high school students. After joining SNP, I am going to nurture not only science but also my teaching skills.

In the weekly SNP meetings, I learned so many things. Most important amongst is how to convince other people of your opinion. Also, while deciding the subjects and topics for sessions, many ideas came in front of me by sharing one another's views on particular issues. I also got the chance to debate with seniors.

The Sunday SNP sessions are the main thing. I learned so many things in SNP sessions, such as handling students and working with our classmates/seniors.

We also learned routine tasks like bringing high school students from the IISER gate to the LHC, lifting table from one room to another room, washing utensils after demonstrating experiments in sessions, etc.

I think the primary goal of SNP is to earn the experience of teaching the students who know the first layer of science—and creating their interest in science by giving them some ideas by making them think.

-Tushar Sherkhane

When we entered IISER last year, there was an introduction to different programs under the umbrella social initiative, Disha. I am mostly a reluctant guy in some ways, but I still decided to try something new after all, I was beginning college life. Being inherently interested in teaching, I was inclined towards Science Nurture Program (SNP).

SNP has got this unique interactive system of conveying the scientific method's basic ideas to students from often not-so-sound educational backgrounds; hence, as they develop a positive notion towards science.

Though the heart of SNP is the free interaction between volunteers and students, somewhere, the brain of SNP lies in the extensive discussion meetings held every week, which are not only quite rigorous but also often hilarious! The brainwork here is mostly not profoundly intellectual, but representation concerned. I particularly like those times when we come up with novel ideas to describe the elegant properties of nature in ways so that we can effectively reach out to those students. The very fact that this system is amendable makes it unique in itself.

The students of IX standard are no less curious. Often, they put forth questions so weird that it makes us rethink the obvious as a student of science. In the last session, I was asked the reason for crying while chopping onions. After the generic answer, on searching the background of the phenomenon, I was astounded. If you have time and interest, I urge you to check it out!

Even a very typical Sunday at SNP is not very regular by usual standards. As a volunteer, the SNP program deals with issues that grow larger every time we think upon them. Come on; it is a real thinker's challenge to come up with new ideas time and again, even on the spot sometimes, to promote and nurture the ever-changing science, of course strictly keeping away its jargons.

At last, I would like to say if you are planning to get into SNP, you will soon realize how your teachers must have felt all these years while teaching you. I can assure you, if you like to get into thoughtful problems, you are never going to get bored in SNP, although you might sometimes feel overworked.

-Sudeepta Sarkar

# MINDSPARK

- Madheshvaran S, Mihir Neve

Under our Guardianship, Mindspark saw quite a few gusts of change over the last academic year. Earlier, Mindspark catered to bright students from underprivileged backgrounds in preparing for an annual MSCE Scholarship Exam. However, we realized that these students lacked an understanding most of the foundational concepts from their curricula. This, along with temporal constraints, meager benefits of the scholarship, and a need for more pragmatic goals, made us shift our paths.

Currently, this program's driving force is the hope that students shall appreciate what they learn, if and only if they grasp in entirety the shadowed concepts involved. Moreover, we felt that this could encourage them to continue learning in the future. Thus, we decided that Mindspark should focus on academics and social growth aspects that could benefit these students' overall development instead of tending to the scholarship.



With the vision set, what ensued was the mammoth task of bringing it to fruition or stepping towards that direction. It may seem trivial to us today, but the idea of restructuring and the probable failures associated, haunted us back then. However, we added new modules on general awareness were added, Maths and English sessions saw some curricular shuffle, and the sessions got embedded with a multitude of activities and games. Then we set the goals. The plan was to make the awareness sessions help them be better proactive citizens of their immediate society.

Similarly, Maths could give them some more transparent concepts, applications, and thoughts to various ways of resolving problems. We teach English to implant the notions of confidence and independence in the language's perusal. We felt that the latter could profoundly foster future education, making it one of the most prized goals.

We had hours of planning for exciting sessions and novel ways to deliver them. Some deserve a special mention here. English saw heavy use of online and offline games, apps, and videos that kept the students engaged. There were sessions where the volunteers spoke only in English for the entire hour to improve familiarity with the language. With

Math, Dhruv Bhasin, an Int-PhD Student, religiously conducted year-long engaging problem-solving sessions every Sunday, filled with math puzzles for the kids to enjoy.

Similarly, the first-year volunteers took a unique path for geometry by clubbing concepts and using the students' knowledge to present the topic from a wholly new perspective. The awareness sessions spread over first aid items, map usage, political structures of democracy, weather and geography, and aspects of road and fire safety. We held model parliaments, elections, Diya paintings (through the art club), and Paper bag making activities (with Prutha). We had arranged interactions with doctors over first aid too.

In introspection, we are satisfied with what we could achieve over the year. Notably, we were able to establish a reliable channel of communication through various interactions and feedback systems. However, we, too, had our own set of obstacles. We saw our volunteers dwindle over the semester to a point where it became tough to tread any further. This almost derailed effective planning, and our '2-weeks system' (An effective session planning algorithm which we had implemented) came to a sudden stop. Similarly, we couldn't give enough attention to develop effective systems of evaluations too.

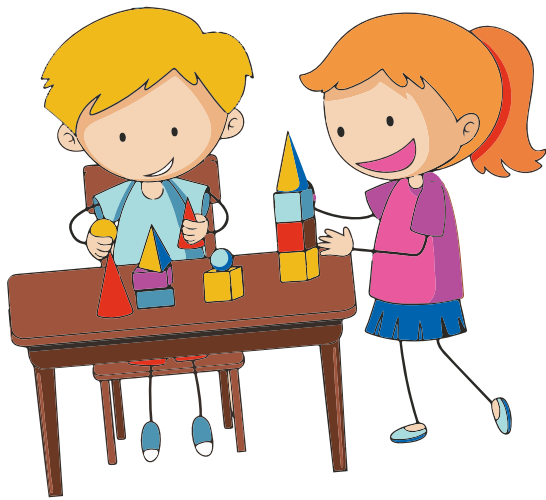
However, this brings out two positive aspects which we should hold clear. First, through the volunteer crunch, we could seamlessly identify those core volunteers who had been dedicated to our goals and had an immense contribution to our success. We thank them profusely. Second, Our faults have only made the future path crystal clear, and Mindspark's future goals are heavily based on strengthening this foundational structure. It's a long journey ahead - with structural improvements, refinement of aims, and accommodation of the planned program progressions. Yet, we are glad we could take the first step in this direction.

Finally, On a personal scale, Mindspark gave us some cherishable and some tense moments too. It taught us the need for balance and gave valuable skills in management, mentoring, and leadership. But most significantly, It gave both of us a precious friend in each other, perhaps, for quite a long time to come.



I always liked teaching, and as soon as I found out about Mindspark, I joined it. My experience with Mindspark has been very nice. I learned how to interact with kids and teach them. Mihir, one of the coordinators of Mindspark, was very friendly and considered everyone's suggestions while making a decision. I just have one request; I would like it if the topics were a little harder in General Science. Otherwise, it mostly met my expectation.  
Thank You.

-Vinayak Pendse



Being a part of the Mindspark team has been an enriching experience. As a GS volunteer, I was a part of planning what we teach them, selecting topics that they would find useful throughout their life, such as first aid, civics, climates, geography and so on. Being allowed this opportunity to teach kids has actually made me learn many things and has reignited the sense of wonderment about topics we consider to be trivial now.

-Vasudha Kulkarni



When I attended Disha's orientation in the first semester, the activity that immediately caught my 'mind' was Mindspark. I joined Mindspark as I was extremely interested in teaching school students. I liked Mindspark over all other activities because it tries to teach a wide range of concepts which are really necessary but aren't taught in schools.

I started volunteering for mathematics and general sciences (GS). Though mathematics is my favourite subject, I loved taking GS sessions. During GS sessions, we teach students anything which is necessary for them to know. It fascinated me because it had no barriers of subjects within science.

At the end of the first semester, I started attending English sessions also.

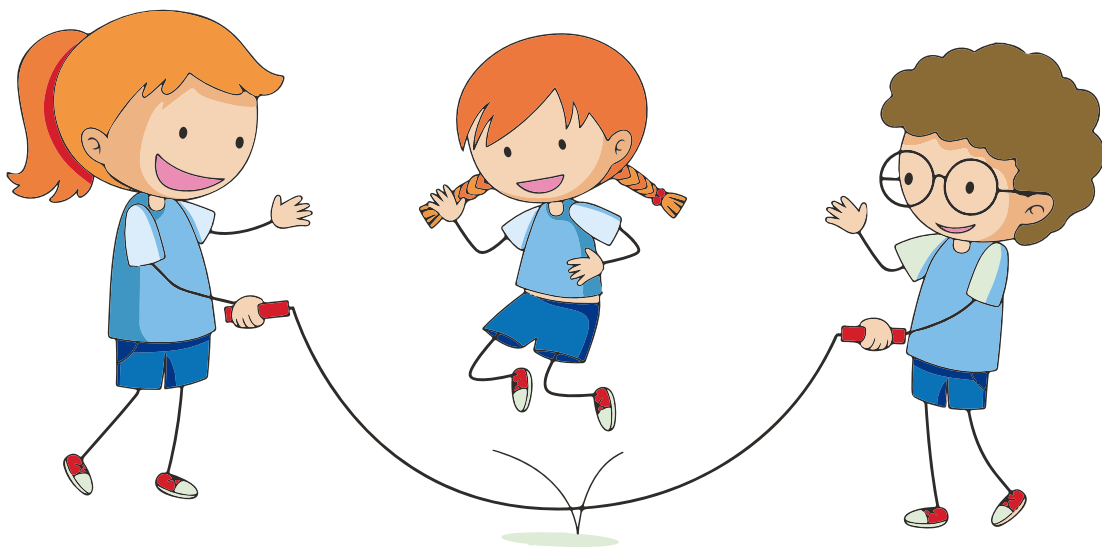
Now, I have made a nice bond with the students. Interacting with them helped me a lot to develop my presentation skills. I am getting more and more involved because Mindspark is better than what I had thought at the time of joining.

I would like to continue in Mindspark as it is one of my most favourite activities.

-Atharva Bhide

My experience as a Mindspark volunteer has been wonderful. Mindspark has given me an opportunity to give back to society in a meaningful manner. Teaching the students who come for Mindspark has been a great experience. Answering the questions raised by them and helping to create road-maps to teach concepts during Mindspark meetings has led to a newfound appreciation for some foundational concepts in Maths.

-Amogh Rakesh



# P R E R N A

- Debasmita Mitra, Priya Batra

Prerna was initiated from the Science Nurture Program (SNP), involving a few bright and curious minds interested in pursuing a science career but unable to afford the expensive private coaching for board and entrance examinations. This program aimed to provide these students with limited opportunities and guidance to do well in these examinations. We conduct rigorous coaching sessions on a biweekly basis to clear their concepts about the subjects and inculcate a curious bent of mind with questioning. We believe this can strengthen their knowledge about topics and help them better figure out which field to pursue in their future career.

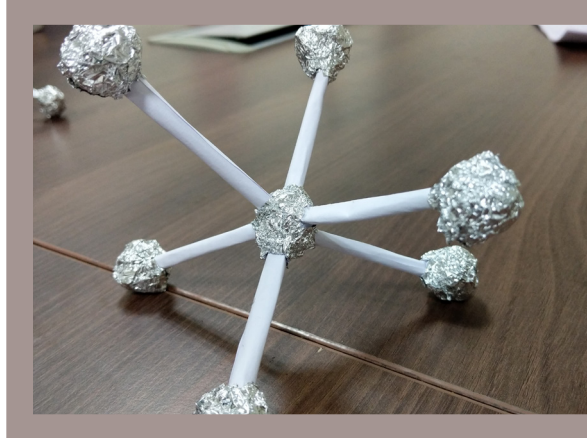
Over three years, we have achieved quite a lot concerning resources, like books and demonstration materials, and a hardworking team of volunteers. We have also standardized a schedule for ensuring that all the subjects are covered every week with due importance to regular evaluation and home assignments. Our first batch of students passed their boards with flying colors in 2019, with one of them clearing and getting into an IISER. Further, we had taken a fresh batch of students from 11th standard in August 2018. This year they appeared for their boards and competitive examinations. While the average result of the bunch was decently well in the boards, a few of them fared excellently in both boards and national level examinations.

Along with the increasing number of students, we were joined by a new batch of volunteers, almost all of them being Ph.D. students. Together with the volunteers, the coordinators play an engaging role in keeping the program intact. For the last year, we carried out this responsibility. We had to work consistently to ensure the smooth functioning of the program according to the schedule. On the other hand, volunteers contributed with their tremendous effort and dedication to each of the sessions they conducted. The students benefited from them, and the volunteers personally had a lot to gain from





the program. We also plan to guide our students by counseling them regarding the varied prospects for a science career after the 12th standard. We can only do this with support and cooperation from the IISER Pune students, who can join us and volunteer for this inspiring program.



At a personal level, coordinating such a program comes with a lot of responsibility. It demands constant dedication and effort, which allows one to enhance their personality a great deal. The interaction with people of different strata, be it managing the volunteers, teaching the students, and sometimes talking to their parents, provides an opportunity to develop immense management and academic skills. And finally, when you see the students do well in their life, the sense of achievement and satisfaction that it brings is the best takeaway from the program.

In the future, we aim to work hard to inspire and nurture these sharp minds, which might go unnoticed and distracted if not provided with opportunities and proper guidance.



# VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

I have been part of Prerna' for the last two years. As the name suggests, this program was started to motivate students and provide proper guidance. But I guess it is doing more than that; it also encourages instructors like me to know more about science. Sometimes they ask ridiculous questions, but at the same time, they can ask fascinating questions. You wouldn't believe that I had to teach them basic multiplication as well as necessary field theory. Sometimes they don't understand specific things because they are written in mathematical language. But when you explain those things by relating to real-life examples, they know it quickly. Most of the students take an interest in cricket and Bollywood. So I tried to explain some concepts with events like Kapil Sharma's marriage, IPL, and IIFA awards. As a math instructor, I try to make their basic concepts stronger to face national level competitive exams comfortably. By interacting with students, I also learned to explain complex concepts of mathematics simply. Sometimes I teach them Vedic Mathematics, and they really enjoy it. During teaching, we face lots of difficulties, but these difficulties really help us improve our teaching skills. We learn a lot from our students. My overall experience with Prerna has been unique, and I would love to be a part of it for the next few years.

-Hitendra



# VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

“Prerna provided me with a platform within IISER where I could do one thing that I liked the most - teaching school kids. It was an honour for me to be a part of this initiative where I could use my skills and time to do something constructive and contribute to society.”

-Rashmi



# T R A N S L A T I O N

## T E A M

- Mihir Dingankar

The translation team is Disha's newest program. It was conceived in the summer of 2019; it was tasked to be a forum to enable greater outreach in the regional languages. IISER, being a multicultural community, has numerous volunteers who have the skill and desire for interactions with society. The only thing that stands in the way is the presence of a suitable medium for those interactions.

The regional languages, Marathi and Hindi, provide just such a medium. The translation team aims to enable the various Disha programs to better engage their students by eliminating language as a barrier to understanding concepts. We at the translation team firmly believe that language should act as a catalyst, not an impediment, to pursue conceptual clarity.



We translated at least fifty different documents, articles, question papers, and modules from English into Hindi or Marathi in our first year of operation. Moreover, we are also in the process of completing an English-to-Marathi word repository, which will be made available to all Disha programs. Another caveat we sorted out was an effective volunteer distribution system to reduce the load per volunteer and enable faster and more efficient completion of our tasks. In addition to these planned chores, we also completed several other requirements on the fly. These involve translating the entire Disha webpage in Marathi for the publicity stall, preparing an English transcript of Prof. Milind Watve's talk for the NIRMAN interview, and helping Abhyasika design their Marathi module.

A lot of work had been put in by the volunteers; nonetheless, it will require a lot more work as the program attains maturity. We are trying to achieve a diversification of activities in the translation team participates. More collaborations with other Disha programs, greater participation in session and module design, and making Marathi videos and articles available to the IISER community are all on the table. We have the largest body of Marathi volunteers of any Disha program. We desire that our cumulative efforts make

the Disha volunteers feel more comfortable with and the students less intimidated by the message we are trying to convey.

I would like to end this article on a more personal note, I came to coordinate the translation team by accident, which ended up with me understanding much more than I had expected. For one, I realized that I do not know Marathi. On a more serious note, however, I realized the indispensable role language plays in our education. Language for most of us is considered a ground foundation, extremely essential but never revisited, considering it the most faithful of our capabilities. What happens if the foundation is shaky? Since we always build upwards, this is a problem we do not consider. At the translation team, this was the part we concentrated on, and the realization that it worked was an exceptionally satisfying experience.



ट्रान्सलेशन टीम  
AMARATHIPOS MHAJIZ EIZITO

# VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

My journey with Disha started as a volunteer for the translation team. My friend, the translation team coordinator, contacted me to help out with the Disha team's new initiative. We would translate common words, educational texts, and informative passages and modules to the regional language, Marathi. More often than not, science and math textbooks in regional languages in state boards are full of information, most of which remains inaccessible to the students it's meant for due to the lack of good teachers. While many Disha programs provide children with motivated volunteers willing to teach, this information does not quite make it across due to the medium of the volunteers being English or Hindi. This does not particularly resonate with the children. The translation team's motive is to help bridge this language barrier, which as a volunteer for Pradnya, I can safely say that it has succeeded in doing. Working for the translation team has made me realize the massive portion of grammar rules in my mother tongue I've been taking for granted and has motivated me to read more in Marathi. I've had an enjoyable experience working for this team and Disha.

- Shivani Deshpande



# VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

I decided to join Disha because it allowed me to serve my share of social work. I am engaged in several activities of Disha, such as Mindspark, STS, and the translation team. Firstly, I was not sure whether Disha needs a translation team. But, when the work started, I realized its importance. I joined it as I knew Marathi and was interested in helping other Disha volunteers with this additional benefit of language. Though it is the first year of the translation team, it is an excellent step to break language barriers between non-Marathi volunteers and students. Our work focused on the translation of various documents from English to Marathi and vice versa. Moreover, the translation team does any work regarding regional languages for Disha volunteers and students.

I got the opportunity to design a Marathi module for Abhyasika students, which was very interesting. It was an excellent chance to refresh basic Marathi vocabulary, starting from nothing. It also reminded me of how I learned Marathi starting from simple work and then increasing complexity. My experience as a volunteer for the translation team was outstanding, and I wish to continue it.

As it is a new department, many new paths by which it can make Disha more reachable are yet to be found, and I am sure that its work will help Disha to grow further.

- Atharva Bhide



S P R E A D

T H E

S M I L E

- Aniket Zodage, Ramya Narayan, Utkarsh Mahajan

One of the main aims of Disha is striving for socio-economic equity in society. However, what exactly is society? Does it consist of just the Pashan area? The answer is an obvious resounding no. To expand the activities beyond Pune schools and go to remote villages in Pune-district, Disha volunteers, back in 2012, started STS where the volunteers took up a daunting task. The subsequent generations of volunteers have successfully carried forward the activity until today - the Jan-Feb 2020 STS expanding to 7 villages with almost 150 volunteers for three weekends. But what exactly does STS focus on, and what is this 'daunting task'?

The Matthew effect, observed in dynamical systems, hypothesizes that often those who have a 'good' starting point end up doing 'good' later too. Should this be a point that makes us give up hope? No. As the cliché goes, rules are meant to be broken, and counterexamples are found for many rules (\*cough\* Chemistry \*cough\*). Just because someone is born in a not so good environment is no reason to deny them the opportunities everyone else gets. That's the primary goal that STS has tried to



stay true to over the years. With 6 to 7 years of going and interacting with the students and villagers, we as an organization have arrived at a sort of collective maturity about how deep the problems are and how we need systematic efforts to even see a small change. Having said that, STS is probably one of the most dynamic programs of Disha. Over the years, even though the philosophy and goals remain largely the same, our methods and contents have changed drastically. We are hopeful that in our year, the wheels have moved a little bit ahead.

In the early days, the planning for STS started on the Wednesday before the weekend. We have come a long way now, with village coordinators' selection beginning in August and preparing content being a year-round process. Previously STS focused on science experiments. But over the last few years, STS went beyond science experiments by talking about economics, career



guidance, addictions, etc. This year we went one more step ahead and started the 'Three weekends, Three topics' idea.

We go for three weekends and spend roughly 25 hours with the kids in the best-case scenario. Owing to this short time, the focus has been on two ways to be impactful. One is going to schools multiple times over the years. Though we have seen improvements in some villages, it is not always possible to see the effect for a long time as the set of kids change. Another way is to deliver one topic through multiple perspectives in a weekend and see the small change. This is what the 'Three weekends Three topics' idea is mainly about. The topics that we chose for the weekends were 'Economics', 'Agriculture', and 'Health'.

In each of the topics, multiple sub-topics were dealing with different aspects of the broader theme. For example, in agriculture, we planned to have experiments about soil-holding capacity, conversations about government schemes, climate change, economics and finance, and social structure in an agricultural society. The topics were mainly brought up by casual conversations and gradually shifted to more serious discussions. In some places, volunteers could quickly strike the chord, and the conversations evolved beautifully. In other places, not so much. One crucial thing that helped in this new venture was the involvement of village coordinators (VCs) in this process, who were selected early in August. They went around, hunted for villages. Knowing the village and the background better, their feedback was vital to design or tweak the modules. The village coordinators indeed did a fantastic job, and this STS couldn't have been possible without them. We were also lucky to get a fabulous and supportive resource team.

Apart from the logistics, we hope (and believe) that STS started many interesting sustainable conversations about critical social topics amongst the volunteers. We don't want volunteers to look down upon the village kids and think that we are better than them. Instead, we want to instill this thought that STS is an initiative to provide a platform for two isolated bubbles to interact and learn something new.

We have tried to review the progress of STS this year through this article. However, we are aware of the shortcomings and the untapped potential to improve. With each year, we become more aware of problems in ourselves and the system. Next year, we hope to improve more upon the three weekends, three topics to make it more directed for specific villages. We also intend to have deeper introspections about the world we live in to enable kids with different tools. The situation often seems gloomy. But it's the smile that we see on children's faces that gives us the inspiration to continue spreading smiles, and with each droplet, we believe that we are making a difference and changing the world one atom at a time!



# VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Dr. Karl Menninger, a world-renowned psychiatrist, was once asked, “What would you advise someone if you knew that person was going to have a nervous breakdown?” The audience expected Dr. Menninger to advise consulting a professional. But he didn’t. He said, “I would advise that person to lock home, go to the other side of town, find someone in need and help that person. By doing that, we get out of our way.” A lot of times, we get in our way, don’t we? We started our journey to Pimpalgaon as a part of Spread The Smile 2020 on 1st Feb with a small team of 7 people. We were quite excited as most of our group had first-years, and we were a part of something like this for the first time. It didn’t take much time to set up small groups and start teaching the kids who were as enthusiastic about learning as we were. The first question we get when we get there from a student of (I guess) 8-9, the standard was, “Are you from ISRO?”. For a moment, we felt like we could pretend and have that feeling (or whatever it is). Still, then we decided to have a proper introduction with all the students and formally greet the Principal and the Headmistress who had arranged all of it.

We taught them numerous things, ranging from the finding of GCD with a geometrical method, explaining natural phenomena using the scientific method, and teaching them the importance of health, hygiene, and economy. A few students concentrated on everything we said, and others were just having a fun time of their life, but I tried to ensure that everyone took back something from that day. As I saw a kid selectively isolated from the rest of the bunch, other kids were often beating him for no reason, which led to a fight more than once. This behavior often results in kids developing certain traits when they grow up, so I tried my best to resolve their disputes and introduce a friendship between them. Phoenix puts it in the best way: “I think that’s when we’re at our best: when we support each other. It is not when we cancel each other out for our past mistakes, but when we help each other grow. When we educate each other; when we guide each other to redemption.”

For me, it was an experience that I would very likely like to have again. It is often said that teaching is one of the noblest professions. I will try my best for the rest of my life to resolve any boundaries between knowledge and the social barriers that we have created in our society. Will you?

-Chayanka Kakati



**PEOPLE  
WHO  
INSPIRE  
US**

The background features a dark teal color with several lighter teal diagonal stripes running from the top-left towards the bottom-right. A grid of small, light teal squares is overlaid on the background, creating a subtle pattern.

# Akshaya

## Patra

12/3/20



AJAY KAVISHWAR

Director, Programme Research & Advocacy

Akshaya Patra traces its beginning to a story of compassion. One day in Mayapur, a village near Calcutta, Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada saw a group of children fighting with dogs over scraps of food. From this simple, yet heart-breaking incident was born a determination that 'no child within a radius of ten miles from the centre should go hungry.'

In the year 2000, we decided to start a school lunch programme to address the issue of classroom hunger with the vision 'no child in India shall be deprived of education because of hunger.' We started with the feeding of 1,500 children in Bengaluru, Karnataka. The popularity of the initiative prompted many school authorities to write to us asking us to serve mid-day meals in their schools. Over a period of time, many like-minded individuals and organisations came forward and helped us reach more and more children.

Since inception, we have been working closely with the Government of India, various State Governments, and U.T. Administrations, providing children with a nutritious and tasty mid-day meal as an incentive to come to school, thus contributing towards their overall health and education.

By 2001, we were feeding 23,000 children. When the Government of India's flagship programme - the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Scheme - was launched in 2001, we collaborated with the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India, and State Governments to implement the programme.

In 2003, the Foundation signed an MoU with the Government of Karnataka for Akshara Dasoha, thus becoming the first organisation to forge a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) with the Government to implement the MDM Scheme. In February 2019, we reached the milestone of serving 3 billion cumulative meals, which was commemorated in the presence of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi.

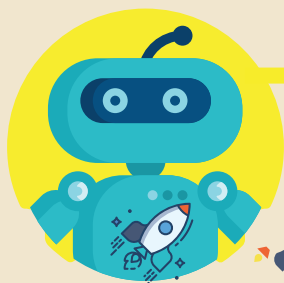
Over the years, our school lunch programme has expanded to serve more than 1.8 million children studying in 19,039 schools across 12 states and two union territories of India. This opportunity has helped Akshaya Patra reach more children in the pursuit of its mission to reach 5 million children by 2025.





### • School Rejuvenation Programme:

Based on the Government's Model School initiative, Akshaya Patra's School Rejuvenation Programme strives to provide a conducive environment for children through a series of infrastructural and academic interventions. It is based on the belief that a better environment at the school translates into better academic performance of children through its positive impact.



### • Giving Every Dream a Chance:

Under this initiative, children receive mentorship and training in areas of their interest, which range from theatre and music to robotics and space exploration. It provides the necessary groundwork for a child to realise their dreams. Additionally, the programme helps provide exposure to various career opportunities for the beneficiaries.



### • Scholarship Programme:

We aim to identify deserving Government school and college students from the underserved sections of society and nurture their aspirations by providing them with financial aid.

All our NEST initiatives are designed to contribute to a complete school ecosystem, with the larger ecosystem we are trying to build here, with the wellbeing and development of children at the core. We hope to collaborate with more organisations and donors to establish over the next few years, and we will be able to establish a strong system for the holistic development of the children of our country.

Akshaya Patra, through its healthy and nutritious meals, attempts to address various issues, including classroom hunger, malnutrition, absenteeism, and dropout rates in schools. The beneficiaries of the school lunch programme get one wholesome meal a day, which in many cases, is their only proper meal a day, thus enhancing both a significant incentive for the education of the child.

Also, mid-day meals have become one of the prime attractions to both the children and parents.

Through the school lunch programme, we directly contribute to our nation's pursuit of two critical UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Zero Hunger and Quality Education. Our mission is to reach 5 million beneficiaries with nutritious and tasty food every school day by 2025, thus hoping to create a significant impact on our society.

As an organisation that implements the MDM Scheme in such a large scale, Akshaya Patra is bound to face challenges, but with channelised efforts, we have also found solutions rather quickly. For instance, it was a challenge for us to reach out to children in the remote areas of Baran (Rajasthan) and Nayagarh (Odisha). To tackle this issue, we adopted a decentralised model. The aim was to ensure that children in these areas don't miss out on mid-day meals because of geographical concerns.



# A DIRECTION FOR DISHA

- Anuja, Pavitra, Saket  
Inspired by our meeting  
with Mrs Rajani Paranjpe

How does progress in science help humanity? Why is collecting data important? What is the right method of an experiment? These questions are of substantial importance in the field of research... then why not apply them in the way we work for Disha?

Mrs Rajani Paranjpe, Founder President of The Society for Door Step Schools, extensively talked to us about the need to concretise the base of Disha by having a methodology to address the issues that both volunteers and the concerned students face, as well as keeping a record of what we have achieved till now.

Education is a noble cause and hence a sector where one can face the least of issues. So what is the “issue” that has prevented Disha from achieving what we want? Actually, let’s ask this question first... What do we want? Disha is a student organization that helps underprivileged students in the education sector; so we want to educate the underprivileged students. To achieve this, we need to have concrete goals. If we are teaching 8th and 9th standard kids, then what are we teaching them to help them grow? If we are going to the vasti, what do we inculcate in them so that they do not remain trapped in a vicious cycle? Scattering knowledge over the students is not going to help them. We need to set smaller goals to accomplish the broader goals of upliftment of the underprivileged.

The methodology is a key element that Disha severely lacks. Being science students, we need to think about how can we attain our goals - stepwise, and reviewed periodically

with each new batch. Students will not acquire the insight of education unless we have an understanding of how to deliver it. We need a proper step-wise program to accomplish our teaching goals and ensure that the kids do not get demotivated. Reading is an essential habit that we need to promote in their daily lives. We need to make sure that the students are fluent in at least one language. This will not only help them fortify their base but also enhance their efficiency in grasping new things. We should provide the kids with appropriately constructed learning tools for a better understanding and might also teach them ways of learning to encourage self-study.



What 'दिशा' has Disha given to the students in the past ten years? Where has the time that we spent through the years gone? We have spent a considerable number of hours working for Disha, but how do we know if they are worth it? We do not have any documentation so far to field these questions. Each year the baton is passed on to the next batch, and in time, this can lead to a loss of information - if not communicated in organized ways. Recording our immediate targets will help us satisfy our comprehensive work in and for society. As an organization, putting out an action plan, and its transcription is a necessity that will keep us motivated and help others to regain faith in it.

We tried answering some questions concerning Disha. Certainly, it was the authors' take on certain issues, and these answers are open to discussion and refinement. What is education, and why is it important? Should the focus be on educating students or making them literate? Why do we think education leads the path for a better career? Such questions go deep within the roots of the sector we are working in and are equally important to address.



To conclude, we would urge the readers to take a pause and ponder on the above-given questions. Before inculcating the importance of education in our targeted students, we need first to define what education means to us and scientifically think about how to deliver it. To guide the underprivileged on the path of education, Disha should own a direction.

*PS : The article is inspired from a discussion between the three volunteers from Disha and Mrs Paranjpe, the founder-president of Door Step School. The images are from various initiatives by the Door Step School.*

# C R E D I T S

## FONTS

SCRABBLES

by Rob Hindley

Handwriting Main

by Morgan Spon

## APPO PAINT

mithella

by Grafito Design

*Playfair*

by Lafontype

Bernardo Moda Contrast

by Claus Eggers Sørensen

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*Thank  
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INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH , PUNE  
(An autonomous Institution of Ministry of HRD, Govt of India)  
Dr Homi Bhabha Road, Pune- 411008



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