

## **Prabudhata : A Path Breaking Initiative to Democratize Higher Knowledge**

Prabudhata is a revolutionary concept formulated by the Kerala State Higher Education Council and the project is now being piloted in a unique and daring manner in Karakulam Grama Panchayath of Thiruvananthapuram district.

### **The Concept**

All the public sector institutions and organizations producing/ transacting/handling higher knowledge, including our universities and colleges, are drawing financial resources from the public exchequer. In other words, such institutions and organizations subsist and thrive on tax payers' toil. What does our higher knowledge institutions give to the common man in return? Does he have any right or claim over the fruits of higher knowledge? Are the studies and researches happening in our institutions good enough to address the needs, aspirations and apprehensions of the society? Are our knowledge centres trying to reach out to the communities amidst which they prevail? Does the knowledge produced by such centres percolate to the grass root level? Can these institutions contribute for the betterment of the life, well being, environment and vocation of common man? Are the common people aware of the influence higher knowledge can exercise in their daily life? Do they approach our knowledge centres for resolving the puzzles of their lives? Even if they show audacity to do so, are our institutions prepared to share vital knowledge to them in digestible form? Have our knowledge centres developed simple enough language and communication means to divulge higher knowledge to commoners? Do the higher knowledge centres have any role in eradicating superstitions from our society and foster scientific spirit? Can our institutions go on to exist like bonsai trees in their secluded containers, without having any roots in real earth? Is such a secluded existence arresting the growth of institutions? Should there be a link between knowledge centres and community? Will such a link be beneficial both to the institutions and community alike? Do our local self governments have any bonding with higher knowledge institutions?

Prabudhata is a concept evolved from such reverberating questions. As a model project Prabudhata aims to make use of the might of local self governments and the potential of Kudumbashree CBOs (Community Based Organizations) to deliver the benefits of higher knowledge to the community and to garner, in return, inputs, themes, thoughts and ideas for

meaningful research and studies from the society. The project is to be comprehended as a harbinger of a new democratic knowledge culture, which will permeate throughout the country in due course. Or it is to be seen as an eye opener for centres of higher knowledge and our society alike.

### **Partners of Prabudhata:**

As hinted earlier, State Higher Education Council is piloting Prabudhata Project in Karakulam panchayat with the active support of the Local Self Government of the area, Kudumbashree Mission and Karakulam Grameena Patana Kendram, a vibrant NGO functioning in the panchayat. The aim is to evolve a replicable model for disseminating higher knowledge, its implications and benefits to common man and community at large.

Besides the foregoing primary partners, we are getting/expecting the patronage and support of an array of agencies, bodies and individuals for the implementation of the project, including:

- ❖ The Government of Kerala, hon'ble Minister for Education and the Higher Education Department (In fact Prabudhata is a Council project declared by the hon'ble Governor in the floor of the State Legislature in 2017)
- ❖ The hon'ble Minister for Local Self Government and the Local Self Government Department.
- ❖ Higher Education Institutions and Higher Knowledge Centres of both the State and Central Governments, situated in and around Thiruvananthapuram city (including the University of Kerala, Kerala Agriculture University, APJ Abdul Kalam Technological University, Kerala State Council for Science, Technology and Environment, National Transportation Planning and Research Centre, Central Tuber Crops Research Institute, Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Rajeev Gandhi Centre for Biotechnology, Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute of Medical Sciences and Technology, National Centre for Earth Science Studies, Centre for Development Studies, Kerala Bhasha Institute, Kerala Historic Council, Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanical Garden and Research Institute, Science and Technology Museum, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology, CSIR-Indian Institute of Interdisciplinary Science and Technology and

Government and Aided Colleges of the region, including College of Engineering Trivandrum etc.)

- ❖ Karakulam Panchayat Committee
- ❖ CDS of Karakulam Panchayat
- ❖ NGOs of the region, including PTAs, Resident Associations, Youth Clubs, Purusha Sahaya Sanghagal and Libraries
- ❖ NSS Volunteers
- ❖ Academic fraternity, including students and teachers and their unions
- ❖ Political leadership of the State
- ❖ MPs and MLAs of the State
- ❖ Opinion leaders from all walks of life
- ❖ Cultural leaders
- ❖ Local Self Governments
- ❖ Information and Public Relations Department
- ❖ Print and Electronic Media
- ❖ Social media and media activists
- ❖ Educationalists and experts from the field of science and technology

Possibilities and potentials of convergent community action, academic volunteerism, development journalism, social media reach and social pressure would be harmoniously harnessed together for the effective implementation of Prabudhata in Karakulam panchayat. Though the epicenter of the programme is Karakulam, impact would be palpable throughout the State.

### **Implementation:**

Prabudhata is entirely a unique project, first of its kind conceived and implemented in India or elsewhere. Since there is no prior model to emulate, the functionaries of the Council are trying to cut a new path to go forward with the project. The strategy and process of implementation is being formulated through collective thinking and brainstorming. Time and again the process has to be re-casted and recalibrated in accordance with several factors, including the responses & feed backs of the target community and stakeholders who are supporting the project.

Though the strategy and process are still in evolving phase, the central theme of Prabudhata has already been finalized. The Kerala State Higher Education Council will empower the people of

Karakulam to frame and raise questions (*knowledge questions- questions based on higher knowledge, each of the higher knowledge centres is producing/transacting/handling*) to the higher knowledge centres in and around Thiruvananthapuram city, with the active support and involvement of Kudumbashree Mission, Panchayat Samithi, CDS and NGOs of the area.

A volunteer team would be formed to disseminate project objects and ideals in the community. Besides the Facilitator engaged by the Council, representatives of the grama panchayat, Kudumbashree CBOs, representatives of NGOs & PTA would be there in the volunteer team. Council and Kudumbashree Mission would jointly impart training to the volunteer team. The volunteer team will raise pertinent questions in the community and arouse interest among common people regarding the implication of higher knowledge in their day to day life. Eventually, the community itself would identify and enlist questions which it wants to place before each centre of higher knowledge.

Subsequently such questions would be sent by the community as open letters (which the media will certainly publish) to the knowledge centres with the request to answer them in interaction meets to be held in the panchayat on specific dates. (*The community would ceremoniously carry the questions prepared for one of the centres in a pompous procession to the main edifice of their destination. Top brass of higher knowledge, including the Vice Chancellors in their ceremonial gowns would be there at the entrance of the institution to receive the community. Just imagine the splendid visual of a sprightly community handing over their questions to the Vice Chancellors and other dignitaries, under the familiar clock tower of the University of Kerala, which people of our state easily identify as a symbol of higher education! Will any media want to miss out the pageantry and the news?*) As this would be an open challenge, centres of higher knowledge cannot but appear before the community at the venue fixed by them for the interaction (*social pressure at work*). Communication tools prepared for the project and media coverage would bring state-wide attention for the concept and project in the initial phase itself.

Heads of higher knowledge centres who participate in the interaction events organized at the panchayat would invite the community to visit their institutions on specific dates for having first hand information about the knowledge areas they are occupied with (*Open day*) . Members of the community will visit institutions on specified dates for garnering information and their rightful share of higher knowledge.

Though foregoing is the central theme of the Prabudhata project which is being piloted in Karakulam panchayat, several other concepts and activities would be integrated to it like:

- Social rooting of higher knowledge centres (establishing perennial and mutually beneficial bond between community and institutions)
- Academic Pilgrimage to Karakulam (Experts from higher knowledge centres visiting the Panchayat to offer knowledge based services to the community)
- Preparation of an attractive book on **Centres of Higher Education/ Higher Knowledge in Triruvananthapuram/Kerala** for statewide distribution

### **Communication Strategy:**

Instead of the run of the mill publicity modes and tools opted for most of the Government funded programmes, a unique & catchy communication strategy and appealing tools would be adopted for Prabudhata project. Following are some of the components incorporated in the communication strategy frame work.

- *Prabudhata installations (thinking man)* at Karakulam and Palayam campus of the University of Kerala
- Prabudhata Question Boxes (*Prabudhata Chodya Petti*) at vantage points to collect knowledge questions from the public
- Street Play (*Theruvu Natakam*) to enact at selected centres of Karakulam
- Prabudhata *Kala Jadh*a
- Artifacts at prominent places in the panchayat
- Prabudhata Ayalsabhas and Gramasabhas in Karakulam
- Flash mobs in at least 100 centres, involving NSS volunteers
- *Opinion leaders first* approach to popularize the ideals of the concept
- Direct mailers to MPs, MLAs, Political Leadership, Local Body Chairpersons, University Authorities, Syndicate Members, College Principals, Student Unions , Academics, top officials
- Effective use of social media
- Judicious use of conventional media

### **Expected Outcomes:**

Even though Prabudhata is now being piloted only in Karakualm Panchayat, its impact and reverberations would be perceptible throughout the state, thank to the cogent communication strategy. Following would be some of the major outcomes of the project.

- New awakening in the community with respect to its right over the fruits of higher knowledge
- Attitudinal change that would occur in academic/scientific community
- Betterment of the life and vocation of common men through knowledge dissemination
- Genesis of a new democratized knowledge culture
- Social audit of the centres of higher knowledge
- New impetus for community oriented knowledge production
- Preparation of kits and means for knowledge dissemination
- Books, pamphlets, brochures etc. produced by centres of higher knowledge to introduce themselves to the society
- New extension activities likely to be launched as aftermaths of Prabudhata
- Adoption of villages by centres of higher knowledge
- Evolvement of a simplified language to introduce higher knowledge to common people
- Social Angle in Research and Knowledge Production (SARK) : a new parameter to assess the efficacy, relevance, worth and usefulness of researches and studies
- Knowledge Dissemination Responsibility (KDR) : a new criterion to gauge the social commitment and extension drive of colleges and other higher education institutions

### **Progress of Prabudhata:**

2017-18 was more of a formative year of Prabudhata. The vague idea germinated during the first quarter of the year evolved into a brilliant concept and a concrete project by the end of the year. Particulars of the step by step progress of Prabudhata during 2017-18 are given below in bullet points.

- Initial brainstorming meeting held on 3/8/2017 at the board room of the Council (Dr. Rajan Gurukkal, One Member Commission for KSHEC chaired the meeting)
- Briefing of the project to hon'ble ministers for Education and Local Self Government.
- Briefing of the project to Principal Secretaries of Higher education and LSGD

- Two rounds of discussions with Executive Director and other officials of Kudumbashree Mission.
- Brainstorming meeting held on 25/8/2017 at the conference hall of KSSTM (the meeting was again chaired by Dr. Rajan Gurukkal. Representatives of various higher education/ knowledge institutions, including University of Kerala, SCTIMST, VSSC, CTCRI, NATPAC etc. participated in the meeting. Dr.B.Ekbal, Member, State Planning Board also participated in the meeting.
- Giving of formal letters to Kudumbashree Mission, Karakulam Grama Panchayat and other stakeholders.
- Meeting with Karakulam Grama Panchayat authorities, Kudumbashree authorities and other well wishers held on 10/1/2018.
- Meeting held on 31/1/2018 at Karakulam grama panchayat to present the concept to the members & officials of the panchayat and CDS office bearers.
- Prabudhata team building seminar held on 21/02/2018 at Gramina Patana Kendram, Karakulam.
- Joint meeting of the opinion leaders Academic/Higher Knowledge bodies and Prabudhata functionaries held on 28/2/2018 at Municipal Guest House, Vazhuthacaud.
- All the meetings of Prabudhata have been videographed as it is a pilot project meant to be replicated elsewhere in future ( To give a clear idea how the concept and project evolved to those who want to emulate the concept)

**Further actions planned:**

After assessing the experience hitherto amassed by piloting the project, the following steps are planned for immediate implementation.

- Integration of the concept of **community rooting of higher knowledge institutions** with Prabudhata.
- Introduction of the concept **academic pilgrimage to Karakulam**.
- Preparation of a handbook/handbooks to introduce the knowledge areas handled by the higher education/knowledge institutions of Thiruvananthapuram to common man with the support of institutions concerned and Kerala Bhasha Institute.
- Preparation of training module for imparting training to Prabudhata volunteers.

- Imparting training to Prabudhata volunteers, in association with Kudumbashree Mission
- Preparation of skits, theme songs, artifacts, installations etc. with the help of Gramina Kalakendram, Karakulam and other volunteers to popularize the concept in the community
- Installing Prabudhata installations and *Chodya Pettikal*
- Preparation of a concept for flash mob and its choreography
- Engaging of a Facilitator on short term contract basis to work with Prabudhata volunteers and Kudumbashree functionaries and for process documentation.
- Sending of communications to all the MPs, MLAs, Chairpersons of LSGDs, university authorities, syndicate members, principals of colleges, cultural leaders, heads of media etc. to popularize the concept in Kerala society.
- Ayal Sabha meetings and special Prabudhata Gramasabha meetings in Karakulam
- Field level launching of the project in Karakulam and subsequent social engineering tasks
- Empowering the community to frame knowledge questions to be presented as open questions before higher knowledge centres
- Taking the questions meant for one of the institutions in a procession
- Arranging a mega event at Karakulam at which the institutions give answers to the questions raised by the community
- Invitation for Open Day
- Prbudhata declaration
- Members of the community visit institutions and interact with academics, researchers, scientists and technocrats

Like Salt Satyagraha, Prabudhata is a simple concept. But its impact would be all pervading and standing. The Kerala State Higher Education Council believes so.