

"B" for Bean

This documentary explores the Sapera community's indigenous performing arts

to analyse conventional education methods and highlight the need for contextual learning

By Saumya Sahay



The Evaluation Jury has recommended **Saumya Sahay**
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with specialization in **Integrated Communication Design**

Herewith, for the project titled "**Full Title with Subtitle**"
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Date: 29 April, 2025

Place Swatantra Talim, Lucknow

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Acknowledgement

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Institute of Design for equipping me with the skills and perspective to conduct a project of this nature. I am especially thankful to my faculty mentor, Aastha Gohil, for her guidance, encouragement, and constructive feedback throughout this journey. I am equally grateful to my project mentor, Ridhi Agarwal, for her continued support and belief in my work.

This documentary would not have been possible without the openness and generosity of the Sapera community of Ashraf Nagar, especially Karan Nath as well as the teachers of Prathmik Vidyalay, Lalaikheda, and all my young students, whose lived wisdom and warmth deeply enriched this project.

A special thank you to my mother and brother, who have been unwavering pillars of support. I'm also thankful to my friends Yash Pratap, Sandeep, and Shantam Nidhi, who accompanied me during field visits, and to Akshata Padhmanabhan, Pratyush Choudhury, and Yuktarth Mishra for keeping me grounded, calm, and motivated, especially during moments of self-doubt.

Lastly, I sincerely thank Swatantra Talim for the opportunity to be part of their project space and for enabling my engagement with the field.

About

I'm Saumya Sahay, a Communication Design student exploring the intersections of art, design, and social science. I'm interested in communities, cultures, and learning about the intricacies of society.

I enjoy capturing the subtleties and simplicities of my surroundings through photography, film, and illustrations. I find joy in projects that offer field exposure and opportunities to document lived experiences firsthand.



This project was undertaken as my Graduation Project at JK Lakshmipat University, as part of the four-year Integrated Communication Design program at the Institute of Design.

The course has played an important role in shaping both my critical and creative thinking, while helping me enhancing my visual communication skills. I am truly thankful to the university for the values and abilities I've gained,

it has helped me build my own ways of thinking and approaching both life and work.



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About the organisation



Swatantra Talim is a not-for-profit non-governmental organisation working in the field of alternative education since 2013. It is inspired by 'nai talim' philosophy thoughtfully carved by Mahatma Gandhi and constructionist approach by Seymour Papert.

The organisation envisions rural landscape as a hub of innovation and a child as an innovator capable of driving social change. Its mission is to nurture scientific temper among rural children by designing contextual, hands-on learning experiences that make education more meaningful, relevant, and empowering.

The organisation operates a rural learning centre in Malsarai Village and actively collaborates with 13 government schools situated across semi-urban communities in Lucknow,



Socio emotional learning

In recent studies around education, a major gap identified is the absence of emotional awareness and management in current formal education setups. Throughout history, education has always been seen in an all rounded way where moral values, ethical thinking, social awareness have been an integral part.

Greek philosopher
Aristotle had rightly said,

*“Educating the mind
without educating the
heart is no education at all”*

It is aligned with the modern definition of education as well which preaches the process by which societies deliberately transmit their accumulated knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values, skills, competencies, and behaviors across generations (UNESCO).

It goes beyond classroom learning, becoming a journey to understand what a person can truly become, both on their own and as part of a larger society.

Socio-Emotional Learning can be defined as an integral part of education and human development through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

Project – Contextualisation of SEL

However, stemming from western thinkers, the existing knowledge around SEL practices loses its way in the diverse Indian context.

This project is trying to understand how ideas like gender equality, inclusion, and emotional learning already exist in the daily lives of people living in remote areas of India.

By spending time in these communities and learning from their experiences (called action research), the team then tries to design classroom activities that are more meaningful, relevant, and connected to the lives of the children in 13 different locations.

I was working as a social emotional learning fellow in the khojyan programme of project location Lucknow

Phase 1

The fellows would immerse in the community and classroom interventions to observe and document Community's dynamics and cultural practices. They critically analyse the existing SEL practices and gender and social identity dynamics and the gaps between the classroom interventions developing aligned pedagogy.

Phase 2

In the second phase, the fellows actively engage in classroom facilitation delivering impactful lesson plans integrating contextualised GESI-sensitive SEL practices. As they engage in the classrooms, the impact is carefully documented through various research tools. At the end of phase 2, the research team would collate and publish a detailed action research based on the entire fellowship journey.

Content



01 "B" for Bean



02 Engagements as
Socio Emotional
Learning Fellow



03 Documentation
of Events



Synopsis

Which knowledge is valuable and who decides the same?

India’s vast cultural and linguistic diversity, with over 2,000 ethnic groups and 1,600 dialects, reflects a rich spectrum of identities rooted in its unique geography.

Yet, the current education system remains largely standardized, often failing to reflect or respond to this plurality. In such a diverse context, it is crucial to critically examine whether the system accommodates the varied cultural realities and learning needs of its learners.

This documentary on Sopera community, explores how their centuries-old performing arts holds deep indigenous wisdom, and highlights the need for contextualized education, one that resonates with children’s lived realities and actively includes, values, as well as builds upon their culture

This film is intended for educators, curriculum designers, pedagogy practitioners, and policy makers, those who shape the learning environments and frameworks

Process

A documentary based on community narrative undergoes a journey that requires flexibility and adaptability. However, a detailed plan has helped me to adapt better with the limited time as well as resources around.

The Double Diamond framework provided structure and clarity, helping me navigate between exploration and refinement effectively.

During my initial time with the community, I discovered the broader challenges of the lack of contextual learning in the current education system and decided to explore the narrative through the paradigm of the Sapera community of Lallaikheda. This phase involved field immersion, secondary research, unstructured interviews and observational enquiries.

As I moved forward with data analysis and synthesis, the field insights shaped into structures defining the film's core narrative. Tools like mind mapping, stakeholder mapping, and storyboarding helped me to define the focus areas, key voices, and contextual locations.

As filming began, I developed the narrative by focusing more on in-depth interviews, contextual visuals and story refinement through scripting, shot selection, and iterative framing based on ground realities.

Post filming, I worked around compilation and editing of the film navigating through sound, sequencing and pacing to deliver a clear, unambiguous central message of cultural relevance and the importance of contextual education.

01

Introduction & Briefing

Choosing the Sapera community as focus
Literature review

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Immersion into the community

Field visits to Ashraf Nagar
Informal & Formal interviews with the community members
Observations and contextual inquiry

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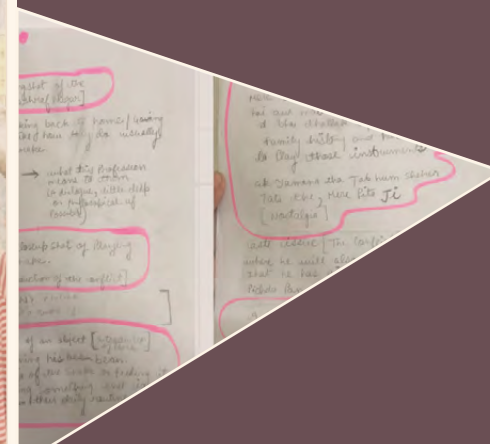


03

Research Systhesis

Stakeholder & Mindmapping
Identifying Key gaps in education Vs Lived realities
Categorising Interviews into themes

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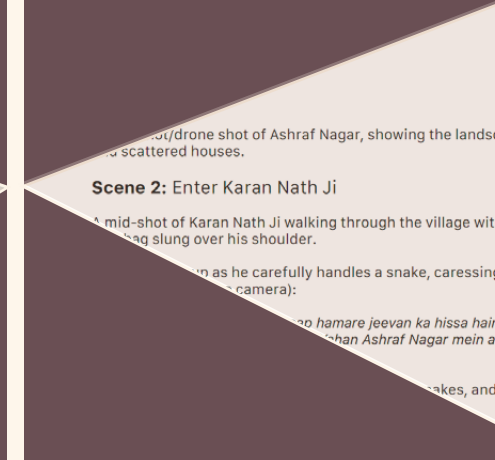


04

Script Development

Forming core narrative
Selecting the protagonist and identifying locations
Finalising the documentary structure
Moodboard inspiration

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Production

Filming directional interviews
Shooting B-rolls

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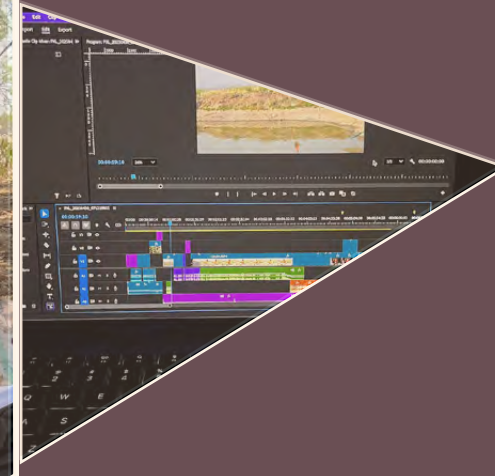


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Post Production

Editing the Film
Review and feedback

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A child's learning environment refers to the entire ecosystem that surrounds and influences their growth.

It moves beyond the schooling system and the teachers.

Gandhi defined education as a dynamic process rooted in real-life experiences, where teaching emerges from the child's immediate physical environment, enabling them to naturally integrate learning into their everyday activities.

Understanding the context of Sapera community

The gap in education and reality, and its capacity to create aspirations is evident in Prathamik Vidyalay, Lalaikheda, where the majority of the school goers belong to the sapera community.

For centuries, This community has resided close to nature with a livelihood defining their identity as snake charmers, From catching snakes to making of local instruments and performing through music and dance. Their close interconnectedness with nature has also created rich indigenous knowledge around local flora and fauna.

But the dropout rate among the children has been very high especially after 5th grade.

The rate is even higher for the girls. The dropped out children mostly engage with their primary livelihood or in informal labour, in case of girls, they are seen engaged in household chores as a preparation for marriage.

Problem statement – Education for all

While India's literacy rates have steadily improved, the quality and relevance of education remain a major concern. There is a growing gap between what is taught in schools and the diverse lived realities of children across communities. Education, unlike literacy, is meant to shape individuals, encourage critical thinking, and help them take part meaningfully in society. However, the current system often sidelines local knowledge systems, cultural practices, and indigenous wisdom, reducing education to the transmission of selective, standardised content.

Hence, the question arises,

which knowledge is valuable and who decides the same?

Literature Review

Gandhi has defined education as

a dynamic concept where teaching can be carried out through real life phases related to the immediate physical environment, where the child can assimilate learning into their day to day activities. The learning journey of a child needs to be supported by families, communities and schools.



The New Educational Policy, 2020

also emphasises on correlation between formal curriculum and lived experiences of children respecting diversity and local context. In a contradictory environment, learning often becomes stagnant it often leads to rejection of formal education.

The policy reflects India's commitment towards achieving its international commitment to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030 i.e. Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) – 4.

The Freirean school of thought

critiques the hierarchical nature of traditional classrooms, where teachers hold authority and students are treated as passive recipients of knowledge, a model Freire calls the banking system of education. This approach ignores children's lived experiences and dehumanizes learning. In contrast, both Freire and the NEP 2020 advocate for dialogic and problem-posing education, where teachers act as facilitators and learning is rooted in real-life exploration and shared understanding.



In Lalaikhera,

the community's identity and knowledge are often ignored, going against the ideas of both the Freirean approach and the NEP 2020. Freire believes that children should be seen as holders of knowledge, and learning should involve meaningful dialogue based on their lived experiences. The NEP also talks about making education more local, inclusive, and rooted in real life. But the children in Lalaikhera face a very different situation. They are socially and economically excluded, lack access to basic needs like proper food and safety, and receive an education that neither values their background nor inspires hope. This gap makes them feel left out, eventually pushing many to lose interest and drop out.

Immersion into the community

Action Research

SEL into Khojyaan Project

Being a part of the project, I was responsible to conduct the action research in Lucknow by integrating GESI informed SEL practices in “Khojyan” intervention of Swatantra Talim. I regularly visited the suburbs of Lucknow as a part of my immersion and eventually engage in the government schools, in classroom facilitation. out of 13 communities, the sapera community was one of them.

As I stepped into the classroom, I got introduced to facilitation techniques for the first time. However with time, my drive for the cause equipped me with the skills and soon, I started delivering sessions in the classrooms.

Field Visits to Ashraf Nagar

I enjoyed my space with children and we connected well over time. As *part of my action research* I explored their lives outside the classroom, where they introduced me to their homes.

They played a major role in my rapport building with the Sapera community. I began interacting with community members leading to

The idea of documenting their lives visually, capturing my action research in the form of a documentary film.



Informal & Formal interviews with the community members were conducted

as part of contextual inquiry

Each interview opened up a new layer of insight, some challenged my assumptions,

Others helped understand small but important cultural details.

Pankaj Nath



He is a snake charmer and catcher by profession. During Kumbh, we had a conversation exploring the religious roots of his profession. He explained the significance of Naag Panchami and Mahashivaratri to the community as they often visit to Kumbh.

Golu Nath



He works as a snake catcher at the Lucknow Airport. He plays a crucial role of catching snakes and relocating them in urban 'development' projects like airports minimising the human-nature conflict.

Somvar Nath



Somvarji is one of the elderly snake charmers of the community. In our conversation, he shared many insights the historical journey of Saperas and the risk involved in the profession.

Karan Nath



A leader figure to the community, He shares a strong political understanding and he is active in local politics. He has been vocal about recognition of their identity from the government. As we conversed more, he narrated the political and administrative plight of nomadic tribes of Uttar Pradesh.

Parmod Nath



Pramod, Karan Nath's brother accompanies him with Hudak, a folk instrument used in the community. He is a performing artist and possesses rich knowledge about the folk instruments.

Principal of Prathamik Vidhyalay, Lalai Kheda



A teacher with 15 years of experience, shares valuable insights about the community. As she talks about the little changes in community's perception on education, she shared behavioral patterns and paradigms of the community. She acknowledges the loss of traditional knowledge in the new generation of the Saperas.

Government School Teacher, Prathamik Vidhyalay, Lalai Kheda



She shared insights around gender norms and dynamics in the community. She also acknowledged the crucial role the Saperas play in rescuing snakes from the school.

Stakeholders & mind mapping



Identifying key gaps in education vs lived realities

Aspirations and economic opportunities

The community feels stuck in a cultural and aspirational vacuum, where education doesn't help them move much forward, and their traditional knowledge isn't given space to survive or grow. This leaves them with fewer hopes and opportunities, As a result, many young people resort to traditional occupations or informal labor, fully aware of how far behind they are in the larger race for opportunity, slowly pushing them out of the system and causing their skills, identity, and way of life to fade away.

Stakes of the stakeholders

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Lost Inheritance

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Categorising interviews into themes



Script Development

Forming the core narrative

While living in the community, I conducted unstructured interviews with people from different age groups, which helped me understand their lives and aspirations across generations.

The elders had deep knowledge of snake charming and the local ecology. The next generation built on this by creating performing arts around their traditions. Neither had much formal education.

Now, the younger generation is more engaged with formal schooling, but they find it disconnected from their reality.

With the loss of ecological space and cultural practices, traditional knowledge no longer offers a stable future, while education feels unrelatable. This has led to high dropout rates and a feeling of being stuck between two worlds.

To deepen this understanding, I also interviewed teachers who gave a more neutral view, confirming many of the same insights.

Selecting the protagonists

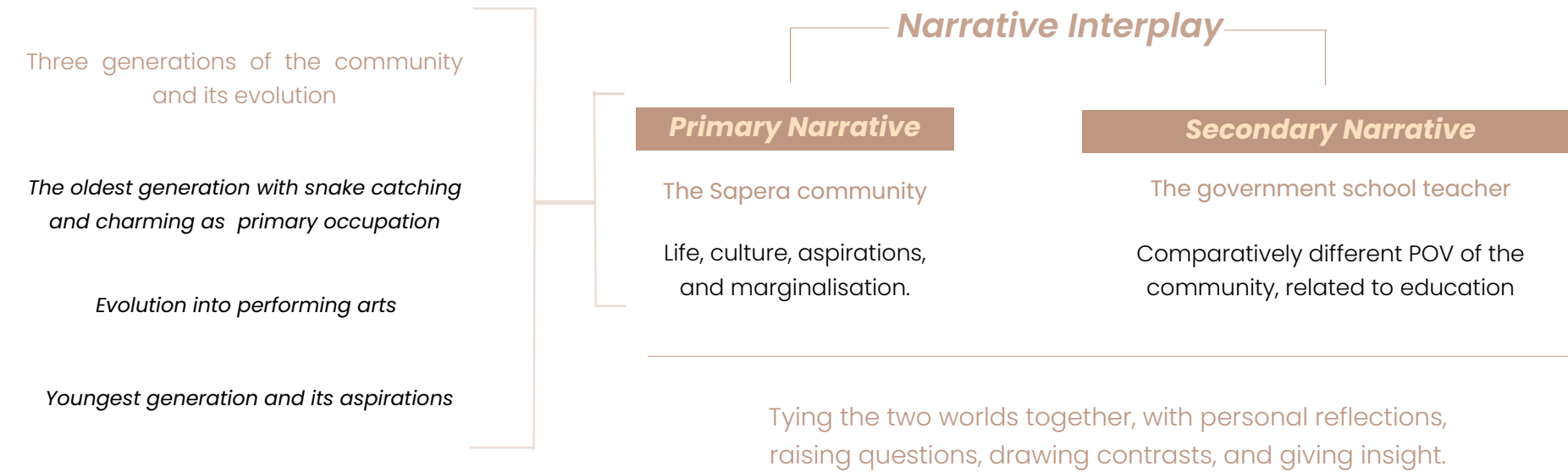


Karan Nath, 62, was chosen as the main character of the documentary for his strong connection to the community's past and present. As someone who has passed down traditional performing arts, like dance, singing, and playful acts using objects such as the laathi and cycle wheel, he represents the knowledge and skills the community holds. He speaks with clarity and openly shares his thoughts on the social and political challenges they face. His experience, leadership, and deep understanding made him the most fitting person to guide the film's story.

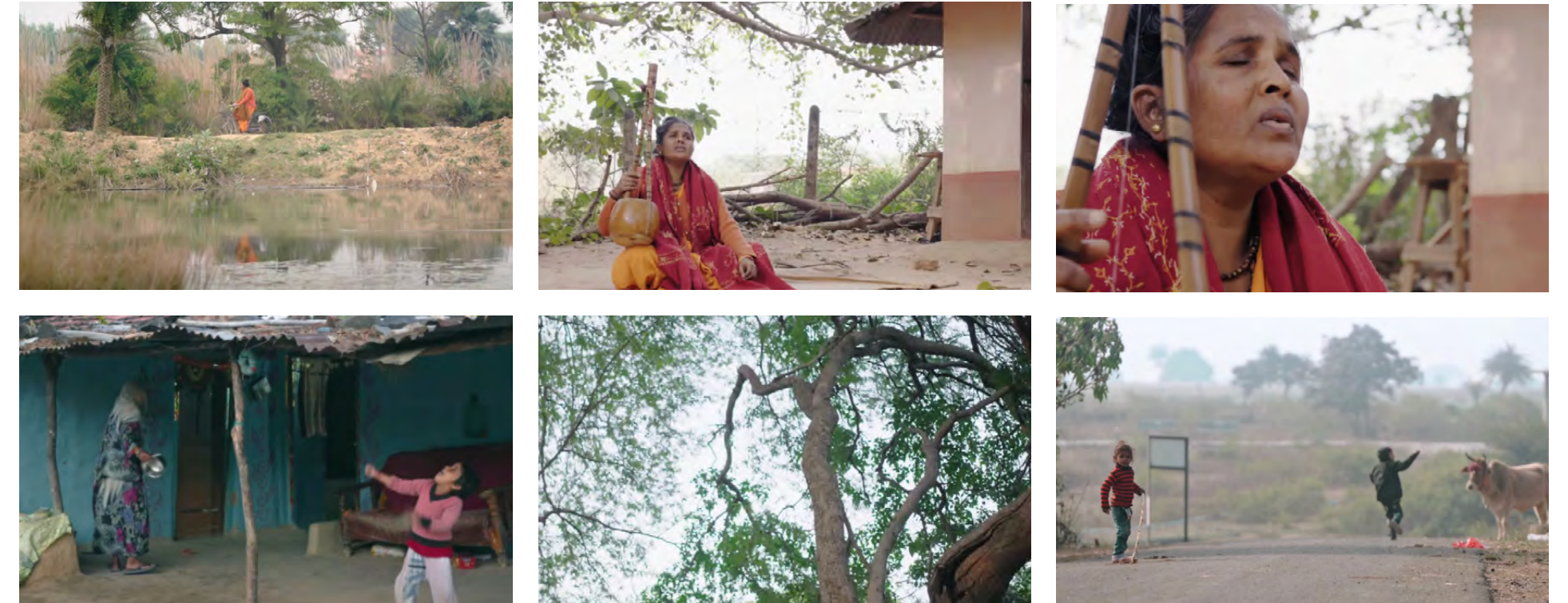


Both the principal and the subject teacher of Prathmik Vidyalaya, Lalaikhera, have been teaching at the government school for over 15 years. Having witnessed the community's journey over time, they offer a more neutral and balanced perspective. Their insights provide a valuable understanding of how education is perceived by the community, the challenges faced by the children, and the role schooling plays in their development. Their long-standing presence allows them to reflect deeply on the changes they've seen and the gaps that still exist.

Finalising the documentary structure



Moodboard inspiration for videos angles



Production

Filming
directional
interviews

Shooting
B rolls

***Post
Production***

Editing

Conclusion

Revisiting Pedagogy

The lack of contextualised pedagogy in India has been recognised as the need of the 21st century. National Education Policy, 2020 strongly advocates experiential learning based on real-life experiences respecting the local culture and contexts.

A curriculum indicates the contents and objectives of a course while a pedagogy refers to the methods and techniques of teaching the curriculum.

The diversity of Indian context can not be centralised with one curriculum. Hence, the responsibility of contextual learning comes down to the need of revisiting the pedagogy.

Contextual education is rooted in constructivist theory

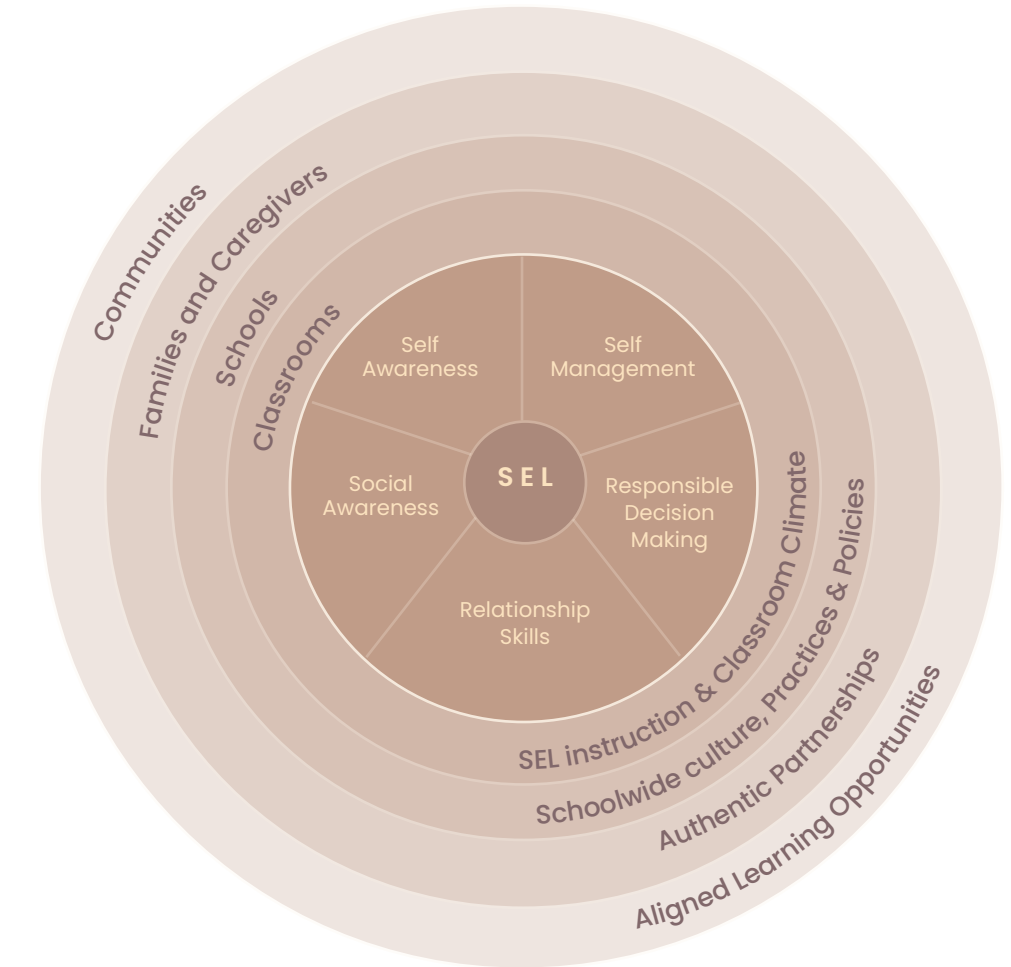
- 01 Real-life relevance is central, learning is shaped by physical, social, cultural, political, and emotional contexts.
- 02 Curriculum content itself is derived from human experiences; thus, contextualisation aligns with the origins of existing knowledge.
- 03 Using familiar, everyday objects (instead of unfamiliar ones) in teaching makes learning more relatable and effective.
- 04 Shifts the teacher's role from authority to facilitator, making learning collaborative. Children become active participants, developing a stronger sense of identity and higher aspirations.
- 05 Community involvement, Empowers families to engage in the learning process.

In context of the sapera community of lalaikheda

The lived experiences of the children shall be used while delivering the classroom content that validates the existing knowledge. This is the first step in creating an inclusive learning environment. The conventional teacher-student relation is replaced by a facilitator-participant relation where the children discuss their lived experiences while understanding concepts of the curriculum. Likewise, the Sapera community's rich ecological and artistic experiences can be leveraged to brainstorm higher concepts.

The idea is to reconcile the content of the curriculums into the lives of children where they see value in their education. Similarly, values and ethics can also be contextualised through the folk tales and the interactions with the physical world.

According to CASEL framework, socio-emotional learning can be categorised into five components

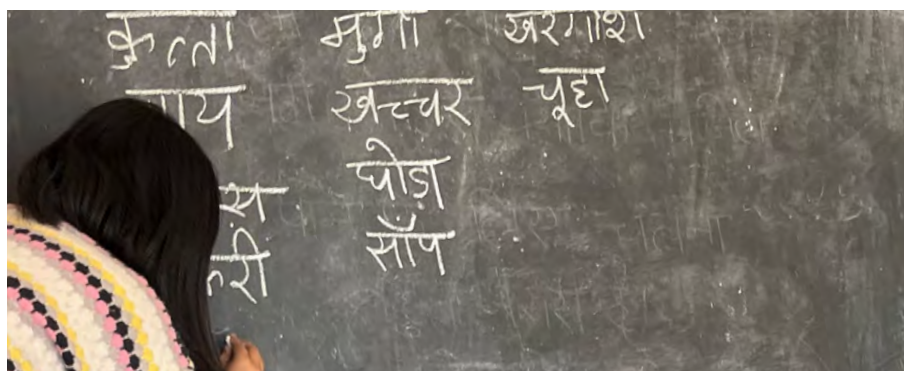


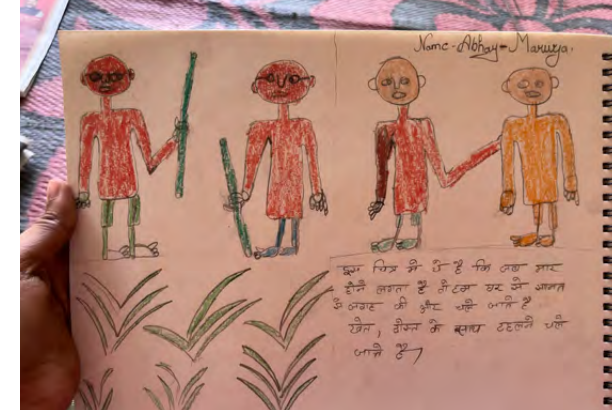
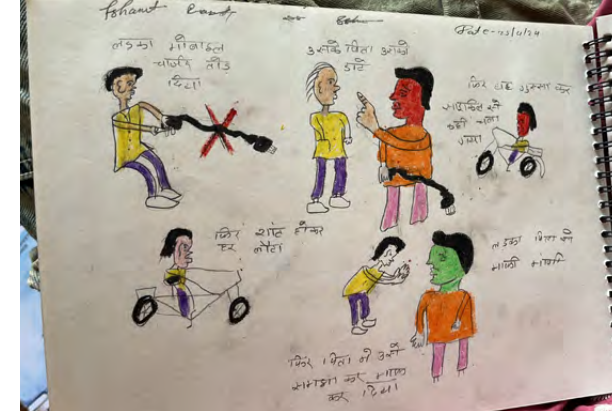
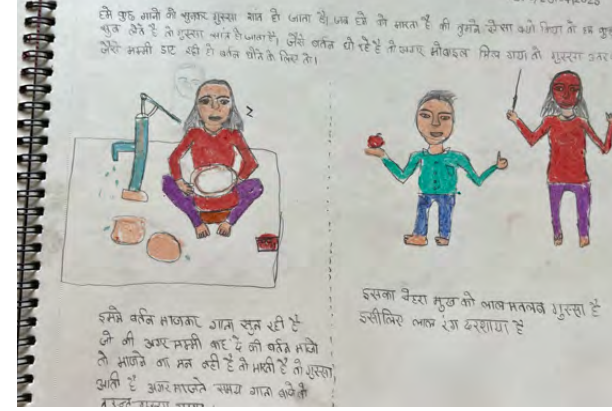
The socio-emotional learning starts at the core of an individual before moving to the school and then the community.

Engagements as Socio Emotional Learning Fellow

1. Ground engagements/Session Facilitation
2. Documentation/Thematic exploration







***Community immersion
and documentation
through qualitative
and quantitative data***

Qualitative Data

Quantitative Data

Explores the scale of the context of
the geography,

