Kaliyuva Mane: An Alternative School that Transforms Lives

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Abstract

This is a case study of an alternative school that transforms the lives of children from the most underprivileged conditions who have dropped out of the formal school system and lost interest in education. The study explores the unique practices of the school that gives new life to the out of school children. The data were gathered through interviews of 39 stakeholders of the school that includes the founder and managing trustee, administrative staff, teachers, students, and volunteers. The data leads to the following themes: personalised curriculum, multigrade-multilevel learning, infrastructure as a learning site, assessment for learning, life skills integration, education as a social service. The farm-like school environment, personal care in a residential set up, flexible curriculum, and learner centred pedagogy enable the children not only to learn the academic subjects and develop eco consciousness but also to master many skillsets that are critical for living in the real world.

Keywords: Alternative education, Alternative school, School dropouts, Out of school children, Kaliyuva Mane, Transformative education, Education of the Poor.

Introduction

The debate surrounding education of the underprivileged and out of school children has been one of the hottest topics in recent years. The issue can be depicted as a "quiet crisis" in education (Smith, 2004), which includes a major dropout problem and a lesser known but equally important "skills gap" (Aron, 2009). In response, countries across the world have been pushing for higher academic standards and greater accountability. In India, education is the responsibility of the central and state governments. Both central and state governments make laws, policies, and programmes for education. However, in the case of a conflict between the central and state laws, the legislation passed by the parliament will be adopted. Therefore, the state and central governments function in partnership for implementing educational policies and programmes.

The Right to Education Act enacted by the parliament of India in 2009, made elementary education a fundamental right, and hence it is mandatory for the government to provide free and compulsory education to the children between the ages of 6 to 14 years. It laid down roles and responsibilities for the central and state governments and local bodies to implement the Act in letter and spirit. However, the field data show that in spite of the government policies and programmes to promote education of the deprived sections, a large mass of school-aged children still remain out of the formal education system. The 2011 Census revealed that the number of out-of-school children in the age group of 5-17 years was 84 million. The 75th round of National Sample Survey (NSS) shows that during 2017-2018, 15.7 % persons of age 3 to 35 years in rural India and 8.3% in urban India have never enrolled (NSSO, 2020).

The initiatives such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan could achieve near universal enrolment in elementary education. Data from the NSS show that the gross enrolment ratio for Grades 6-8 is

90.9%, while for Grades 9-10 and 11-12 it was only 79.3% and 56.5%, respectively. This also indicates that a significant proportion of enrolled students drop out after Grade 5 and especially after Grade 8. As per the survey, the number of out of school children in the age group of 6 to 17 is 32.2 million. It is not a surprise that the large chunk of these out of school children belong to the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), which includes scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, other backward classes, and many other disadvantaged sections. Therefore, it has become a top priority for India to bring these children back into the educational fold as early as possible, and to prevent further dropping out of the students. Thus, the National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) has set a goal to achieve 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio in preschool to secondary level by 2030. The policy also proposed a concerted national effort to ensure universal access and affordable opportunity to all children of the country to obtain quality holistic education–including vocational education–from preschool to Grade 12.

The above scenario highlights the need to draw out appropriate strategies and plans to bring all the dropped off children back to the school, retain them, and ensure that no child is left behind in receiving quality education. In such efforts, the role of alternative education institutions is very important. In fact, the NEP 2020 gives greater importance to alternative forms of schooling in curtailing dropout rates and ensuring universal access to education at all levels. It strongly recommended to put in place alternative and innovative education centres in cooperation with civil society to ensure that children of migrant labourers, and other children who are dropping out of school due to various circumstances, are brought back into mainstream education.

Fortunately, there are a number of alternative and innovative education centers in India and many of them have already been subjected to academic research. Study of such schools and

the directory of similar institutions available in two major works in the field (Vittachi, 2007 and Pathak, 2016) provide vital information on the alternative systems of education in India. One such school named "Kaliyuva Mane" (Home for Learning) near Mysore in Karnataka, educates the out of school children in a very unique way. The school works for the upliftment of the deprived children from rural areas who have dropped out of the formal school system and have lost interest in education. It provides free education in a residential set up to these unfortunate children as a social service under a not-for-profit organisation called Divya Deepa Charitable Trust.

Kaliyuva Mane addresses the learning needs of the out of school children at every stage of their education. The children admitted in this school include child labourers, children with huge academic lags, children with special needs, emotionally sensitive children, children from broken families, and those who are abandoned by their parents. In a short span of its existence the school has transformed the lives of many such children in the countryside by enabling them to successfully complete secondary education and brought them back to the mainstream. The school works in a very unfamiliar setting, but with a strong conviction of the need for promoting life skills and human values among these children. This paper explores the unique efforts of this very humble organisation in providing education and hopes to the children from the most deprived sections of the society.

Methodology

This paper is an offshoot of an exploration of "Kaliyuva Mane" by the author to produce a video documentary on the school. The paper presents the unique practices of this school in transforming the lives of children who otherwise would have joined the large mass of illiterates in the remote villages. The initial interaction with the Founder and Managing Trustee of the

school led the author to study the school from an academic point of view. Thus, a case study of this unique school was planned. The data for the study comes mainly from semi structured interviews with 39 stakeholders of the school that includes the Board of Trustees, administrative staff, teachers, students, and volunteers. Additionally, an unstructured observation of the classroom activities and infrastructure facilities of the school as well as the documents available on the school website, brochures and monographs were also used to collect relevant information.

The respondents were asked to talk about their experience and views about the school in a very open way. However, information about the vision and mission of the school, characteristics of the students, curriculum and teaching learning activities, evaluation of students' learning, the problems faced by the management and the students were elicited from the respondents, using probes. The interviews and all the school activities were video recorded, and the relevant portions of the interviews were transcribed. The responses in Kannada language were translated to English. The transcribed responses were analysed and coded under several categories like student profile, curriculum, textbooks and learning materials, teaching learning activities, instructional resources, assessment practices, co scholastic activities, problems faced by students. Data from the documentary sources like reports, testimonials, student profiles, assessment records as well the videos were placed under these categories. The analysis of the data under these categories led to merging and modification of the initial categories into the themes such as personalised curriculum, multigrade-multilevel learning, infrastructure as a learning site, assessment for learning, life skills integration, and education as a social service.

Table 1: Sample of respondents

Gender	Board of	Administrative	Teachers	Volunteers	Students	Alumni	Total

	Trustees	Staff					
Male	2	2	5	7	12	3	31
Female	-	-	3	2	2	1	8
Toal	2	2	8	9	14	4	39

Characteristics of alternative schools

Alternative education is often defined as a form or mode of education which stands as an alternative to the formal schooling that focuses on marks and academic achievement. The term "alternative education" in its broadest sense covers all educational activities that fall outside the traditional K–12 school system (Aron, 2009). The formal schools work in a very predictable way, as their curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation practices are prefixed. Here the end results are more important than the process of learning. Thus, the yardstick of successful completion of schooling is centered around marks, ranks, and/or grades. On the other hand, the institutions of alternative schooling define learning and success in different ways. Such schools are more focussed on the process of learning than solely on the end results (Vittachi, 2007). According to Pathak (2016) "alternative education is the one that with its innovative methodologies to teaching and learning offers an option against the state-provided mainstream education and its approaches" (p. 9).

As specified by Koerrenz et al. (2018), the alternative element of alternative schooling refers to a "difference," "an alternative is alternate to something else." They consider alternative schools as projects that have the ambition to change schooling in general and the impact of schooling on society in particular. Alternative schooling is not just about making a difference in

a formal way, but about doing something better to improve school. Therefore, the very idea of alternative schooling incorporates two differences: (a) the difference between the institutional frameworks and daily life, and (b) the difference between daily life in the institution itself and instruction via teaching (Koerrenz et al., 2018).

Vittachi (2007) identified some general characteristics of the alternative schools. These schools follow an individualised approach to education and learning than the mainstream schools. They accord equal respect to the student, parent, and teacher irrespective of socioeconomic status and abilities of the individual. Therefore, integration of children of mixed abilities and or socio-economic groups and even mixed ages form the key element. Learning is experiential and interest based rather than learning out of textbooks or from class lecture. Subjects taught are interlinked so that the boundaries of knowledge are diffused, and the child is able to see the connection across various fields of learning. Class size is kept small; one teacher does not teach more than 25 to 30 students. Class structure of the alternative schools accommodates children of different ages or even interflow of different grades or standards for different subjects. The physical classroom spaces are broken free allowing learning to take place outdoors. Evaluation methods do not always rely on conventional tests and examinations. Affiliation to the popular examination Boards may not be sought as these schools explore new topics and syllabi that are not prescribed by the Boards. Success rate is not determined only by student performance in competitions, examinations, and other such benchmarks. The learning outcomes are a blend of measurable immeasurable parameters.

Pathak (2016) states that, in India, the landscape of alternative education is broad and highly fragmented. There are various philosophies at work, but a common thread that runs these is the child centred and inclusive approach to education. Unlike mainstream education, in

alternative education everything revolves around the child. Alternative schools in most cases are also catering to the needs of those children who are either left out or behind or have been turned down by mainstream education systems. However, as observed by Vittachi (2007), there is no one model of alternative education. Each model differs from one another in terms of approach to education, learning, curriculum, pedagogy, size and structure of class, discipline, administration, and evaluation of learning.

According to Vittachi (2007), most experiments of the alternative schools are small, but fundamentally replicable. They reach out in meaningful ways to diverse children—from different economic backgrounds, in diverse social settings. Several experiments are clustered in the states of Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra—with a sprinkling in other places including Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bengal, Gujarat, Delhi, Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and others. It is noted that in many cases, there is no hard and fast line dividing the mainstream from the alternative. Even hardcore "mainstream" schools gradually adopt some elements of "alternative" education.

Why Kaliyuva Mane?

In India several government sponsored schemes like Operation Black Board, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Samagra Shiksha, Scheme for Providing Education to Madrassas/Minorities, National Means Cum Merit Scholarship Scheme etc. are implemented to ensure that underprivileged children receive a solid educational base. The RTE Act 2009 guarantees free and quality education to all children and incentives like Mid-Day Meal, scholarships and even reservations in private schools to encourage maximum enrolment of students from underprivileged backgrounds. The 71st round national sample survey (NSS) on social consumption in education sector conducted in 2014 shows that the net enrolment ratio in India

for male and female was 84% and 83% at primary, 64% and 62% at upper primary, and 52% and 51% at secondary levels of education respectively (NSSO, 2016. p 55). During 2017-18 these ratios were enhanced to 86.9 % and 85.3%, 72.5% and 71.8%, 57.9% and 57.5% respectively (NSSO, 2020, p.84). This increase in the attendance ratio over the years shows that different schemes in the sector of education have helped to enhance the enrolment and attendance of children at different levels of school education. However, as mentioned earlier, a large corpus of the children of school going age are still out of the school system. In the urban schools, financial constraints are cited as the major reason for non enrollment of the out of school children, whereas in rural areas majority of them are reported to be "not interested in education" (NSSO, 2020. p vi).

The RTE Act provides for admission of out of school children to an age-appropriate class and provides training to enable them to come up to the age-appropriate learning level. However, there is no effective mechanism to bring these children back to school, particularly the children from deprived sections of the society, and to ensure that no child is left behind in receiving quality education. Under Section 12 (1) (c) of the Act, all schools—private, aided, unaided or special category—must reserve at least 25% of their seats at the entry level (Grade-1) for students from economically weaker sections (EWS) and disadvantaged groups (DG). In 2018–19, more than 3.3 million students secured admission under this provision (Bhattacharjee, 2019). However, parents and children who have been admitted to private schools on this special provision face many problems, which include, discriminatory behaviour towards parents, and difficulties experienced by students to blend in with a different sociocultural environment. There are several cases of dropout among these students whose parents rely on the 25% RTE quota in the private school to provide quality education to their children.

It is also significant to note that the RTE Act is applicable only to elementary education. As the first cohort of EWS students has completed class eight in 2019 and the 25% quota ceased to be mandatory after 14 years of age, there is no clarity about who will pay for education of these students from Grade 9 onwards. "There is thus a real risk of creating a pool of 15-year-old students rendered ineligible to attend any school and falling out of the education system completely" (Bhattacharjee, 2019). The official surveys referred earlier shows that about 37% of children who complete elementary education do not enroll for secondary education. In effect, a huge number of children are going out of the formal education system.

The majority of children who have never attended any school, belong to the socially disadvantaged class (India Today Web Desk, 2019). In 2014 the out of school children in the 6-18 age group were more than 45 million, which is about 16.1% of the children in this age group. The proportion of out-of-school children was higher in rural India (17.2%) than in urban India (13.1%). Among the social groups, the proportion of out of school children from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) was the highest, followed by Other Backward Classes (OBCs). On the whole, the out-of-school children belong to the most underprivileged section of the society and economically backward communities (Dubey, Pankaj & Mitra, 2018).

It is significant to note that the situation prevails even after 10 years of implementation of the RTE Act and implementation of several centrally sponsored programmes. The 75th round of NSS reported that 10.6% children at primary, 18.2% at upper primary level, and 20.8% at secondary level dropout from the formal school system. The proportion of dropouts in secondary school in rural areas (20.8%) is higher than in urban areas (17.1 %). The school dropout of girls at secondary level in rural areas (21.4 %) is about 3 percent higher (17.6%) than in urban areas (NSSO, 2020 p.220). A recent survey in Karnataka revealed that the number of out-of-school

children in the state has increased five-fold. The total number of out-of-school children in the state is 70,116 compared to 14,000 during 2017-18 (New Indian Express, 2019).

The increase in the number of children who have never enrolled or walked away from the schools in frustration and confusion is increasing. The stories of failure run into millions. The reasons for the children's drop out from the school include lack of interest in education, financial constraints, domestic or economic activities, non availability of schools in the neighbourhood, inability to cope with studies or failure in studies, unfriendly atmosphere at school, unfamiliar language/medium of instruction (NSSO, 2020 p.219). Migration of the family and apathy of the parents also contribute to the drop out of the children. All these pose a big challenge in achieving the national goal of providing universal access and affordable opportunity to all children to obtain quality holistic education from preschool to Grade 12. It also underlines the role and importance of alternative schools like Kaliyuva Mane in the field of school education.

Major Findings

The study reveals that the unique and innovative practices of Kaliyuva Mane signifies the very name of the school as 'a home for learning' for the children from the most underprivileged section of the society. The major findings of the study emerged from the categories specified in the methodology section are presented and discussed below.

Personalised Education for Every Child

Kaliyuva Mane follows a flexible curriculum, customised to suit the needs of every child. It takes into account social circumstances, learning needs, requirements and expectations of the children. The school admits the children throughout the year and does not put any upper age limit for admission. The batch of students in the school at the time this study falls under the age group of 6-12 years. Most of these children did not have age-appropriate knowledge when they

joined this school. The clinical psychologist of All India Institute of Speech and Hearing, Mysore, who examined these children said that "though their mental age, intelligence, and adaptive behaviour were age appropriate their performance on academic achievement tests was by and large at kindergarten level." Many of these children were clinically diagnosed as "Average Intelligence-Academic Delay with Learning Difficulty" (Success Stories, 2018).

The school does not force children to attend classes immediately after their joining. Each child is given adequate time to build rapport with other children, teachers and other school staff. Once the child starts showing interest in learning, an informal assessment is conducted to identify areas where the child needs attention, and an individual curriculum is fixed. The school believes, as stated by its founder and managing trustee, that "an uncluttered mind is a prerequisite for learning; love, care and empathy are the ingredients to create a happy mind in the child. As he put it, Children get abundant emotional support from the school staff… They are initiated into academic learning only when they become emotionally comfortable in school. It may sometimes take several months for a child to reach this stage." He further said that "children should retain a sense of wonder in them and enjoy their childhood to the brim."

The school does not follow any prescribed syllabus for grades 1 and 2. The focus is on developing language abilities and basic mathematical skills among the children. At a later stage the school uses Karnataka State textbooks and or the textbooks of National Council of Educational Research and Training appropriately. Moreover, as one of the teachers said, "it is not mandatory for the children to study any particular textbook in Kaliyuva Mane. For instance, children of the age group 12-13 years are not forced to study the entire textbooks of Class VII. A teacher may use textbooks of class VI, VII, or VIII according to their learning needs and ability. However, the students of the age 15 and above who appear for Secondary School Leaving

Certificate (SSLC) examination are taught with the textbooks of Class X and they are prepared to write the examination in English medium."

The school offers three languages: Kannada, English, and Sanskrit as first, second and third languages respectively. However, the medium of instruction is essentially bilingual. In the initial stage children are taught only in Kannada, their mother tongue. Gradually English is introduced based on the comfort level of the children and necessary skills in English language are developed appropriately. The flexibility of the curriculum provides freedom to both the teachers and the students and it is visible in the grouping of the children, teachers' autonomy in choosing the textbooks and learning resources, and assessment of students' learning. This enables the school to personalise learning inputs for the children and keep them at the heart of learning. Rather than the homogenized, standardized approach adopted in the mainstream schools, the personalized learning process followed in Kaliyuva Mane takes into account every child's interests and ensures that no child is left behind, as the curriculum is tailored to each child's present abilities.

Flexible Learning Groups

Being a residential institution, the school engages the children in various activities from dawn to dusk. However, a flexible time schedule is followed for learning academic subjects, and the learning activities are conducted according to the convenience of the students and teachers. For pedagogical purposes, the children are grouped into flexible learning groups based on their age, ability, academic level, pace of learning, and emotional readiness. Unlike the mainstream schools, Kaliyuva Mane does not follow chronological age of the children as a basis of students grouping. Thus, a class can have children of multiple age groups, irrespective of the class in which they dropped out of the formal school system. A child can learn one subject in one team

and another subject in another group. So, children move from one group to another depending upon their interest and progress in learning. This makes each learning group a multigrade-multilevel class and enables the children in each group to learn at different cognitive levels depending on their ability and pace of learning.

Teachers largely adopt interactive pedagogies in the classroom. Language skills of the children are taken care of even in subjects like mathematics, science, and social science. Teachers help the children to read and understand the text in each subject by focussing on the conceptual understanding as well as grammatical and linguistic aspects embedded in learning a subject. Meaning of difficult words/terms are explained in the mother tongue. Thus, the ideas of multilingual/bilingual and language across curriculum are practiced in the classroom. Students are given adequate time and individual attention to learn the concepts. Participation of the students in the learning process is ensured through discussion, group activities, and problem-solving exercises. A feel free atmosphere in the classroom enables the children to express their ideas and views freely.

Infrastructure as Learning Site

The school is set in a farm-like environment that enables the children to learn, construct and live in an eco-friendly living system. The infrastructure of the school is created so innovatively that the children subconsciously develop an ecoconsciousness. The eco-friendly projects like rain-water harvesting, solar-powered lighting, biogas plant, eco-toilet, and organic farming are consciously planned to reduce the carbon footprint of the school on the planet. Children actively participate in all these eco-friendly practices of the school.

Almost all the buildings have solar lights. Ramps are constructed to facilitate the movements of physically challenged children. Other facilities are eco-sanitation, biomass boiler,

astra stove, solar cooker, and eco-chip boards. As most of the children are from remote villages and are in practice of open defecation, the school gives training to such children to use toilets of both Indian and Western style. The eco-toilets are used not only to conserve water and promote hygienic practices but also to produce human waste manure. Diluted urine goes to the coconut trees and solid waste compost is used for manuring the other plants and trees in the campus.

The infrastructure of the school is maintained and utilised as a learning space with several innovative open learning areas where the children learn from both nature and the teacher. The buildings, corridors, floors, walls, and even water tanks are used as learning resources to learn and apply science and mathematics knowledge. For instance, the geometrical shapes and equations drawn on the walls makes the learning lively. The diagrams of compass painted on the door steps of the classroom and library enables the students to measure the angle between the wall and the door by closing and opening the doors. The measurement of length and breadth of blackboards marked on its boundaries helps the students to understand the concept of area and calculate it by themselves. The height, diameter and volume of the cylindrical water tank marked on it enables the children to find out the amount of water in the tank at different points of time by applying relevant mathematical formulas.

Assessment for Learning

The school does not conduct any formal or annual examination for its students. However, students' learning progress is assessed through informal weekly tests and such assessment is done by the teachers based on the lessons they taught in that particular week. These tests serve the purpose of continuous assessment and are used to monitor students' learning, refix the curriculum, and to understand the effectiveness of the methods and strategies of teaching employed by the teachers. The managing trustee of the school explains: "The very purpose of the

examination in Kaliyuva Mane is to assess the child and refix the curriculum based on it. This we achieve by conducting simple informal weekly tests… A teacher teaches for five days and on the sixth day there will be a simple oral or written test. Based on the performance of a child we fix the curriculum for him/her again and move the child from one team to another."

The school prepares and maintains the learning reports of children every month. What a particular child has learnt in all the subjects as well as his behaviour, hygiene, interaction with other children will be assessed and recorded. These records of assessment are used in refixing the curriculum and guiding the child. However, the students who are preparing for SSLC examination are assessed through formal regular tests in line with the question paper pattern set by the Secondary School Board. Even in this the children are given freedom to take the tests on the date fixed for it or another day depending on their readiness. As the school is not formally recognised by the government, those who appear for 10th standard examination are registered as private candidates.

Life Skills Integrated Education

The school provides unique learning experiences through unique initiatives like Kids Bank, Kids Court, and Skill training Center to promote life skills among the children and enable them to face real life situations. The Kids Bank, an innovative practice to teach money management, provides real banking experience to the children. The Bank is run by the students under the guidance of the teachers and each student functions as "Bank Manager" on rotation. The school has prepared mock currency notes and cheque books for the children. Each child is given a personalised cheque book, a passbook, a cash box, and an account book. There is a store attached to the bank where children can shop daily essentials like soap, shampoo, pen, books etc. using their personal cheque.

Every month a "cheque" for a certain amount is issued to each child depending on the individual needs. Children can also earn by working in the dairy, kitchen, office, dormitory, farm, or by helping others. Children deposit their earnings in their own account by filling a challan. To purchase materials from the store each child has to write a personal cheque and submit it in the bank. "The kids bank enhances children's mathematical skills, work culture, and prepares them for the real world. It also helps them to understand the benefits and limitations of money," say the teachers and the volunteers of Kaliyuva Mane. Linked with the kids' bank, the school practices a system of rewards for learning good habits. Every week a reading/writing session is held and all those who read and write properly are given special *Gift Cheques.* A child can also get a *Gift Cheque* for displaying positive values such as genuinely helping others, accepting one's own mistakes etc. A *Fine Cheque* is given to deduct money from the child's bank account whenever he/she displays undesirable behaviors.

The Kids Court resolves disputes of the children and provides moral lessons to them through actual acts rather than the books. When children quarrel their disputes are settled in this court. They can drop their petitions in a complaint box and on a fixed day the teachers call both the parties to the court to settle the disputes. Punishments to the guilty are generally very mild. For example, the guilty will not be allowed to play for a day while all the children are playing on the ground. Or a Fine Cheque will be given to the child to deduct money from his account for being guilty. Children can also file "public interest litigation" regarding school rules and regulations. A confession box is also kept for sensitive children who would like to confess their mistakes and feel light-hearted. The skill training center called "Kaushala" provides practical training in cooking, dairy, horticulture, plumbing, welding, tailoring, electrical work, DTP,

painting, soft skills etc. All the above initiatives of the school to provide holistic education to the children stand out as unique practices in the field of alternative education.

Education as a Social Service

Kaliyuva Mane is not just an experimental school that imparts education to the out of school children. It provides opportunities for teachers and volunteers to learn teaching and do social service. There are only a few teachers the school has appointed as its regular staff. Other teachers are volunteers. In fact, the financial status of the school trust does not permit it to appoint highly qualified and trained teachers. Student teachers, teacher educators, medical and engineering students, students from countries like Germany, are working in the school as volunteers. The volunteer teachers include young graduates, engineering professionals, retired teachers, social workers etc. Even volunteers from distant places also teach and interact with the children of the school through video conferencing. Most of the volunteers do not have any prior training in teaching. Therefore, Kaliyuva Mane functions as a teaching laboratory for them. The methods and strategies of teaching they adopt in the classroom are not time tested; they devise their own methods of teaching. The primary purpose is to enable the children to understand concepts meaningfully and develop their ability to learn by themselves.

Kaliyuva Mane as an Alternative School

Kaliyuva Mane shares many characteristics of the alternative schools articulated by Vittachi (2007). The school largely follows an individualised approach to education and learning and accord equal respect to all the children admitted to it. Most prominently it integrates children of mixed abilities and or different socio-economic groups and even mixed ages in the classroom. Learning process is experiential and interest based rather than based only on textbooks or teacher dominated lessons. The curriculum interlinks different disciplines enabling the children to see

the interconnection across various subjects of learning. The school accommodates children of different ages and different grades or standards for different subjects. The physical boundaries of the classroom spaces are often diffused allowing learning to take place outdoors. Though the school relies on tests and examinations, the purpose and the manner in which evaluation methods used depart significantly from the conventional tests and examinations of the mainstream schools.

The school is not affiliated to the state or central boards of secondary education. However, one of its major objectives is to bring the children of the marginalised section of the society into the mainstream. Thus, it prepares the students for state board examinations to successfully complete secondary education. Therefore, it focuses on the prescribed syllabus for the secondary classes. However, the schools also explore new topics, syllabi and material in the primary classes. Student success is not determined by performance in examinations, particularly in the early stages; rather the learning outcomes are assessed by many other immeasurable parameters.

The school completes 17 years of its social service in 2022. Started with 14 students in 2005, it has made great achievements in its endeavour to educate the underprivileged children who were thrown to the abyss of socio-economic misery. So far more than 100 children have written secondary school examinations in English medium and most passed in first class. All these children, when they joined Kaliyuva Mane, stood nowhere in academic learning and in English language skills. Most of them were not in a position to write their name properly in their mother tongue even. But the process of education in the school enabled them not only to learn academic subjects, develop vital language skills in both Kannada and English but also develop many other skill sets that are very critical for them to live in the real world.

Most of them pursued technical or higher education in Arts and Science programmes, engineering courses, business management studies, chartered accountancy, or nursing. It is a matter of pride for Kaliyuva Mane to see that almost all its alumni have got gainful employment in different companies and organisations. The school has changed the lives of these underprivileged children for better. With all these achievements the school stands as a real home for the out of school children who want to learn again and regain their life.

Conclusion

Achieving the targets of Sustainable Development Goal in education (SDG 4) set by UNESCO (2019) and the universalisation of elementary and secondary education is a big challenge for India. With various policies, programmes, and schemes in education the country could achieve remarkable strides in enrollment and retention of children at the elementary level of education. However, it is a matter of great concern that a huge number of children of school going age are still out of the purview of school education. The majority of them are from poverty ridden families in the rural areas and a high proportion of them are from SEDGs. This signifies that the constitutional mandate to provide free and compulsory education to all children remains to be a distant goal. The national education policy aims to achieve the goal of 100% Gross Enrolment in preschool to secondary level by 2030. This means that the target of RTE Act 2009 to achieve universal enrolment by 2020 has been further extended by ten more years.

A country like India that aspires to be a global economic power can no longer ignore its responsibility of giving quality education to its underprivileged children. Apart from the government, the civil society also needs to take greater responsibility for educating these children. When the formal system finds it difficult to meet the target of free education to all, alternative schooling gains significance. That is what Kaliyuva Mane has done and proved in a

small village of Mysore. The success of this alternative school will certainly inspire other agencies in different parts of the country and the world to replicate this model or devise their own model of alternative education to transform the lives of the deprived children. It is high time that the agencies at the national and international levels identify all such schools and organizations working for the education of the out of system children and recognize their contribution and provide all possible support to them and thereby achieve the educational and sustainable development goals.

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