



# THINK LABOR

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## Learning to Read, One Madrassa at a Time



In the quiet suburbs of Gaya, about 20 kilometers from the place where Siddhartha Gautama received his enlightenment, a silent revolution is taking place. If one looks around, there is nothing to be seen except endless grasslands that appear to be meeting the distant horizon. It is quite likely that if the Buddha were to visit this place more than 2500 years after his enlightenment, he would not feel out of place. However, as is often the case, there is more to this remote village of Aranga than what meets the eye.

Mr. Sakeel, a local resident, is talking to a group of youngsters, encouraging them to get trained at Pratham's Hospitality Training Centre in Bodh Gaya. The region, which was a hotbed of Naxalism till a few years ago, still lacks industries that can employ the local youth who do not want to continue in the traditional agrarian trade. Being a senior member of the community, Mr. Sakeel understands the importance of vocational training in finding stable jobs. *"Almost no household in this village has a male head of the family"*, says Mr. Sakeel, *"they have all gone to Delhi to weave garments"*.

While the youth are getting ready for vocational training, the children in the village are improving their reading and learning levels through Pratham's intervention. The Madrassa in Mr. Sakeel's village has introduced reading and math camps for children run by volunteers from the community who are trained by Pratham. The community has also offered space to Pratham to set up a Yuva Bhawan (youth community center) that will become a focal point for all youth and community-related activities in the area.

A further ten-minute drive from Mr. Sakeel's village is another isolated, remotely located Madrassa. The two-storied building, still under construction, is the only source of education for forty kids of different age groups from nearby villages. There has been a recent addition to the timetable for these kids: they must spend an extra hour in the evenings in Pratham's reading and math camps. The curriculum of the Madrassa now boasts of having a wide range of subjects: from Persian and Quranic studies to Hindi and Math.

Sipping tea, with a scenic platteland sunset as the background, the founder of this Madrassa tells us that the purpose of any educational institution, Madrassa or otherwise, is to prepare the children for the future.

Unsung heroes like him are breaking stereotypes, one day at a time; just like Pratham is teaching every child to read, one Madrassa at a time.

**Author:** Tushar Singh, Pratham