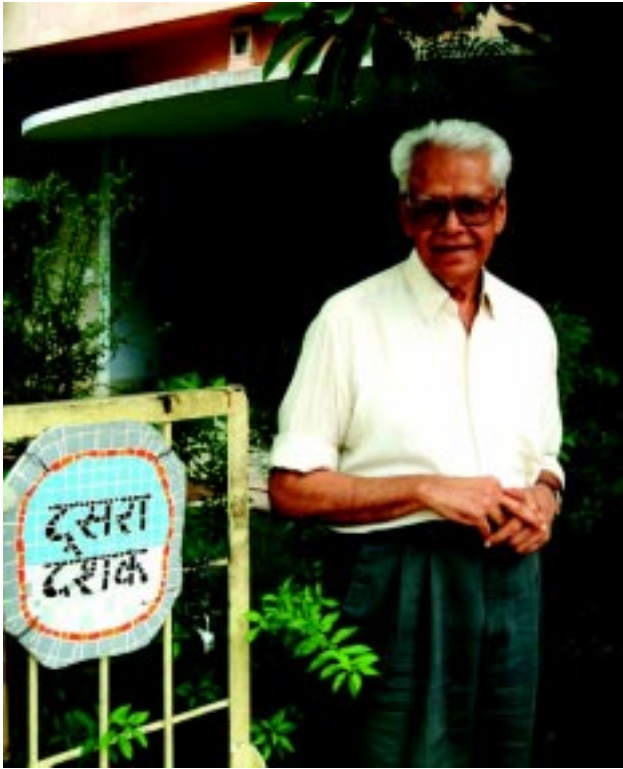


DOOSRA DASHAK PROJECT, FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT, RAJASTHAN



Anil Bordia outside the Doosra Dashak office

Anil Bordia traces his commitment to innovate, envision and create, to his schooling at Vidya Bhawan School in Udaipur, where grades were not assigned supreme importance; students were egged on to be creative and broad-minded, and to move beyond the dominant social and economic patterns. Bordia was inspired by his father, a great school teacher, and wanted to follow in his professional footsteps. Eventually, he joined the Indian Administrative Services, where he specialized in education. His childhood experience and inspiration set him apart from the rest of the bureaucrats. He was appointed to serve in numerous significant positions including, as director general of India's National Adult Education Program in 1977, at which time he formulated the adult education policy. Between 1987 and 1992 he served as India's education secretary, and had the opportunity to implement the new education policy.

During his tenure as education secretary, a clear shift of priority was made towards basic education, and a pioneer project for universalization of primary education was launched in Bihar and Rajasthan. This initiative known as Lok Jumbish, or 'people's movement', started in 1992 and developed a range of innovative approaches to ensure basic education and, through that, the fundamental skills and competencies that make for a better life.

For Anil Bordia, the starting point of any new venture lies in analyzing its challenge, and in acknowledging that he alone cannot provide answers. He reaches out to others with experience and understanding of the issue. He, then, works towards influencing positive decision-making to facilitate its implementation on the ground. As a rule, he pilot tests his new ventures on a small scale, learning and building from its results. These steps of implementation have guided Bordia through his life, in his various ventures. At the core of them all is to seek the seeds of meaning and tap the sources of energy that can transform society. He believes that those who are oppressed, whether by caste or gender or economic disadvantage, have an understanding of their existential reality and of how to address it. The only contribution an outsider can make is in enabling them to see that they can change their situation, and in providing them with the wherewithal to do so.

In 2001, Anil Bordia set up the Foundation for Education and Development and undertook the project of Doosra Dashak (literally, 'second decade'). It is committed to the education and development of persons in the 11 to 20 age-group and hopes to be a lever for the realization of the vision of a country of educated people – not only

of those who are literate and have relevant skills, but also of those imbued with values of healthy living, democracy, non-violence, respect and equality towards all men and women and conservation of the environment. It hopes to enhance their vocational skills and help them move towards livelihood-related issues. Finally, Doosra Dashak would like to see the energy of adolescents being harnessed for nation building through the creation of cadres who can provide educated, informed and responsible leadership. In order to get the project off the ground, the Tata Education Trust has supported Doosra Dashak since its inception in 2001 for a period of five years with an amount of Rs. 14 million against which Doosra Dashak raises a matching grant from other donors.

Adolescents comprise around 22 per cent of India's population; more than half of them have had no exposure to primary education, and many of the rest have been pushed out of an education

system they found irrelevant to their context. They are now trapped between childhood and adulthood, alienated from their local milieu and ancestral occupations, anxious of their physical and psychological changes, and increasingly burdened with adult responsibilities, including those of marriage, especially in rural areas where Doosra Dashak works. They enter adulthood with no education and life-skills, with poor awareness of sexual health and hygiene issues. On the other hand, this age-group possesses a lot of idealism and energy that needs to be catalyzed into something that is socially transformative; their potential needs to be unleashed for change and reconstruction. They are seeking relevant education, self-confidence, motivation and role models, failing which they are vulnerable as pawns in the hands of anti-social elements, who will channelize their energy into crime and religious fanaticism.

At the core of Doosra Dashak's strategy are



Taking a break: traditionally-attired girls playing carrom

residential camps for adolescents' integrated education, extending between three and four months and providing education that (a) takes cognisance of their earlier learning and experience, (b) is located in the adolescents' life context, (c) addresses issues that affect their lives and (d) incorporates life-skill training. Although most of the participants are those who have never been to school, there is a significant number that has dropped out from school in the past, and others who are enrolled in school, but are not attaining the desired kind of education.

Doosra Dashak has been organizing residential camps (separately for boys and girls) since May 2001 in the blocks of Bap (Jodhpur district) and Kishanganj (Baran district). The venue of the camp is usually in the outskirts of a village. This enables them to come out and learn freely, and adhere to the norms of the camp, which are often in defiance of traditional mores like untouchability and intermingling of diverse religious groups. A cadre of instructors have been trained to conduct the residential camps. They are selected not only on their ability to teach, but also on their ability to relate to and interact with the participants. The instructors, an equal number of men and women, live with the adolescents through the duration of the residential camps.

Doosra Dashak's effort begins much before the education camps are actually organized. It



Residential camp for girls

begins with community mobilization. Women's groups are encouraged to deliberate on their issues of concern, and to act as a support group to adolescents in their village. Doosra Dashak, thus, believes in the intrinsic as well as instrumental value of women's empowerment. Over the years, they have become a strong support for the organization's work, in motivating adolescents to attend the residential learning camps. Further, with a view to building a sense of local ownership of the intervention, Doosra Dashak works with the Panchayat and other social and religious leaders in the region. Its unit of intervention is a Panchayat Samiti, and it attempts to cover all the villages in it.

It is true that the residential courses have changed the lives and vision of the participants. After participating in the camps, they have shown consciousness of health and sanitation, and have gained in self-confidence. The camps have become a space for training in gender sensitivity and communal harmony, too, and Doosra Dashak hopes to see the results over time. Some of the trained participants have gone back to their villages and set up adolescent forums which have taken up activities around village sanitation, running libraries and assisting their peers with their studies. Many of them have started taking initiatives in participating in gram sabha meetings, and in seeking information through the Right to Information act. Through their effort, Anil Bordia and the Doosra Dashak team hope to turn the dominant tide of mainstream education. They recognize that educated people are, in many ways, worse off than those who have not been schooled, since education only results in incapability of productive activity, alienating its clients from traditional forms. Bordia fears that children will continue to drop out; and he believes that it is our obligation to provide them with an opportunity to learn and be empowered.