

A look inside Khelghar

(August 2024 to July 2025)

Highlights

The Khelghar of the Palakneeti family received an award from the Vanasthali organization in memory of the organization's founder, Nirmala Tai Purandare. Receiving an award from such a renowned and experienced institution working in the field of early childhood education is indeed an honour.

Six short films related to Khelghar's work were produced over the year. Out of these, three films have been specially made for use in our training programs. The organization VOPA created three films on the theme of *Positive Discipline*. Additionally, the organization Myelin produced an extensive podcast about the role of Khelghar.

A new book titled *Sodawave Netke* (Solve it Neatly) by Khelghar volunteer Aparna Kshirsagar was published. Aparna Tai has been working with the Palakneeti's Khelghar for many years in the area of language. This book serves as a companion to *Lihave Netke* (Write Neatly), written by Madhuri Purandare with the aim of helping children understand grammar and practice it in a joyful, playful manner.

This year, one of our former students, Hiramma Hedlagi, completed her BSc in Zoology with 75% marks and has taken admission for an MSW (Master of Social Work). Neha Khatravat also passed her BSc in Interior Design with 75% marks. Santosh Pawar completed his MSc in Computer Science with a CGPA score of 7.85.

This year, 15 students from Khelghar passed the 10th standard exams and 4 students passed the 12th standard exams. Seven of the 10th-grade students scored between 60–80%, while all four 12th-grade students scored between 50–70%. All of them intend to pursue further education.

Former Khelghar student Shreeshail Birajdar is now working as a resource person with the youth group. Shreeshail passed 10th standard in 2004 and went on to complete postgraduate studies in MSW and Social Entrepreneurship. After working for a few years at BARTI (Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Research and Training Institute), he has now started his own social organization.

Beginning

A new academic year! A new chapter has begun!

Currently, Khelghar is going through a difficult phase. The sky seems clouded with many challenges. True, this newsletter begins with questions and concerns... but hold on—we also want to share how our united team is bravely facing this situation.

Shortage of Teachers

Two of our experienced teachers who manage daily responsibilities at Khelghar went on maternity leave, shifting the burden of work to others. With our coordinator Anuradha Tai unavailable, coordination duties fell to Priyanka Patil and Shubhada Joshi. From finding new teachers to preparing them and dealing with sudden issues—it was chaotic.

Our older team members, those over sixty, had to gear up again. New young volunteers have also joined wholeheartedly. To maintain unity, understanding, and mutual respect, we hold team meetings every fortnight.

English Classes

Last year, we lost our beloved Deepali Tai Potdar unexpectedly. It was a huge emotional blow to all of us. One major impact was on the English classes. Manasi Mahajan had trained teachers to teach English, and some began conducting classes. However, some teachers educated in Marathi medium lacked confidence to teach English—so classes didn't take off.

We launched a campaign to attract new volunteers. Through personal outreach and monthly sessions led by Shubhada Joshi, 15–20 new volunteers joined us. After learning about Khelghar's methods, they began working with children. Five of them, with support from our class teachers, took on the challenge of teaching English. As a result, this year, English classes are running smoothly.

Changing School Schedules

Last year, all government school timings changed from 7 AM–12 PM to 10 AM–3 PM, affecting our 2–4 PM sessions, which had to be discontinued. Evening sessions were started instead. This year, schools are expected to run from 10 AM–4 PM, meaning even the 4–6 PM time slot will be affected.

We don't have enough space to conduct all classes in the evening.

Last year, our evening classes for grades 1 to 4 received a good response. So this year, we split them into two groups: one for grades 1–2 and another for grades 3–4. For this, we had to rent an additional space.

On one hand, we dream of providing quality education to more children in the locality, but on the other, rising costs are a big concern.

Changing Community Context

Parents now value education more and want their children to study as much as possible. But popular notions like sending children to English-medium schools or expensive coaching classes influence their decisions. Some even take loans to pay coaching fees.

These decisions often burden children and do more harm than good, but parents fail to see this.

Children love coming to Khelghar, but because of their packed schedules, they're tired and lose interest in studying—they just want to play.

The Mobile Frenzy

Having a mobile phone now seems like a basic need for every child. If not given by parents, children after grade 8 earn money to buy their own. All their free time is consumed by screen viewing. They stop playing. They get addicted to watching and making reels. Watching sports is a popular passtime.

Exposure to pornography draws them prematurely towards love, sex, and violence—it's practically an addiction.

We do organize sessions with Prayas or Mukta Chaitanya, but our efforts often fall short. We are seeing some children getting trapped in this web, right before our eyes. Sometimes we feel helpless in such situations.

Financial Concerns

The most pressing issue is financial. Both Wipro and Yardi Foundations had already informed us that last year was their final year of financial support.

Although we've sent proposals to other organizations, only Shashikala Foundation has responded so far. We haven't yet mastered reaching out via social media. We now rely on Khelghar's circle of well-wishers. Along with donating yourself, please share this newsletter with your friends. Do send us contacts of CSR wings or charitable organizations that might support us.

Encouraging Events from Last Year

Life skills education is essential to help children grow with empathy, understanding, and confidence to improve their own lives and surroundings. Last year, we developed a 3-month module called "*Finding Myself*", covering topics like self-awareness, interests, strengths & weaknesses, influences, and planning for the future. We documented the process, trained all teachers, and implemented it across all grades.

Project on Waste Management

From February to April, we worked with children on the topic of *waste*.

What kind of waste do we produce? How is it managed? What are its harmful effects? How can we practice waste segregation? The goal was to help children understand and adopt the 4Rs—Reduce, Repair, Reuse, Recycle.

Volunteers Ruby Rama Praveen, Aditi Deodhar, and Ojas Phatak supported this work.

Children conducted composting experiments using two bins and understood the importance of separating dry, non-biodegradable waste. Plastic waste was collected and sent to *Re-Charkha* for reuse. They interacted with Yuvraj Chabukswar, who manages community waste, and watched videos highlighting its impact. We also worked with parents. A meeting with Vaijnath Gaikwad from the Health Center gave parents a chance to share their challenges. In all, waste management was studied from multiple angles.

Festivals, Excursions, Art & Workshops

To keep children engaged and interested in learning, we held many activities—Diwali celebrations, annual gatherings, excursions, art programs, and workshops for children who lagged behind.

Art Week

After training from the Bangalore-based organization *ArtSpark*, we discovered a unique way to teach art. We understood how art closely connects to life skills: observation, inquiry, experimentation, decision-making, creativity, and perseverance.

In April, our artist friend Ranjit Kokate trained teachers in the ArtSpark method to work with children step-by-step. Students created wet-paint artwork and 2D-3D collage models. Children were deeply immersed in this 5-day workshop and created beautiful art pieces.

Focused Support for Struggling Students

In May, Sujata Lohokare conducted training on remedial education methods for all Khelghar workers. New volunteers also participated.

We worked for 15 consecutive days, 2 hours daily, with about 25 students—2–3 students per volunteer. This individual attention helped significantly improve students' reading and writing skills. These students are now learning confidently with their peers.

Excursions

Children love excursions!

In the past, we struggled to arrange them due to lack of funds. This year, thanks to one organization, we secured funding for the trips. Both children and their parents from the Khelghar friends' group wanted a trip to the seashore. We took younger children to a water-based location. Through the planning process—research, maps, budgeting, bookings—children learned enthusiastically. Older kids took on responsibility for managing the trips. Afterwards, they made drawings and wrote about their experiences. These trips also led to great conversations between kids and teachers, group bonding, mutual understanding, and stronger relationships.

Khelghar's Annual Gathering

The gathering is a truly joyful and energizing event!

Choosing something you love, working hard to perfect it, and presenting it on stage is a beautiful experience.

This year, the children performed wonderful dances.

They chose upbeat songs in different languages that got everyone grooving.

There were songs, poems, plays—this year's highlight was plays based on English songs and storybooks.

Children also showcased self-made reels. Parents shared heartfelt messages and even performed a lively dance!

Such events bring students, teachers, and volunteers closer, forming lasting bonds.

At the gathering, the youth group paid tribute to our beloved Dipali Potdar Tai, singing the song she taught them and sharing messages. Deepak Zhende made a video in her memory, moving everyone to tears.

'Games' Project in Language Learning

We applied the *Project-Based Language Learning* approach in our Marathi classes using the theme “Games”.

Over the course of a month, children studied traditional and modern games.

They explored the games their teachers used to play and learned new ones from them.

They created lists of traditional and modern games.

To learn about unknown games, they decided to interview teachers—learning how to conduct interviews and take notes.

They also learned how to write game rules using an activity from the *Kulfi* magazine.

When asked what it takes to play a game well, they made insightful observations:

– For Blindfold games: “You need to listen with full focus, Tai.”

– For Carrom: “Watch how the good players play.”

– For Kabaddi: “You need stamina, strength, and speed!”

As games were part of their everyday lives, they were excited to talk about them.

In groups, they chose one game, made a poster, and presented it—gaining public speaking experience too.

Box: Khelghar’s Close Mentoring Workshop

For the past four years, we have been working on Khelghar’s expansion project in collaboration with the Wipro Foundation. Each year, we organize a 15-day training program for grassroots-level workers from across India. Additionally, we work closely with two organizations annually, staying in constant contact and supporting them as per their needs.

From **April 16–19, 2025**, we organized training for three such organizations.

One of them, *Samavesh*, works with nomadic and denotified communities such as the Meers, Fakirs, and Devipujaks in the Mehsana region of Gujarat. Most children from these communities are out of school.

Navjeevan works with children of waste-pickers in Kalyan, and *GramUrja* works with government schools in the Ambajogai region. Here, families often immigrate for sugarcane cutting for 4–5 months, which adds complexity to children’s education.

With these organizations, we worked on the theme “**Towards Joyful Learning**”. The process of teaching and learning was mutual. The challenges faced by the communities they serve are deeply moving. For instance, while narrating how children in Gujarat, barefoot in the scorching sun, run to attend classes, all participants, including the facilitators, were brought to tears.

All three organizations continue their work in the face of numerous difficulties. This workshop brought many shades of deprivation to light. Through several hands-on activities, the concept of teaching and learning unfolded in practical ways. For all of us, the empathy-driven inspiration from this workshop was incredibly meaningful.

In today's times—even in the 21st century—this reinforced the need to work with marginalized communities whose children are still outside the mainstream education system.

Reorganizing the Youth Group

The number of youths in the group has now crossed 40. One weekly class is no longer sufficient to meaningfully engage with all of them. While some students actively participate and progress well, others drop out of the group.

To ensure more consistent participation and provide the support young people need at this stage, we began reorganizing the youth group from April.

Conversations with the students, facilitators, and class teachers helped us define a new direction. This year, along with Shailaja Tai, Radha Joshi will be working with the youth on mental health.

Shreeshail Birajdar will guide them through project-based work.

When students choose a topic they care about and present it to others, they naturally learn a lot in the process. Jyoti Kudale will help 10th-grade newcomers integrate into the group. In addition to the weekly class, we also plan to hold **Sunday workshops as needed**.

We want to ensure students get opportunities to participate in programs such as the **Narmada Bal Mela**, **Lokshahi Utsav**, and youth events like the **Govind Pansare Yuva Jagar** organized by *Bebaak Collective* in Panhala. We are also working on **career counseling** and **one-on-one mentorships**.

Naturally, all this leads to increased costs. We hope that our well-wishers and friends of Khelghar will support this project and the educational assistance provided to these young people.

Upcoming Plans

In May, we give students a 15-day break and use this time to evaluate the project, teachers, and children. We try to find solutions to the challenges that emerge.

This year's evaluation led to the following decisions:

- Special efforts will be made to **encourage reading among children**. One day per week will be reserved for reading in the children's schedule.
- To enhance teacher reading, a session will be planned every 15 days.
- We aim to develop capacities such as critical thinking, logical reasoning, estimation, imagination, observation, reading, writing, and communication. For this, we will design modules on **measurement, origami, map-reading, time-telling, and shop-fair activities**.
- Teachers will be supported to creatively plan their classes.
- We will explore **more inclusive methods of evaluation**.
- We need to become proficient in using **LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Instagram** for fundraising through social media.

In Conclusion

As with last year, we are confident that we will face every challenge with unity, enthusiasm, and creativity this year too. All we need is your support and encouragement— Just place your hand on our shoulder and say, “Go for it!”

Do share your thoughts after reading this newsletter.

Invitation – Meet in Person

We are planning a “*Direct Meet*” program to interact with and understand the youth group members.

This year, let’s meet at **Khelghar on Friday, July 18, 2025, from 5 to 8 PM.**