

Case study — Anveshi

The cramped eighth-standard classroom in a government school in Nacharam, Hyderabad, listens with rapt attention to Anuradha, a teacher of a nearby school, as she reads from the story book *3/4, 1/2, Bajji, Bajji*, which depicts the experience of a child as he intelligently comes to grips with his family's marginalised status and acts accordingly.

He has to somehow obtain second-hand textbooks for himself, as his family barely has the wherewithal to purchase new ones for him. The narration of the story does not highlight empathy; rather, it portrays the reality of the child's life, and the way he copes with it. For the 70 odd young minds in the classroom, this is a tale that is synonymous with their own lives, and they relate to it with enthusiasm. An animated discussion ensues, while Anuradha gets feedback on the story.



3/4, 1/2, Bajji, Bajji is one of the many stories that **Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies (Anveshi), Hyderabad**, has put together as a collection, under an innovative project titled 'Different Tales: Stories from Marginal Cultures and Regional Languages' – a project that commenced in November 2005, supported by a grant from the Trust under its **publication initiative, Parag**.

The project marks an endeavour to produce illustrated storybooks in Telugu and Malayalam, as well as in English translations for children in the 9-13 age group. The stories are set in the social

and cultural contexts of marginalised childhoods and communities, and stem from a perceived need for such literature for children from all backgrounds, so that different childhood experiences, which are usually not depicted in storybooks, are told with sensitivity and insight.

Over the past two years, Anveshi has put together a collection of 20 stories, ten each from Malayalam and Telugu, each reflecting the spirit of the project. Many of the writers draw upon their own childhoods to depict different ways of growing up in an often-hostile world, discovering new relationships with peers, parents and other adults.

The stories take the reader on an enticing journey, as they speak of delicious cuisines, ingenious little games, unexpected lessons at school, and heart-warming friendships. The stories are illustrated with some eye-catching visuals that vastly enhance their appeal. They were sketched by a group of young artists from the Fine Arts Department of MS University, Baroda, who worked closely with **Anveshi** during this journey.

Anveshi plans to publish the collection shortly, and make the books available at reasonable or specially subsidised rates to children in government schools, social welfare hostels and urban bastis.

The **Trust's publication initiative, Parag**, launched during 2005-06, promotes innovative publishing of children's literature and educational material in various Indian languages. The initiative encompasses:

- Publication of books in various Indian languages
- Professional development among illustrators, writers and publishers

- Dissemination of professional writing
- Networking among publishers and educationists

Besides **Anveshi**, other organisations collaborating with the Trust within **Parag** include:

- **Eklavya**, Bhopal, which is strengthening and up-scaling its publications programme that develops, disseminates and markets a variety of new books, besides supporting their library programme
- **Nirantar**, Delhi, which develops educational material for neo-literates in the form of a bimonthly magazine, besides producing a variety of teaching learning material and offering short courses on participatory material development
- **Planet Read, Pondicherry**, which is piloting the use of Same Language Subtitling (SLS) for animated stories in two tribal languages (Bhil and Santhali) by developing four anibooks, and assessing the impact of these animated books on the reading habits of 2,000 children
- **Ravi J Matthai Centre for Educational Innovation (RJMCEI)**, Ahmedabad, which is carrying out SLS of nine, song-based programmes on television, in as many languages, reaching out to 200 million early literate viewers, across eight regional states and the Hindi speaking belt, leading to improvement in the reading skills of school going children and semi-literate / early literate adults
- **Centre for Learning Resources (CLR)**, Pune which is developing bilingual reading material for school children in Marathi / Hindi – English format, consisting of instructional material, recreational and reference material.