



children being sent to English medium schools. All of us in the group backed the idea, and so began this novel campaign that saw the number of students being enrolling in ZP schools go up.

A round of the campaign begins with the teachers identifying, and collecting the names of, all children in their villages eligible for admission to the 1st std. Then they put up this list in the town square, or near the village panchayat office or possibly a temple. At the same time, the teachers also campaign door-to-door, requesting families to enroll the children in the ZP schools, and providing information about the various projects and programmes that these schools have. All 1048 schools in Gondia district are digital, and use a semi-English method of education. They also use the principles of constructivism while teaching, which puts the child at the centre and lets her decide her own pace of learning. The school gardens, grounds and well-equipped libraries are among the other attractions. Families are happy to hear about all these aspects. The teachers also emphasise that the children's guardians may visit the schools at their convenience, to ensure that all the programmes discussed are indeed part of the school.

Our efforts have borne fruit, and over the two years of the campaign so far we have noticed a substantial drop in the number of children going to English medium schools. This could also be due to the hefty fees, and additional expenses for every project, in those schools, whereas the ZP schools keep a tight leash on such expenses. Moreover, families do not have to give any "donation" to get their children admission in the ZP schools. The most important factor is that the progress made by other students of ZP schools in their own villages convinces parents and guardians that their children will learn English, too, in these schools.

Once families are convinced, the 1st std students are taken to school on their first day with great pomp and ceremony. In every village of the district, there is a procession of the older and new students of the local ZP school. Students are given colourful caps, and the new students are given balloons and flowers. Raising slogans that emphasise the need to educate the child, this procession of students and their teachers goes around the village. In

my village of Mohgaon Tilli, we take the new students around the village in a bullock cart decorated with banana leaf stalks, balloons, and mango leaf garlands. Tilakchand Bopchey, Chairperson of the 'Tantamukt' (dispute-free) village committee, makes a bullock cart available for this occasion. The school band and the slogans reverberate throughout the village.



**A procession to make the first day of school special**

Once the procession reaches the school, the new students are welcomed in the traditional way with a lamp, and a gudhi (mast) is hoisted at the school gate by members of the students' council along with important people from the village. Children receive sweets from the villagers, sometimes even a ceremonial lunch. At the end of the ceremony, bouquets are given to the guardians of the 1st std students. In 2017, 18 new students entered the 1st std in our school. Though school is on all through April, the new students are not forced to sit in class every day. Instead, teachers use this time to familiarise them with the school and its surroundings, and to build up a rapport with the newcomers, who start coming to school regularly only from June.

In 2017, the District Council administration had advertised the campaign for school enrollment, 'Gudhi Padva – Shala Pravesh Vadhava'. Speaking about this new thrust

through advertising, Education Officer Ulhas Narad said, “The teachers of the Gondia ZP schools are taking great pains to ensure that students get a good education. Each school has undertaken some programme or the other. All schools in the district have turned digital and have adopted the principles of constructivism in teaching. Moreover, as all schools are semi-English, students are also learning the English language.”

“So this year we decided to advertise the names of those district administrative officers who studied in ZP schools as children themselves. It is a fact that most civil service officers studied in ZP or municipal schools. Through these flex-boards we wanted to showcase that the ZP schools impart quality education. We do not want students to come to our schools just because they get free education and meals. We want them to come because their guardians are convinced that their children will receive quality education in our schools.”



### **A poster of the District Collector proudly proclaiming to be a student of ZP school**

The ZP schools in Gondia also hold summer camps along the lines of those held by elite schools in urban areas. They call these camps ‘Sanskar Shibir’ (‘Value education workshop’). These workshops take place from 14 April to 9 May, for two hours each

morning. There are sessions on good handwriting, mathematical games, making useful things out of waste, needlework and handicrafts, as well as environment protection, tree plantation, games, karate and even horse-riding, all free of cost. The disabled children are also given training in rolling agarbattis (incense sticks), making doormats, using the photocopy machine, skills that can help them learn to be financially independent.

This year we saw a very positive outcome of the flex hoardings which had the District Collector, Dr Abhimanyu Kale, and the Chief Executive Officer, Dr CL Pulkundwar, proudly proclaiming that they had been ZP school students. Last year, the campaign had led to 9000 enrollments; this year, it was 10,922 new students in the 1st std of ZP schools in the district.

In this manner, Gondia has established its own unique admission pattern in the state.