

Prayatna

In this article, we explore how Prayatna, based in Jharkhand, is redefining grassroots education by deeply engaging with communities before taking any action. Rather than arriving with pre-set solutions, Prayatna invests time listening to teachers, parents, and local leaders, understanding their realities and aspirations. Their commitment to participatory development means education initiatives grow organically, rooted in local needs and ownership. This approach builds trust and ensures that change is sustainable, meaningful, and driven by the people it serves.

Friends of Tribals Society

In this article, we highlight Friends of Tribals Society (FTS), an organization that has quietly built a vast network of tribal schools across India through a uniquely community-centered model. Rather than imposing external agendas, FTS recruits teachers from within the villages they serve, ensuring education is culturally relevant and locally owned. Their philosophy focuses on values like self-respect and self-reliance, fostering both literacy and empowerment. This grassroots approach has made FTS a beacon of hope in some of the country's most remote and underserved regions.

Learn more about these stories on page number 3 & 5.

The Crucial Role of Indian NGOs

There are many who feel differently about the role of Indian NGOs, ranging from those who believe that NGOs are just a sham or a shade lower than fraud, to those who believe they are merely family-run businesses in the garb of philanthropy—or, in the worst case, non-entities. This article will dispel all such doubts in the reader's mind and establish beyond doubt the crucial role that NGOs play in India's social sector.

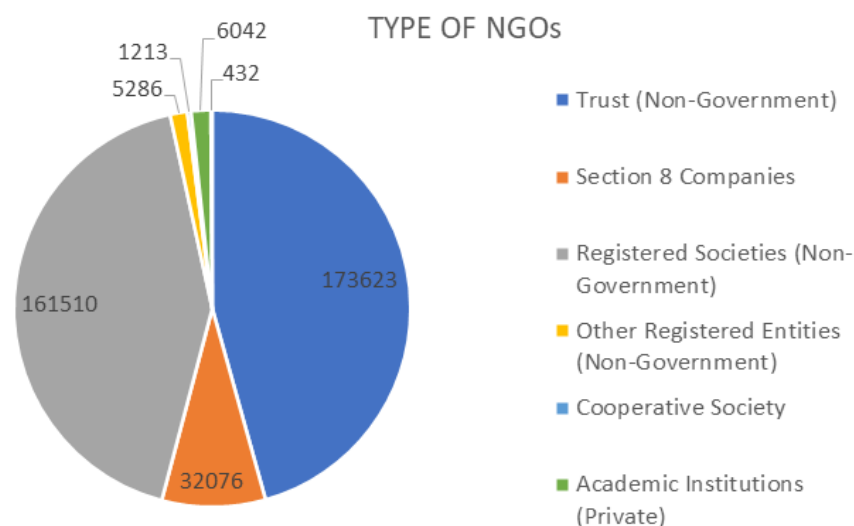
First, we have a large number of NGOs working at the grassroots level. Secondly, they are registered and exempt from income tax and are not fly-by-night souls. Thirdly, their areas of work are not only the areas of SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) but also the social sector that the Indian government considers important and allocates almost 7.6% of GDP (FY25 Budget Estimates) as funding. Lastly, the funds these NGOs spend for the social and economic upliftment of the underprivileged, in aggregate, is NOT small at all.

Number of NGOs

As of the date of this article (20.5.2025), there are 3,80,182 active NGOs as monitored by the NGO Darpan website, a Government of India portal. As a reference point, it is important to understand that NGOs not registered on the NGO Darpan website are debarred from receiving grants from PSUs (Public Sector Undertakings) and CSR funds from the private sector as well. Hence, this large number of registered NGOs is not only real but also substantial—either in their scope of work or their strong balance sheets.

Type of Registered NGOs

The pie chart below gives an analysis of the types of NGOs at work in India and the kind of statute under which they are either registered or born. This data is again sourced from the NGO Darpan website:



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 Jeet Edu

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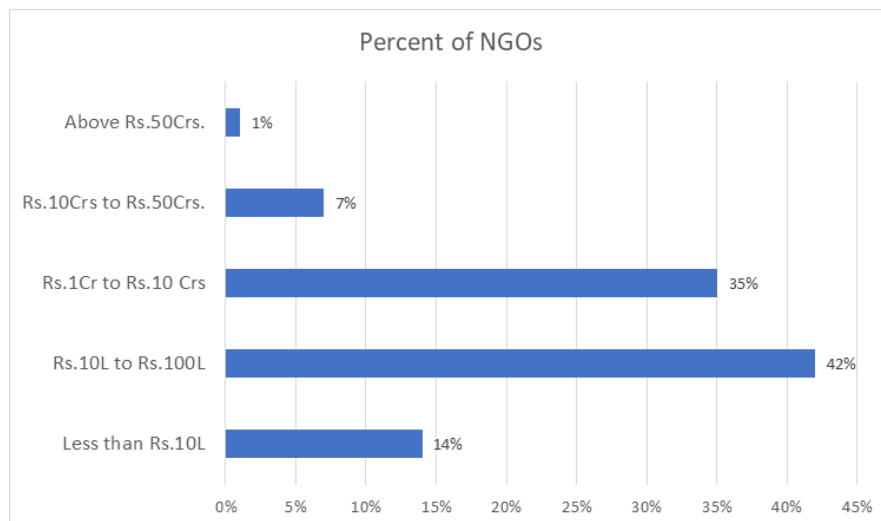
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Areas of Social Work

The top sectors that these NGOs work focusedly on for the underprivileged are Education, Sports and Culture, Health & Hygiene, Vocational Training and Employment, and Women's Development and Empowerment, including the differently abled. Nearly 80% of the funds spent by these NGOs are concentrated in these areas listed, and they are critical indeed.

A Peek into NGOs' Budgets:

A recent report by AT Kearney, Indian Nonprofit Report: Role, Evolution and Impact, brings out interesting empirical evidence on the basis of an all-India survey of 400 NGOs regarding the budgets or balance sheet strengths of these NGOs.



NGOs contribution to social sector

If we extrapolate this data to the universe of registered NGOs in India—a number equal to 3,80,182—and take the lower range value as the average spend of each NGO (for example, 1% of NGOs spend above ₹50 crores per annum, so consider each one spends only ₹50 crores), even then the average annual spend of these NGOs combined is ₹6,06,000 crores. To put it in perspective, the Government of India spends ₹25.7 lakh crores every year (7.6% of GDP FY 2024-25BE) on the social sector, which means NGOs spend 25% of GOI expenditure. Not small by any measure!

Summary

This article aims to debunk prevailing misconceptions about Indian NGOs—such as the belief that they are fraudulent, family-run ventures, or insignificant players in the social sector. It presents compelling evidence to the contrary, illustrating that NGOs in India are not only legitimate and formally registered entities but also vital contributors to national development. Operating across critical areas such as education, healthcare, vocational training, sports, culture, and women's empowerment, these NGOs work tirelessly for the upliftment of the underprivileged and marginalized sections of society. The data highlights that nearly 80% of NGO activities are focused on these key areas, ensuring a targeted and impactful approach to social welfare. Furthermore, the financial footprint of these organizations is far from negligible. With over 3.8 lakh NGOs registered on the government-monitored NGO Darpan portal, and a collective estimated annual expenditure of ₹6.06 lakh crores, their role becomes even more pronounced. This massive figure constitutes approximately 25% of the Indian government's annual spending on the social sector (₹25.7 lakh crores), underscoring their indispensable presence. Thus, NGOs are not just auxiliary support systems; they are essential pillars of India's socio-economic development framework, complementing and amplifying governmental efforts in building a more inclusive and equitable society.

Prayatna: Nurturing Alert, Aware, and Responsible Citizens through Holistic Education

In 2009, amidst the corridors of India's booming software industry, a young engineer named Praneet found himself reflecting on a question far removed from the codes and commands of his day job: What is the true purpose of education? Born into an environment where creativity, engineering, and inquiry were part of everyday life, Praneet's introspection eventually gave birth to Prayatna, an education-focused organization driven by a simple but powerful mission — to cultivate alert, aware, and responsible citizens.

Today, Prayatna stands as a dynamic force in rural and under-resourced education in India. Founded not by career educators but by engineers and technologists, Prayatna bridges the worlds of technical innovation and social transformation. It doesn't seek to replace government institutions but instead complements them by working within the system — especially with government schools — to empower children with the foundational tools of life.

From Coaching to Character Building: The Holistic Model

At its core, Prayatna's work goes beyond textbooks and exams. It began with remedial education and academic coaching for students in rural areas, but quickly evolved into something much deeper. "We don't want to run schools. That's the government's job," says Praneet. "But we want to build the foundation of life."

That foundation is grounded in holistic development — an approach that combines academic support with personality development, character education, and life skills. Their programs include remedial classes to bridge learning gaps in subjects like mathematics and science, career guidance sessions, and activities designed to boost self-confidence, awareness, and social responsibility.

In essence, Prayatna aims to develop not just good students, but good human beings. The emphasis is particularly placed on underprivileged children who often lack the mentorship and exposure that private institutions afford.

Transformational, Not Transactional

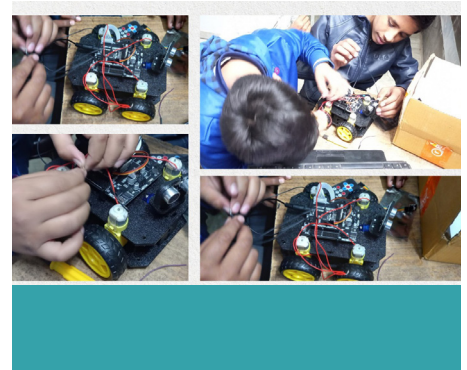
What sets Prayatna apart is its unwavering belief in education as a transformational process — not a business model. Their work is not about short-term outcomes or scaling for profit. It's about slow, steady, and meaningful change.

This philosophy also extends to how they measure success. Rather than just exam scores or placement numbers, Prayatna looks at broader indicators: How aware is a student about their own potential? Are they asking questions? Are they thinking critically? Do they show compassion and a sense of responsibility toward others?

The organization's self-developed Holistic Development Model serves as a roadmap for this kind of transformation — providing a framework that is flexible yet rooted in deep educational values.

Balancing Digital Innovation with Human Connection

In recent years, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, Prayatna embraced digital learning as a tool to stay connected with students.





They provided one-on-one digital support, ensuring that learning didn't stop when the schools closed. However, this period also revealed the limitations of remote education, especially in under-resourced contexts where devices, electricity, and internet access can't be taken for granted. As a result, Prayatna has consciously taken a balanced approach to technology. On one hand, they are investing in digital transformation through a dedicated Research & Development lab, where students themselves are being introduced to deep learning and encouraged to lead their own projects. On the other hand, they are mindful of not letting digital interactions replace the emotional and social connection that in-person learning fosters.

"There must be a balance," Praneet explains. "If we go fully digital, how will we really connect with the students?"

The Road Ahead: Reforms and Resilience



Prayatna's work aligns in many ways with the vision laid out by India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 — which calls for critical thinking, experiential learning, and character development. But as the team notes, systemic change is still slow. This makes the role of organizations like Prayatna all the more vital. By working in parallel with schools rather than replacing them, by focusing on students rather than structures, and by investing in the long game of transformation rather than the fast track of metrics, Prayatna is creating ripples that could one day shape the tide of education reform. In a world where education is often equated with competition and credentials, Prayatna reminds us that it is ultimately about connection, conscience, and contribution.

Topics	General Statistics	Post Intervention
Teacher to student ratio	1:100	1:30
Regular Assessment Mechanism	poor	Monthly
Exposure to Digital Learning	Poor	Initiated
Passing ratio of Class X	65-75 %	100 %
Communication & Personality development	None	Excellent
Exposure to outside world	None	Initiated
Exposure through Co-curricular	Initiated	Excellent



Friends of Tribals Society: Lighting the Flame of Learning in India's Tribal Heartlands

In the forgotten folds of India's tribal belts — where infrastructure is minimal, schools are distant, and generations have grown up without access to structured learning — Friends of Tribals Society (FTS) has quietly planted the seeds of education and empowerment. Founded in 1989 in Kolkata, FTS began with a simple yet powerful belief: that education is the most effective way to uplift marginalized communities and bring about sustainable change. Over the years, the organization has grown into one of India's largest grassroots education movements, reaching millions of tribal children across West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and parts of the Northeast, who might otherwise have been left out of the country's development story.

At the heart of this effort is the Ekal Vidyalaya model — a single-teacher, single-room, non-formal school that operates in some of the most remote and underserved villages in India. These schools are not built of concrete alone; they are built on trust, inclusion, and local participation. They function for a few hours each day, focusing on foundational literacy and numeracy, health education, cultural identity, and civic awareness. Each Ekal teacher is chosen from the same village, enabling deeper community ties and more effective learning. The Ekal Vidyalaya model is not just cost-efficient — it's deeply human, empowering children with knowledge and their communities with pride.

The success of the model is rooted in the organization's "Three S" philosophy: Sanskar (Values), Swabhiman (Self-respect), and Swavalamban (Self-reliance). It recognizes that education must go beyond textbooks and exams. Children are taught to respect their elders, protect the environment, and cherish their cultural traditions. They are encouraged to question, to dream, and to see themselves as agents of change within their villages. This blend of character development and basic education builds not only literacy but also a sense of belonging and purpose. It's a curriculum that's both ancient and urgent, blending the wisdom of India's civilizational ethos with the needs of today's fast-changing world.

FTS also recognizes that education today cannot remain analog. While their core model is deeply rooted in face-to-face instruction and human connection, the organization is now exploring ways to incorporate digital tools that can enrich the learning experience without replacing the soul of the program. From visual learning aids to basic tablets where feasible, FTS is experimenting with hybrid models to prepare tribal children for a digital future, even as they stay grounded in their roots. This transformation is being guided not by trend but by need, feasibility, and community feedback, ensuring that tech never becomes a barrier or distraction.

This direction of thinking closely aligns with the vision of platforms like Jeet Edu, which aim to build crowd-sourced, accessible lesson databases to support grassroots educators across India. By aligning their curriculum with such digital repositories, FTS can broaden the resource base for their teachers, improve quality without increasing costs, and introduce tribal students to newer ways of learning. FTS believes this synergy could accelerate the digital transformation of rural education while preserving the community-driven ethos that has been its hallmark for over three decades. As India steps into a new era of education, equity, and innovation, Friends of Tribals Society stands as a shining example of what's possible when passion meets persistence, and when a nation's most underserved citizens are seen not as beneficiaries, but as co-creators of their own futures. The movement continues to grow — quietly, purposefully, and with the unwavering belief that every child, no matter how remote their home, deserves a light of learning.



Member organizations of JEET

Vipla Foundation

www.viplafoundation.org

Activities : Education Initiatives, Skill Development Programs, Community Development

VKRCE Trust

YouTube@MathsMadeSweet

Activites : Education, Dlgital Video Library, Training.

Ramakrishna Sarada Samiti

www.rkssngo.org

Activities : Education, Women's Empowerment and Health Camps

National Association for the Blind

www.nabindia.org.in

Activities : Prevention of blindness and low vision, Education, Talking books, Braille press, Vocational training, etc.

Bombay Community Public Trust

www.bcpt.org.in

Activities : Educational scholarships, medical relief, development of some training manuals and films, conducting NGO development activities and projects through NGOs

Shree Samarth Vyayam Mandir

<https://ssvmdadar.com/>

Activities : Sports Training & Certification and Yoga

MSP Foundation

<http://www.msp-edu.org/>

Activities : Educating, uplifting and strengthening through schools including the villages of Ambavade and Gursale, in Central Maharashtra.

Muktangan Education Trust

<https://muktanganedu.org/>

Activities : Seven Mumbai Municipal schools Integrated with a Teacher Education Center, Outreach through Collaborative Learning, Research and Advocacy

From Mandates to Movements: Why Grassroots Action is Key to Rural Education Reform

Last month, Shiksha Sangam, hosted by the Jharkhand Education Project Council (JEPC) and Collectives for Integrated Livelihood Initiatives (CINI), brought a crucial shift in the education discourse by centering grassroots voices — teachers, panchayat members, School Management Committees (SMCs), and NGOs. At a time when education policy is often shaped in distant offices, this gathering grounded the conversation in the realities and possibilities of rural education. India's rural education system has long struggled with a paradox. Government initiatives have provided infrastructure like school buildings, mid-day meals, and digital chalkboards, yet learning outcomes remain poor. Teacher vacancies, absenteeism, outdated teaching methods, and weak accountability continue to hamper progress. This reflects not a lack of intent but gaps in implementation, ownership, and local relevance. Shiksha Sangam underscored that real transformation lies in empowering villages themselves. Giving SMCs, Gram Panchayats, and community members genuine control over their schools is not symbolic — it's strategic. When communities collectively own their education ecosystem, change is rooted and sustainable. It shifts from mere attendance monitoring to active engagement — fostering dialogue between teachers and parents, tracking learning, addressing infrastructure needs, and envisioning a better educational future together.

NGOs and grassroots collectives are vital in this ecosystem. They bring localized understanding of language, culture, and geography and often combine academic learning with life skills, gender awareness, digital literacy, and vocational training. However, their impact can be limited without a structured framework that encourages collaboration with government machinery. Rather than working in silos, government and civil society must co-design, co-implement, and co-own solutions. Digital technology offers promising tools but risks becoming another layer of exclusion if poorly implemented. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 advocates technology integration, but many rural areas still face challenges like unreliable electricity, poor internet, and lack of devices. Digital solutions must be low-cost, locally relevant, and language-accessible, complementing—not replacing—the trusted presence of local teachers and community volunteers. Hybrid approaches combining digital content with in-person mentoring may hold the key. There is also significant potential in leveraging open-source, crowdsourced educational content created by public-spirited educators across India. Yet, digital integration must be driven by genuine needs, especially for first-generation learners who often lack academic support at home. The focus should be on making digital meaningful, not just digital for the sake of it.

Another crucial insight from Shiksha Sangam was the need to rethink how success is measured. Beyond enrollment and exam scores, success should be defined by critical thinking, community participation, confidence, and student well-being. When children feel heard and respected, education becomes a living experience, not a mere formality. Ultimately, Shiksha Sangam reminds us that education reform must be a people's movement, not just a top-down mandate. It requires trusting local actors, decentralizing decision-making, and centering the realities of rural children. Teachers must be partners in pedagogy, not mere policy enforcers. Digital tools should support human relationships, not supplant them. In a diverse country like India, one-size-fits-all solutions will fail. But when communities — panchayat members, educators, parents, and children — come together to envision change, real transformation begins. As India advances toward NEP 2020's vision, fostering such dialogues and piloting decentralized, collaborative models will be crucial. Only then can every child, whether in a bustling city or a remote hamlet, not just access education but truly thrive.