



Gitanjali Dehuri, mother of a one year old toddler, lives in the remote village of Banjhiamba. Today Gitanjali walks with the exuberance of a child who has suddenly discovered a new toy. With a smile that radiates pride and achievement she shyly admits that the ‘Gramin Pathshala’ (Community School) started by Bansidhar & Ila Panda Foundation(BIPF) has opened a new world for her and 29 other women in Banjhiamba , a hamlet of Kochilagaon village under Mangarajpur Gram Panchayat in Tangi-Choudwar Block. 25 yr old Gitanjali and her friends have been initiated into the world of literacy. “Till today I managed with thumb impressions. Now I can sign my name and read Odia books. The writings on walls and hoardings which were like pictures earlier come alive as I can decipher their meaning.” She says with pride.

30 Km off the National Highway, surrounded by hills and jungles and cut off from the rest of the world, the 82 inhabitants living in 21 houses of village Banjhiamba depended entirely on selling firewood and paddy cultivation from a meagre 5.5 acres. The nearest school being 15 Km away the entire community languished in illiteracy and lack of basic amenities like health, sanitation, etc ; making them vulnerable to diseases as well as market exploitation.

BIPF assessed the scenario and took upon itself to begin the change by opening a ‘Gramin Pathshala’ in the area. Teachers, Anganwadi workers, ASHAs and Govt Officials from Departments of Health and Women & Child Development now visit the village at regular intervals. The visible change has instilled a new hope in the people.

“We sit for an hour or two in the evening after our daily chores. I can read my son’s immunization dates. My husband now consults me in family decisions. It is as if a new life has opened up to us.” Says Gitanjali with her charming smile that says more than her words.

I am now 25 yrs old and for 24 years and nine months I managed with the thumb impression only. Now I am writing and can put my signature in paper. With this I am reading the odia books slowly leaving behind the illiterate world. While going in to the nearby market, now I am trying to read the odia writings written on different soaps and hoardings, which I never managed. This is not the only case of mine it is with all the 29 girls and women who are reading in the Gramin Pathasala (Community School). All thanks to Bansidhar & Ila Panda Foundation. The school came to the community. With a smiley face said Gitanjali Dehuri of village Banjhiamba of Mangarajpur G.P.