

## NAHEED AQUEEL :DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP AT GRASS ROOT LEVEL



**A literacy class organized by Prayatna Foundation in progress.**

When Naheed came to Lucknow in 1998 with a degree in Commerce and took up the job of a Manager Sales Tax in the Lucknow branch of the Bangalore based firm Electronic and Control Put Ltd , little did she imagine that she would quit the job to become a full time activist .But her experiences in the city in her attempt to live an independent life were harrowing . She realized that if she with her education and financial independence found it so difficult, what would be the plight of single woman (be they widows or divorcees) from the vulnerable sections of society? She decided to do her mite for making their life endurable.

And this resolve to support the needy was in keeping with the traditions of her family .Her grandfather Nazim Ali who had extensive land in Teri village of district Sultanpur, was a freedom fighter and an MLA for 15years! His motto was to serve the people irrespective of caste or creed and he distributed considerable land to the landless Dalits and Muslims .

A liberal, who believed in education and empowerment of women, he set up a school in the village and also ensured that the women in the family were educated. It was her grandfather who ensured that her mother Noorjehan who had only been thought the Quran before marriage was educated at home up to eight standard. Naheed and her three sisters grew up in this liberal atmosphere without any hindrance in following their dreams. It was this upbringing which enabled her to take the decision of quitting her job and setting up of the PrayatnaFoundation in 2005.

The objective of the Prayatna Foundation is to work for the legal rights of the marginalized and vulnerable sections of the community with special focus on capacity building and developing leadership in women, specially single women

from these sections of society .In this endeavors the Prayatna Foundation has partnered with PAAC,(Poorest Areas Civil Society) and supported by the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust .

I learnt about Naheed Aqueel's endeavors quite by chance : it was an email by one of the members of the Association Of Muslim professionals (AMP) who drew AMP's attention to her work and informed that she had won the Hindustan Times Women Award 2015 . I was impressed : it is rare to find a single Muslim woman working as an activist in the rural areas of Lucknow and Barabankhi .I immediately Google and learnt that Naheed 's foundation had established the Prayatna Vikas Manch in Barabankhi district which now enlisted 20,000 volunteers for raising issues of legal rights for land and education .

The Foundation and the Manch have been working in 79 villages of the two districts and have manage to enroll nearly 1400 children e into schools , given 50 scholarships, obtained houses for 72 homeless families, land for 18 landless farmers , installed 32 hand pumps and got 16 roads constructed . Though modest , it is considerable achievement considering the finances available .But the area in which her work is laudable is in skill development and capacity building in women specially single woman of these villages through women's literacy and skill development classes .

In the last five years i.e. from 2011 to 2015 the Prayatna Foundation has taken up a multi pronged

1. Establishment educational programmed which includes the following:  
of women's literacy centre.
2. Proper implementation of education right bill in primary and middle schools.
3. Re-enrollment of dropout children and to organize an awareness campaign to ensure regular presence of students in school.
4. To organize girl's education awareness program regularly.
5. Capacity building of the members of the school management committee and to organize regular meeting with them.
6. To organize educational tours of women and children.
7. Formation and capacity building of "Baal Samooh" and "Kishori Samooh" such as Nukkad Natak, art & culture, games and debate.
8. To organize issue specific film show.
9. Conduct interface meeting with the religious leaders for the development of education.
10. To organize public hearings for proper operation and transparency of Midday meal, scholarship and building construction schemes.
11. Organize award functions to boost morale of teachers.

**The achievements of the foundation are detailed below:**

| Activities   | Year       | Year        | Year        | Year        | Year        | Total        |
|--|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
|  | 2010       | 2011        | 2012        | 2013        | 2014        |              |
| Women Literacy Centre  | 600        | 1200        | 1800        | 2400        | 3000        | 9000         |
| Registration of girls in Govt. Schools                               | 300        | 592         | 635         | 1000        | 766         | 3293         |
| Construction of 2 primary schools by the effort of Organization      |            |             |             | 02          |             | 2            |
| Establishment of Anganwadi Kendra in the basti of deprived community |            |             |             | 01          |             | 1            |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>900</b> | <b>1795</b> | <b>2435</b> | <b>3403</b> | <b>3766</b> | <b>12296</b> |

#### 12. Impact:

1. Due to the regular educational program of the Prayatna Foundation, the women of the project area are able to do their work of the Bank and Dakghar themselves.
2. After being associated with the educational program of the organization, the women have not only developed self confidence, but also fought in an organized way for many social issues and have succeeded as well.
3. A visible change in the attitude and thinking of men towards women of the family.
4. Increased awareness in the family about the girls' education and 76

In its effort to provide skill development and training the organization has been running vocational training program in 80 villages of both the districts. The organization was able to get financial support from 2005 from F.V.T.S Bangalore and Sir Dorabji TATA Trust from 2008-2014..

**The courses conducted under this program include the following :-**

1. Computer literacy Course
2. Beautician Course
3. Mobile Repairing Course
4. Dress Designing Course

5. Solar Lantern Assembling Course  
 6. Video & Photography Course  
 7. Painting Course

The year wise achievements are detailed below :

| Activities                      | Year | Year | Year | Year | Year | Total |
|---------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
|                                 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |       |
| Computer Course                 | 96   | 96   | 96   | 96   | 96   | 480   |
| Mobile Repairing course         | 240  | 240  | 240  | 240  | 240  | 1200  |
| Beautician Course               | 240  | 240  | 240  | 240  | 240  | 1200  |
| Dress designing Course          | 600  | 600  | 600  | 600  | 600  | 3000  |
| Video & Photography Course      | 20   | 20   | 20   | 20   | 20   | 100   |
| Solar Lantern assembling Course | -    | -    | -    | 25   | 25   | 50    |
| Cloth printing Course           | -    | -    | -    | -    | 30   | 30    |
| Painting                        | -    | -    | -    | -    | 30   | 30    |
| Total                           | 1196 | 1196 | 1196 | 1221 | 1281 | 6090  |

Most of the participant who completed the courses have been able to generate income of five to six thousand rupees which as definitely empowered them .

In recognition of the efforts of the Foundation its CEO Naheed Akheel has received several awards from both media and state government .Some of the awards received in the recent past are:

1. National Status Award for Intellectual Development by Intellectual People and Economic Growth Association, New Delhi 2012.
2. Community Leader Fellowship Award by National Foundation of India, New Delhi 2013.
3. Governor of Uttar Pradesh awarded for Social Contribution in Rural area, Lucknow 2013.
4. Hindustan Times Women Award, 2015.

5. Awarded for the Recognition for the services to the community by Health Education Awareness for Life in India, 2015.
6. Awarded for the recognition for the service to the women education and security by UP Government and Hindustan Times News Paper 27 August 2015.

However Naheed 's experience in getting financial assistance from various schemes for the under privileged has not been encouraging . She had applied for the New Roshni scheme of the Ministry of Minority Affairs which was to create leaders in the minority community but was disappointed .Her experience indicates that only those who have contacts and are able to network have access to these schemes .If this is so, it is very unfortunate as there are few women activist from the minority community working for their upliftment in rural areas.

But with the little finances they manage to raise , Naheed and other volunteers of the Foundation and Manch continue to fight for the rights of marginalized and vulnerable and are certain that they will be able to create a movement like the Manch in rural areas .Naheed is also inspired by the life of the Prophet and is convinced that the Quran and Traditions of the Prophet if followed in their true spirit will lead to empowerment of Muslim women through education and skill building.

Naheed Akheel can be contacted at 0522 4103293, 09838783837 .  
For more info visit [www.prayatnafoundation.org](http://www.prayatnafoundation.org)