

A dilemma with three horns Or Should we call it a ‘trilemma’?

Friends, we started the struggle to save Bandhyali with a letter in which we placed all the facts in front of you, sought your opinion and if agree, your support. You all supported the struggle to keep the school going. As a result the school is still there. The court cases have come to a point where we are again facing a dilemma. Now the school belongs to the supporters of this school as much as to the community and Digantar. Therefore, we would like to have your opinion on a serious issue. The High Court has asked us to choose one of the three options to relocate the school. We, of course, can reject all and decide to continue the legal battle as well. But as it is, we have to respond to it on Monday. In jaipur we are organising meeting of people who are involved in Bandhyali struggle and of the community to take all opinions. But the larger educational and activist community is also part of the struggle today, therefore, we would request you to read this note carefully, see the map attached and give your opinion.

The information:

The High Court has elicited proposals for several alternatives from the JDA to relocate (may be dislocate is better?) the Bandhyali School. The latest position could be understood with the help of the attached map:

1. The blue area, marked ‘School exists now’, is where the Bandhayli School is located.
2. Children come from the various Dhanis, marked on the map.
3. The red area marked ‘P1’ is Proposal No. 1 from JDA. It is a strip of land, very irregular in its shape; maximum width 44m and minimum 18m., total area 6300 sq. m., roughly half of what we have applied for, and in which the school is running now. The JDA’s norms for Sr. Hr. Sec. School are about 12,000 sq. m. This place is enough for a primary school, but not adequate for a bigger or higher school.
4. The second red area marked ‘P2’ makes proposal No.2 from the JDA. It is about 800 sq. m., low land, water flows during rains. After a bit of filling etc. it can serve as well as the P1 for a primary school.
5. The third red area, marked as ‘P3’ is the Proposal No.3 from the JDA. It is flat land, about 15,000 sq.m. Adequate for a big school. Becomes far from the Dhanis from where most of the children come now, but come in the centre of two villages of Khatipura and Bhavgarh Bandhya, and the group of dhanis of Kho Nagorian.

6. None of these pieces of land is being allotted for the school for free; the JDA will charge a substantial price. We just are keeping our fingers crossed that it would not be too high to afford.

Defining the 'trilemma':

It seems there are three values involved here:

1. Fighting against the injustice inherent in dispossessing a well functioning free school for educationally backward communities in favour of a business venture. And associated values.
2. Protecting educational interests of the children of the community for which the school has been working so far, especially of the girl children.
3. Development of alternative pedagogy for the secondary level and academic growth of the institution.

All these values have been the part of the struggle for Bandhyali so far. They may not have been articulated exactly in the same terminology but have been present in the discourse.

First, Fighting to keep the school where it is today, is the best option if we be guided by the first value, lets call it 'fight for justice'. But it may involve disruption of the education of the children if we are not strong enough, if we get tired, if we loose interest of the people who are supporting us. In that case, the interest of the children, and growth of alternative pedagogy both will suffer. If we are able to protect the school but the struggle lasts long, still the growth of the school will suffer.

Second, accepting proposal P1 seems to be the best option is we are content with catering for children up to primary level in their own vicinity. Here we would be guided by the value 2, lets call it 'interest of the children'. It does not go well with the value 1, fighting for justice. It also severely compromises the value 3, pedagogical advancement and institutional growth. Accepting P2 is identical as accepting P1 in terms of these values. It also doe not serve the interest of the children at secondary level.

Accepting P3 serves well the development of pedagogy, the school; and brings the school in the centre of three villages, which is very good for the purpose of developing a Sr. Sec. School with alternative pedagogy. But is compromises the interests of the primary school children and more or less abandons the fight for larger justice.

In your opinion, which one is the best option for the school? Which one should we choose?

--Rohit Dhankar