

VOICE OF VOICELESS: SPEECH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR HEARING IMPAIRED CHILDREN IN PREPRIMARY STAGE

TEACHER	Yogeshkumar Bhange
SCHOOL	Z.P. Primary School, Wadachiwadi, Upalal (BK), Taluka – Madha, Dist. – Solapur (Maharashtra)
PHONE NUMBER	9922-0605-99
E-MAIL	yoeshkumar.bhange25@gmail.com



Shri Yogeshkumar Bhange is a teacher in a government primary school and a member of State Innovation and Research Foundation, Maharashtra. His son Prasun suffered from hearing disabilities in his childhood. Shri Bhange became aware of this issue when his son was two years old. When Prasun was two years old, Shri Bhange realized the problem. He lived in a small village with no medical facilities and so he went to a district hospital from where he was directed to Pune for BERA (Brainstem Evoked Response Audiometry). This was in 2004. Shri Bhange realized that he had taken a lot of time to realize that his son had a hearing problem, and so felt that there would be other parents facing similar problems.

While he began therapy lessons for his son in Pune he enrolled him in a school with normal children and not in one for the disabled. Some parents facing similar issues of disability in their children would approach him to seek his advice. All parents could not go to Pune for therapy and so Shri Bhange's wife Jaya Bhange formed a group of such parents to share what she had learnt during these sessions. In 2009, she formed an NGO, "Voice of Voiceless" (VOV).



Training to parents

The focus was to detect hearing impairment in children between the age group of 0–3 years. Shri Bhange strongly believed that if the disability was detected early, with therapy it could be treated and the affected children could attend normal school. Shri Bhange then came in touch with CORO INDIA (<http://coroindia.org>), an organization working to empower leaders in marginalized communities. The organization taught the couple the importance of research and how this could help to impact policy. With an advanced fellowship VOV conducted a survey of hearing impaired children in the age group of 0 to 6 years in Solapur District. The following insights came to light:

- PHCs are not equipped and specialized for necessary treatment of hearing impairment .
- According to the parent survey, it was found that every child was vaccinated.
- Government has set up "Aanganwadi" for the children of 0–3 years of age. An Aanganwadi worker can conduct surveys but is not scientifically trained to identify a deaf child. Also, there is no scheme for providing Speech Therapy to the identified children.
- The health department organizes camps for vaccination but there are no arrangements for testing the hearing ability of a child.
- The social welfare organizations provide hearing aids but that is given only after the age of 5; the actual impact could be created if the child is tested before the age of 2 years.
- Education department have teachers who provide education to the deaf children but they get this job when the actual age of learning to speak is



People at school visit

long gone. As a result, these children become permanently dumb and are unable to share their joy or pain with the world.

VOV came up with a cost-effective and innovative hearing ability test in 2014. The test could easily be implemented by anybody: take a metal bowl and a plate, and create a clang of metal on metal when the child is occupied with some other game. If the child does not respond, she is identified as possibly hearing impaired and is referred for advanced scientific test “BERA”.

Shri Bhange approached the collector to identify hearing-impaired children; CORO and Precision Camshafts supported them with funding: 4250 Anganwadi workers were trained in 2 months to conduct “Plate bowl test” and how to communicate with such children and their parents. The idea was to diagnose the hearing disability before the child reaches 3 years of age, so that she/he could be trained to speak.

BERA takes about three hours and costs around 1500 rupees per test. The plate-bowl test is

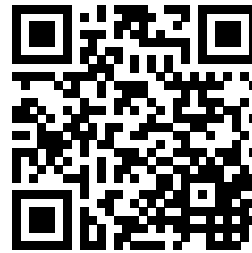
a cost-effective approach to identify the problem in the early stage. The “Taati Wati Chacani” (thali-katori or plate-bowl) was successfully conducted in Solapur District in September 2014. A total of 289,000 children were covered, and 147 children were identified. These children were sent for BERA test and early treatment of therapy sessions have started for them with the help of initiative “Taati Wati Chacani”.

Shri Bhange is now planning:

- to increase the participation of government agencies;
- to identify hearing and speech impaired children through “Taati Wati Chacani” in 3 talukas of his district;
- to conduct speech therapy sessions for hearing and speech impaired children in these talukas;
- to conduct home to home speech therapy.

This innovation was presented at The Fourth International Conference on Creativity and Innovation at/for/from/with Grassroots [ICCIG 4] at IIM Ahmedabad. The Head of UNICEF India, Dr Yasmin Haque greatly appreciated the work. The innovation was also presented at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration Mussorie in 2019 in a workshop of Grassroots innovations.

www.voiceofvoiceless.org.in



QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. How can education be given to children who cannot hear?
2. How can children who cannot speak and hear be identified?
3. How can creativity be developed in children who cannot hear?

QUESTIONS FOR TRAINEES

1. What is BERA?
2. How can children who cannot hear be taught to speak?
3. How to check if a child can hear?