

# Vedanta Supports Ekal Vidyalayas in Rayagada and Kalahandi



## EOI CORRESPONDENT

**BHUBANESWAR:** In India's development journey, education plays a critical role. However, given the vastness and diversity of our landscape, the last-mile delivery of this constitutionally enshrined right has been a recurring challenge, especially in rapidly growing states like Odisha.

This is most visible in tribal regions, where geography, dispersed settlements and socio-economic barriers hinder access to essential services. In districts like Rayagada and Kalahandi, the gap is particularly evident in the early years of learning. For many tribal children, formal education often begins in a language unfamiliar to them, within systems that do not reflect their lived reality. Recognising this need, Ekal Vidyalayas have adopted a decentralised, community-based model, bringing learning into villages and delivering it in local dialects. Vedanta Aluminium has been extensively supporting this unique model's expansion in the region with nearly 400 such schools in Kalahandi and Rayagada supported by the company, taking the project's transformational impact beyond classrooms and into communities.

The company's efforts go beyond financial support and extend to onboarding teachers, providing learning materials and linking classroom education with practical awareness sessions through its wider community programmes. Each of the Ekal Vidyalayas is designed to eliminate access barriers as far as possible, helping ensure that children in the 6-10 age group have access to foundational learning opportunities. Classes are held within the village, often in open or shared

spaces, led by a teacher/Acharya, drawn from the same or nearby community. This ensures familiarity, language alignment and continuity. Alongside this, the company's additional interventions in sanitation, health and nutrition further augment the ecosystem within which these schools operate. The model is simple but deliberate. Teaching methods rely on storytelling, songs and local references, ensuring comprehension in the early years. The focus remains on retention and foundational learning, rather than just enrolment. While Ekal provides the foundation, its effectiveness deepens when supported by aligned community initiatives. In many villages, classroom awareness is reinforced through Vedanta's ongoing awareness programmes, creating continuity between learning and practice. For instance, sanitation awareness introduced through Ekal is complemented by Vedanta's Project Nirmal, which focuses on improving hygiene practices, menstrual awareness and community-level behaviour change.

Similarly, nutrition awareness is supported through Vedanta's Pehli Udaan and Shishu Sanjeevani programmes, which engage families on child health and dietary practices. This helps translate knowledge into adoption, particularly in communities where access to nutritional information has traditionally been limited. Health awareness follows the same approach. While Ekal teachers introduce basic understanding of illness and prevention, Vedanta's Mobile Health Units (MHUs) provide doorstep healthcare services across remote regions. This linkage ensures that

awareness is backed by access to care.

The combined effect is visible at the household level. In many villages, children emerge as the first point of information for families. Bibhisana Majhi, parent of a student, reflects on this shift, saying: "We didn't have schooling earlier. Now my children read and explain things to us, about cleanliness, health and what we should do. It helps everyone." This transfer of knowledge helps reduce dependency on external intermediaries and enables households to make informed decisions, from healthcare to accessing welfare schemes. Ekal's success is anchored in a community-led framework. Village committees help identify the school, select the teacher and ensure regular attendance. This decentralised approach makes the model less dependent on external systems and more resilient to local challenges.

Marchana Jalia, an Acharya from Renda in Kashipur block of Rayagada, explains: "Because the school is in the village and the teacher is from here, parents trust it. Children come regularly. It becomes part of daily life." This trust plays a critical role in sustaining participation, particularly among girls, who are more vulnerable to dropping out due to access and mobility constraints. Odisha today has over 4,600 Ekal Vidyalayas, with a significant presence across tribal belts. Supported by Vedanta's broader community development initiatives, the Ekal Vidyalaya model demonstrates how aligned interventions can strengthen outcomes at the last mile. This ensures that schools do not function in isolation, but as an integral part of a larger developmental ecosystem.