Providing Quality Education to Children of Migrant Labourers

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Neelamma has been coming to our Teaching-Learning Centre (TLC) regularly and we know her well through these meetings. After a few meetings, she told us about her school which is the only ‘completely’ Hindi-medium government school in the state. It was very interesting to understand how this school is still running after so many years as no Hindi medium schools are left under the education department anywhere else in the state. This is what got us curious to learn her story.

Background

Neelamma teacher has studied throughout in Ballari except for her MA in Kannada from the Mysore University. After she completed her Hindi Prathama and Dwitiya examination, she was appointed as Hindi teacher. She has almost 20 years of work experience and has been working in the present school for the past seven years.

There are five teachers in the school including the Head Teacher (HT). A total of 107 students study in classes I to VIII. The HT teaches social science and another lady teacher teaches Kannada. The other three teachers teach all the subjects from classes I to VIII, which include science, maths, English and Hindi. Children come from various backgrounds and different states. Most of the children are from families of labourers who work in the Jeans factory in the area, pani puriwalas who are predominantly from the north and stay here for long durations; and, construction workers etc. There are students from Bihar, UP, Assam and Rajasthan. The children speak very fluent Hindi and very little Kannada.

Teacher: Neelamma
School: Jain Mart Government Hindi Medium School, Ballari district, Karnataka

The teachers in this school face two main challenges—teaching Kannada to students who have no background of the language and teaching all subjects in Hindi which requires teachers to be equally fluent in Hindi, as well as in other subjects. This is challenging because Hindi is the mother tongue of the children and they excel in it whereas the teachers know only passable Hindi. Secondly, as most of the children’s parents are labourers, the children too, keep moving with them because of which there is a large number of dropouts as well as, those who keep coming back. If parents want to attend even a wedding in their native places, the children go along and miss, at
least, a month of school.

Some positive observations

The school name is known among labourers and panipuri wala as new parents keep bringing their children for admissions here every year. Children are exceptionally sharp and clear in their understanding. I got to interact with children and their confidence level and conceptual clarity about a lot of things was quite surprising—be it geography, knowing the name of oceans around our country or knowing the neighbouring countries; or be it mathematics and being able to explain multiplication and addition. A student even stood and asked me if I know the definition of science and he went on to state the definition both in English and Hindi.

Umashankar Periodi leads Azim Premji Foundation’s work in Karnataka. He has been in the field of development for two decades working with tribal and marginalized sections. He has been with the Foundation since 2003 in various roles.

Rachana Patwardhan with an environmental science background was the district coordinator of Ballari and is, at present, a part of the program management team for the field initiatives of the Azim Premji Foundation.

The SDMC has been very supportive and has helped in installing a water purifier and has built an underground sump. Teachers have been trying their best to keep the momentum going. The Nali-kali cards are not available in Hindi, but teachers are trying at their own level to use their understanding to teach younger students. The school is located in an extremely interior, market area in a rented building. It is kept very neat and clean even though it is very small. It has separate toilets for girls and boys.

About Neelamma teacher

After the school visit, it felt like all the efforts have been collective ones by all teachers working there. The HT’s support and SDMC’s active involvement is also visible. But the subtle extra efforts that Neelamma teacher puts into self-learning as well as to do better in the classroom, are clear. To begin with, she, along with the other teachers has gone around various places where labourers and north Indians reside to encourage them to send their children to her school. They have made efforts to let the concerned people know that the school is Hindi medium. Neelamma has been a regular participant in our events and has also attended the winter workshop. She has been visiting the Kendriya Vidyalaya to understand the Hindi terminology and how to teach younger kids in Hindi as she teaches classes I, II, and III. Since she started teaching science in recent years, she has had to figure out a completely new set of vocabulary and techniques and has been asking us very actively for help. In a recent instance, her name was added to a science workshop, but she was in a fix because there were only two teachers, including herself, for class VIII. She quietly let us know that it would not be able to leave the other teacher with all the work. But on the third day of the workshop, which was a Saturday, she came to the workshop after school and attended the rest of it. She tried learning all the techniques that were taught in previous days and when I went to her school, she had taken out the microscopes and was trying to set them right to be used immediately. Our TLC has been getting a lot of Hindi story books and she has been taking it regularly to school and sharing the children’s reactions with the others.

Neelamma came across as someone who does not talk too much about the wonderful work that she is doing. It was interesting to talk to her and understand the principles behind her vision of the role she plays in the school.
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