

Learning from everyday life

By | Jul 24, 2014

Adharshila Learning Centre has become a novel example for teaching children of tribal communities. Adharshila follows the work-centred education model. It is worth mentioning here that in NCF -2005, the National Focus Group on Work and Education has talked about the educational work of Adharshila Learning Centre. Its style of work and education is presented here.

'Sendhwa' is predominantly a tribal region situated in western Madhya Pradesh close to the Maharashtra border. Adharshila Learning Centre was founded in 1998 by Amit and Jayshree who were actively involved in the social sector, had a good understanding of the educational perspective and wanted to impart education to the children of the tribal community in the area. Jayshree says, "It was very challenging for us to run the school without resources. Our expectation from the local community was that they would help us in procuring the necessary resources." First, they looked for a suitable place for the Learning Centre with the help of local people. A barren hill was chosen where even the grass would not grow. The villagers helped in preparing the land. A big hall was constructed there. People provided bricks and labor. The Learning Centre started with 30-32 children and today there are more than 110 children studying there.



I had heard/read about the Learning Centre. The main questions before me were –

- How is the school conducting the teaching process in the rural area?
- How is their local language being linked to the textbooks?
- What is the profile of the teachers there? From where do these teachers come and when and how are they trained?
- How are teaching processes taking place through productive work? To what extent is the tribal community connected to the school?

I visited the Centre for two days and tried to understand the teaching processes better.

The structure and background of the Centre

The Centre is located in Saakad village near Chatli, 12 kilometers from the Sendhwa-Nivali road. The population of this village is about two thousand. The people here are engaged in professions like farming and animal husbandry. The school has four buildings and rooms spread across the land. There is a library in one room while the other room is an office-computer room. One of the buildings houses the kitchen. The rest of the open space is used for farming. Nearly 110 children from class one to class eight stay here of which 65 are boys and 45 girls. I went around the various classes and saw that in each class the teachers were mingling with the children and talking to them in their local language Bareli. There are three young teachers here. The first teacher is doing his B.Sc., the other two are women one of whom is studying in class 12 while the other is a former student of this school.

The Adharshila Philosophy

The Centre is influenced by the ideas of educationist Paulo Friere. The people involved with the school management believe that a school is a good medium to bring about social change. But one cannot depend only on schools for change. Also the change cannot happen only by reading books. Therefore, the school should become a center of knowledge acquisition and a source of strength for social change without alienating children from their social traditions. In addition to this, the prime aim of the Centre is to give the children opportunities to become self-dependent through collective labor and social activism and to develop values in them.



Teaching in Nature's ambience

There is no uniform or need for loaded heavy bags in the school. The children participate in classroom activities in a very self-disciplined way. I did not hear any kind of hullabaloo. The six acres of land though barren initially are now rich with nature. There are many varieties of trees, plants and vegetation in the campus. The barren land has been



developed into “productive” land in 15 years. This is the result of the amazing work that the children have done along with their studies. Amit says, “There are about 100 different species of trees and plants including some herbal plants. Different kinds of birds and butterflies add to the beauty. On the whole, the school is nestled in the lap of Mother Nature. The children try to learn and understand things while being close to the nature.” When we look at the present education scenario we find that it has moved away from nature. The classes are surrounded by four walls while the teaching process is bound by the

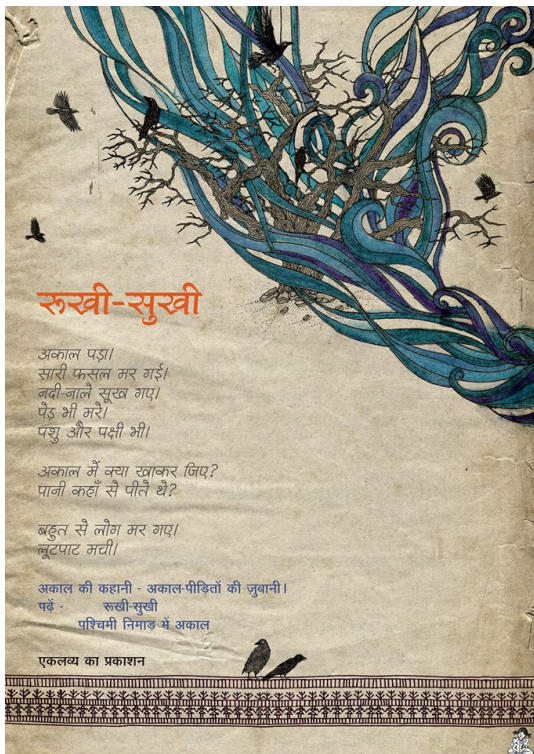
restrictions of curriculum. In contrast, the innovative ways of teaching methods that have been adopted here break free from these chains. A new chapter of educational innovation is being written here, in an open environment, and in consonance with children – free from the stereotypes of education.

Education in mother tongue

The speciality of this school is that the children are taught in their mother tongue. They are taught in ‘Bareli’. And because their home language is used in school, the children participate in educational processes very enthusiastically. Use of home language in teaching is a very joyful experience for children. True education of life is the central point of Adharshila. NCF-2005 insists that “the children’s understanding should develop; they should collect the information and know the methods of collecting them. They should also be able to analyze the information they get from experience, the facts they have collected and draw their own conclusions. This will develop and increase their ability to observe, think and understand. They will also be able to think independently and take their own decisions.” NCF’s spirit is very much alive in the way the children are being taught at Adharshila. The children here have many opportunities for learning and creative expression. Their academic work is taking place in their own environment and in the language they are comfortable in, with a lot of fun and complete autonomy. So their learning skills are developing automatically.

Know the details of History – effortlessly

The Centre has entwined the process of teaching and work in such a way that the children try to know and understand the local history through games, drama, folk songs and folk dances. These children come from Chatli and Saakad village which are about two kilometers away from the school. The children of classes 6 to 8 are given new projects every year. Some children were asked to do a project on ‘the history of the school’s land’. The children are happy doing such projects. When they were trying to find out the history of their school’s land, they came to know about the history of their village. They were able to answer questions like, “How old is the village? How many people lived there? What types of trees were there?” The children learned the history of the school in a simple manner through such questions and wrote about their village from their own points of view. Later on, their work was printed into a booklet. Similarly, other groups wrote about the history of the rivers-canal of Saakad village and the pond of Sendhwa village. As a part of their educational activity, the children also found out and wrote about the history of seeds and folk tales. Such activities reflect the distinctiveness of the Learning Centre. The children also take part in cleaning, gardening, farming and the kitchen work to learn the importance of labour.



Opportunities to create literature

The children here have an opportunity to involve themselves in the activities related to literary creation. The children meet the local people and compile folk tales, folk songs and proverbs. They present their creative writing, poems and songs in the form of posters, booklets etc. Further, these materials are used for teaching in other classes and thus children get familiar with the socio-cultural environment. Another noticeable feature of the Centre is that the library is managed by the children themselves. They sit in the library and collect material from newspapers, magazines and books and prepare sheets under the guidance of their teacher friends. There is no fixed time for the library. The children pick up the books and read them as and when they wish. Eklavya has recently published a book of poems on famine written by the children of the Centre.

Preparation of Bareli-Hindi dictionary

Efforts have been made to prepare a ‘dictionary’ of Bareli dialect and a few Hindi words in the school. This dictionary is prepared based on each letter of the Hindi alphabet. The Bareli-Hindi dictionary includes the words that are commonly used. The present handwritten Bareli-Hindi dictionary has about 50-60 pages and is being extended every year by adding new words.

Environment Studies

The children are asked to collect the information on locally available plants, major produce, seeds, animals-birds, soil, water resources etc. by means of projects. They go around the village, collect different types of seeds and then display them on a sheet in the form of a chart. They collect the information about the endangered varieties of seeds. This helps the children connect with their local environment. They collect the information in groups and share their knowledge with each other. They

come face to face with their environment and deepen their understanding.

Labour based knowledge acquisition process

In the educational instructions of basic tasks, knowledge can be built by action. The Centre believes in this principle and hence instead of pouring knowledge into the children, it emphasizes on work-based education beyond the curriculum. The following tasks have been included in work-based education –

- Group based farming
- Cooking and managing the kitchen
- Nursery and gardening
- Care and maintenance of the cows in dairy
- Poultry
- Purse-making
- Organic farming and preparation of organic pesticides
- Making improved stoves
- Operation and maintenance of the bio-gas plant
- Taking care of solar energy panels and plants

The school has linked the rural work with the school curriculum and it's clear that education in Adharshila Learning Centre has its roots in the everyday life.

This article by Siddharth Kumar Jain, Azim Premji Foundation, Madhya Pradesh, has been taken from the January 2014 issue of 'Shiksha ki buniyad'. This is an edited version. The photographs used here are taken from the Facebook page of Adharshila and 'Shiksha ki buniyad'. The article originally in Hindi has been translated by Nalni Rawal.

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