Education

Education is very important as it is something that liberates us from the bondage of ignorance and helps us to think for ourselves and be aware of our rights and duties. But unfortunately, there are many children in the country who do not have the opportunity of getting educated and some are not even literate. So, Barefoot started Shiksha Niketan, a school within the campus up to Class X. The children of Tilonia who are not going to government schools.

But at the same time, it was understood that there are many other working children in far-off hamlets of the Silora Block who can’t come to school or have dropped out and then started working. Something had to be done for them and thus the concept of night schools, bridge school and vocational training came into being.

The main idea behind all these educational initiatives is that poverty should not be a reason for somebody being deprived of education.

Night Schools

There are many underprivileged or poor children who are not able to attend even the government schools as they are busy earning to support their family during the day by grazing animals such as goats, cows, sheep, etc.

Barefoot College started a night school for them from 7:30 pm to 9:30 pm daily. Teachers are from the community and more than their education, they are interested in the community and more than the education, strengthening schemes, social issues, cattle rearing, sewing, carpentry, etc.

The purpose is to impart enough knowledge

My visit to a Night School

On the day, I visited the night school. There were some other visitors from states like Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Kerala. The children of the hamlet of Govardhanpur, tucked away amidst the babool trees and vast fields, away from the urban chaos. They did not have any idea of any place beyond their state of Rajasthan. They had to be told about Gujarat, Kerala, etc., so that they could understand properly where we had come from.

So that day, we made the children learn what is a village, a town, a district, a state and then explained to them that India is 29 states and there is only one of them. Gujarat is below Rajasthan, Kerala is at the bottom of India. They learned the names and locations in about 15 minutes. A rough map was drawn on the blackboard to show them the relative locations.

The result was wonderful. In half an hour the children started asking us about the language, climate, etc. It was a very thrilling experience for me and I returned to the Barefoot College happy to have made a difference. I also realised how difficult it can be for urban guys like me to come down to their level and make them understand through simple examples.

so that they can enter the government schools if they wish to or else at least be aware of their surroundings and not be cheated when they grow up.

Monitoring

The functioning of the school is monitored by the children’s parliament or Baal Sansad and a committee of the parents. Once every two years, elections are held between the ‘Light’ and the ‘Shepherd’ parties. The Prime Minister and various other ministers are elected and there is also an opposition to keep it in check.

It is very common for a guy to be grazing goats during the day and switch over to being the Prime Minister in the evening!

The functions of the Baal Sansad include getting involved in the proper functioning of the night schools, bringing out the chronicles and motivating more children to attend the night schools.

Teachers are selected by the committee of the parents. Children also learn the ways and means of democracy at a young age and lose the fear of expressing themselves in front of others at a young age.

Residential Bridge School—Singla

It is a fully residential programme for children who have dropped out of school. They stay at the bridge school for a year or two where their knowledge is brought up from where they left off, so that after completing their bridge school they can join the mainstream education, i.e. government schools.

Children who dropped out at 5th class may actually have knowledge of a 3rd standard child, so they must be brought up to the level of the 5th standard.

Students are taken in with an entrance test, to determine their level of learning, irrespective of the class from which they drop out.

RAAG

This programme has been initiated to allow children to explore their hidden talents and express their creativity so that their stay at the Bridge School is not only about studies.