

Pedagogy in Practice
Experiences in Primary Teaching in West Bengal

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Primary teachers in West Bengal are not really an envied lot. Rather they are scapegoats for every institutional failure that one can ever imagine. But like the clichéd silver lining to the dark clouds there are umpteen numbers of teachers who are trying their best to carve niches into the lives of their pupils and to the larger social context. And they are bringing about unquantifiable changes in the thoughts and lives of a generation in stealth. The Pratichi Institute has been instrumental in documenting some of these efforts over time. Here are some of the initiatives narrated by the primary teachers themselves.

Experiences in a “backward” school

Maloy Kumar Bhattacharyya

Head teacher, Suhrid Santhal Nimna Buniyadi Bidyalay
Birbhum

I first joined a Rampur Primary school as an assistant teacher in February, 1996. The school was located in Dubrajpur Block, Birbhum district. The school did not have any building per se. The classes were held in a community prayer hall situated somewhere between Rampur and neighbouring Bulbuli villages. Around 170-175 children were enrolled of which the lion's share belonged to the minority communities. Around 35-40 students belonged to the general caste and other dalit communities.

After spending a few days in school I noticed that most of the children from the minority community did not come to school. Those who actually did dropped out midway. After talking this matter over with the Head teacher I learnt that most of the parents of absentee children were engaged in livestock trading. Some were engaged in tanning goat skin. Since the children actively helped their parents with the work, they seldom attended school. But I had my doubts. Soon after, I went over to the neighbouring Muhammadpur village. On interacting with the villagers I came to understand that these children did not attend school as a result of some kind of religious rigidity on the part of the grownups. A little probing brought me face to face with the real issue. Since classes took place in a Hindu prayer hall the Hindu children were privileged enough to take their seats on a platform while the children belonging to the minority community sat on the ground. This discriminating gesture deeply humiliated the minority community which metamorphosed into their decision of not sending their children to school. I was shocked and ashamed. I decided to meet the parents and soon came to realize the gravity of this deep-rooted, sensitive issue. We decided to meet the Panchayat Pradhan for funds needed to build a school house. The Pradhan promised funds to our Head teacher provided the villagers raised some fund themselves. Ironically enough the minority community's contribution far exceeded that of the Panchayat's. Incidentally the attendance multiplied manifold after the schoolhouse

started functioning. I stayed there for two more years and within that span the school had made considerable progress in terms of attendance and quality of teaching.

In 1998, I joined Mohula Primary School in Sriniketan Block, Birbhum. The school was run within a dilapidated structure amidst unhygienic conditions. We expected children from general, dalit and adivasi communities to get admitted to our school but in reality, around 90% of the children from the backward communities did not get enrolled at all. Though around 71 children were in rolls only 30-32 actually turned up. Once again I organized a meeting with the villages who were caught completely unawares about the functioning of the school. The parents of Santhal community scarcely knew that their children were supposed to get admitted to the Mohula Primary School. Since there was such intense lack of awareness among the villagers we joined hands with the local clubs and organized community meetings harping continually upon the importance of education. The villagers were soon interested and came forward to enrich the school by planting saplings around it, planting a kitchen garden and generally beautifying the school to quite some extent. This upsurge in awareness contributed in higher enrollment and enhancement of quality of education in general. The local clubs came forward and helped in organizing cultural and sporting events. And the children made the best use of it. Later with the help of local clubs we set up evening coaching classes in Santhal neighbourhoods where children, from classes I to VIII, were tutored free of cost. Other cultural events and blood donation camps were also organized. It was during 2004-05 we came in contact with Pratichi (India) Trust and relentless help from the team of researchers transformed this school into one of the model schools of the district. The children of this school performed outstandingly in studies, cultural activities and sports. After passing out of the primary school they continued to do well in the local high schools and with time found it easy to get admitted to various schools affiliated to Visva Bharati. Being witness to this comprehensive development, a farmer of moderate means, a primary school teacher and a college professor donated pieces of land to the school. Few parents joined hands and donated a fish tank to ensure that all children have fishes as a part of their mid-day meal. To every villager the school became an object of pride. During this period of time neither were there any irregularities in the school nor any out-of-school children in the locality. Such was the bond of faith and trust that

primary school teachers were considered a member in every village household who could be consulted even in a dire family crisis. From celebrating the birth of a newborn to mourning of a dead, the school teacher was an integral part of every village occasion.

In February, 2012 I had to shift my base once more. This time I was appointed the Principal of Suhrid Santhal Nimna Buniyadi School near Santiniketan. The school is located within Pearson Pally Santiniketan and it caters to the need of children from neighbouring Kaligunj, Balipara, Andrews Pally and Rabindra Pally. About 95% of the children belong to different backward communities. Despite proper infrastructure and other facilities the attendance of children was minimal and the quality of education was also poor. The school had requisite number of teachers, quite a number of NGOs working in adjacent areas and Visva Bharati's Rural Extension Centre functioning just beside it, yet lack of awareness concerning education was a real eye sore. The healthcare facilities of the area were also in doldrums.

As a measure to eradicate these problems, we have tried to bond with every family in the locality, monitor attendance and frame the teaching materials in a child-friendly way to ensure that the children come to school. Now the attendance has shot up to 80—85%. We have been able to identify every child in the neighbourhood and enroll her. It is indeed encouraging to see that the attendance at the parents meeting concerning academics and school development is gradually rising. In the last meeting out of 85 parents 72 mothers turned up. We have joined hands with rural clubs to ensure beautification and development of the school infrastructure. Now Visva Bharati has also promised to extend their helping hand in developing this school. Keeping in mind the participation of the Santhal children we are also planning festivals and competitions. Children are encouraged to participate in every event and are faring excellently in each of them. Sporting activities are also high point of our extracurricular activities. Yet above all the improvement in the quality of teaching-learning that satisfies me the most.

Being a part of all of the above drives, has instilled in me the belief that a “backward” school can only bloom with the help of awareness from the parents, building bridges between parents and teachers and ensuring regular attendance.

Besides these, each child personally needs a beautiful school building, a garden, a playground and of course love and affection from the teachers.

The truth about slow learners

Tapas Kumar Bhattacharyya

Assistant Teacher

Khoskodomboopur Paruldanga Nandarani Nimna Buniyadi Bidyalay
Bolpur, Birbhum

It was January, 1997. I joined Koyemba Primary School located in Rampurhat in Birbhum district as an assistant teacher. It has been 17 years and I have now been able to garner quite an experience of teaching in a number of schools in three different subdivisions of Birbhum. And this experience is peppered with a number of bitter-sweet memories. There has been a lot of change in terms of infrastructure of primary schools since I first set off. Simultaneously I notice a sea change in the attitudes of teachers of primary schools. The improvement in other facilities was supposed to ensure a hike in the quality of classroom education yet there exists a chasm. Let me dig out a few reasons.

I had been engaged in preparing electoral list of the village since I was teaching in the village's primary schools. That made me familiar with each of the children's family member. Owing to this closeness I found it exceptionally easy to find out reasons behind absenteeism, gauging the difficulties and solving them very fast. I discovered it was essential for a primary teacher to develop a cordial bond not only with the students but also with the members of their family and the community as a whole. More amiable the bond, easier it becomes for the teacher to run the school effectively. Later when the attendance shot up I tried to teach the children with great enthusiasm in my own way but could not leave a mark. My inexperience as a teacher led to this setback since I have never found a child who is unwilling to learn. But I soon realized the teaching methods should not be framed according to my sensibilities rather it should be moulded to suit the children's needs. I tried teaching children the way they liked it and succeeded in creating magic within the four walls of a classroom. I was startled to find out that children who were always labeled as 'weak' were the first to jump into the learning bandwagon. I had to change my teaching techniques time and again keeping in mind the children's difference in background and the economic set up and that has been my learning

from the entire process. It is a blunder to zero down on any one process which will enable every child in the classroom to learn effectively.

It is a shortcoming on our part that we always try and force children to look at things from our point of view, in case they fail, we somehow alienate them. This throws alienation or rather lack of endearment throws long shadows on the child's learning process until she is labeled as 'backward.' To elucidate this affirmation let me elaborate little incidents of which I have been a witness.

Incident 1

It was Bengali class for the third standard. I distributed worksheets and instructed them to form a meaningful paragraph from jumbled up sentences.

1. Rama goes to school.
2. Rama wakes up from sleep.
3. Rama brushes her teeth.
4. Rama eats rice.

Most of the children wrote in the same order but two girls and a boy thought a little differently. They wrote---Rama wakes up from sleep. Rama brushes her teeth. Rama goes to school. Rama eats rice.

I said, "Rama goes to school and then eats rice, correct it immediately." But the child argued, "But Sir we come to school and then eat rice in our mid-day meal. Isn't that so?"

I was startled. I had tried to evaluate the children according to my point of view and goofed up. How could I now label them as 'backward' children?

Incident 2

It was a history period for the children of standard IV. It was just after the recess and the children were not quite interested in lessons. They are bored with the places, dates and battles detailed in their history text. To dispel the monotony I started telling them stories about our freedom struggle. I tried to instill into them a sense of history and then the children opened up---

A girl said, "Long back Byamakhya came to a Kali Temple in our village." Then a boy rose up and said, "Sir, did you know though our village is called Paruldanga, it used to be called Udaynarayanpur earlier? Since

there were lots of Parul trees around (almost a forest) Rabindranath Tagore re-named it Paruldanga?"

How can I now call them disinterested and backward?

Incident 3

I had made a child stand facing the sun and trying to point out the four different directions to the class. I noticed that each child was somehow aware of the geography of their village. Standing on the playground they can point out to the nearest town Bolpur, the village's Kali Temple, the lake, the post office and so on. They can also explain why cracks appear on school rooms made of clay mud. They know that Prantik (the other end of the village) has red laterite soil. Since these bits and pieces of knowledge are integral parts of their lives and they are eager to inform me about this down to the minutest detail. How can I then say they have no interest in learning?

I feel extremely betrayed when I hear some children are being labeled as 'backward'. Personally I feel this generates due to some ideas that are etched into the teachers' mind. Whenever a child from Dalit or Adivasi family turns up in the school without any evaluation we identify her as a "backward" pupil. Similar mindset castigates first generation learners. We feel a child while stepping into the school should be equipped with the knowledge of alphabets and numbers though this view is not acceptable in any way. I agree a place can be 'backward' due to absence of basic infrastructure but this backwardness by no means applies to the children of this area. The children who come to school knowing the alphabets and numbers may have a little advantage but that does not mean that the others are "backward"? If we look down upon the first generation learners then we are indirectly emphasizing the need to private tuitions which is unethical. Are we not trying to hide our own inadequacy behind such lame excuses?

Frankly I do not believe any child can be 'backward'. When a child first comes to school it hardly matters whether she knows her alphabets or she belongs to the first generation of learners, the teaching method should learn to accommodate the child's requirement. Then there is no difference between teaching and learning. It is true while class room teaching some

children cannot keep pace with others. That does not mean they lag behind, rather they move ahead in accordance to their own pace which may not match with others. They need our help to make up for their lost pace. The question remains whether we wish to help them out from such situations. Instead we try to make the children follow our own pace while learning. And the seeds of 'backward'-ness gets sown. Disrespecting the child's inability to grasp we force her to match pace with others. The child gets confused loses her pace and receives the 'backward' label.

Before calling a child 'backward' if we delve into the reasons carefully we would understand that we the teachers, the administration and lots of people who are integral to the system is backward.

Each child is different and they learn differently. Once we grasp the simple truth the rest is cakewalk. If we have respect each child's demand and opinions teaching is never difficult as it seems.

Language learning: From Obstacle to Opportunity

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I have been teaching since the last two decades yet I feel incomplete as a teacher. I feel frustrated at times because I have the feeling that I have not been able to fulfill the criteria of a good teacher. Teaching to me is a continuous learning exercise. From my point of view, I am nothing more than a weak backward pupil since I am still trying to build bridges between education and life.

Every year some children from adivasi Santhal families get enrolled in my school. These children speak Santhali at home. Their mother tongue is not Bengali, the medium of instruction in my school. 5 year olds when they first step into school find it difficult to come to terms with an alien language. The other children speak Bengali so the adivasi children find it extremely difficult to communicate. As a result they are friendless. They sit with their heads bowed down. They stare blankly when spoken to. To them school is not a second home but an alien, friendless land.

I call each children of the school by their names and try to involve everyone in classroom activities. But I continue to notice some children who are not interested in activities. They bow their heads down and sit quietly. Friendless and lonely, they keep on daydreaming. I tried a lot but could not develop an attachment with these two children---Rameshwar Murmu and Majhi Besra. They are 5 year old whose mother tongue is Santhali. While the other children in the class talked nineteen to a dozen how could I make these two children study and that too in a language so alien to them? The very thought struck terror in me.

When I called the rolls in the class, everyone but those two obliged me with a “present please”. It seemed Rameswar and Majhi had lost their tongue. I called them by their names. Still there was no response. I called them. They did not budge. Then I left my seat and went to them. Not only did they keep quiet but almost sunk to the ground. I tried over and over again but failed to make them utter even a single syllable. This entire incident spurred feats of giggles from the rest of

the pupils. I became dumbfounded with anger and disappointment. Little Anup Sarkar of the same class popped up and informed me, Sir, he doesn't speak. Another child, Ankita added, "They keep to themselves. They don't read or write. They play with each other." Once again I felt deep trouble brewing within me. I tried to solve the immediate crisis by taking all of them outside the class to play. While the children played together, shouting at each other but those two were still reticent. They were having fun and participated when hauled into the game but never spoke a word.

The next day was no different. They sat with their lips sealed. I went to them, sat on the ground beside them. I asked, "What's your name?" Not a word. "What's your father's name?" Silence greeted me once more. I patted them on the back. They shrank back. This made me determined I wasn't going to let go of them. They lived in a para (neighbourhood) next to mine. I went to their houses straightaway. Rameshwar's father Futu Murmu and Majhi's father were dead drunk. No sooner did they see me coming than they fled. Before escaping they managed to say that they were sick and they would meet me the day after in school. I decided to talk to the children's mother. I could gather that they were daily wage earners who had to work hard throughout the day. Though they did not possess land of their own the little that they had was in beautifully maintained. In the next door lived Jetha Hansda. I, immediately, decided to learn Santhali from him. Every evening I went there for lessons. I noted down phrases and sentences I require for classroom teaching and learned the translated version. No sooner did I learn the Santhali sentences than I started applying the same in next class. On entering the classroom I had already noticed the two sitting together grumpily. After wishing "good morning" to others I called out "Nonde Hijume". Both looked up startled. Then I walked up to them and asked their names in Santhali. Both replied. I was beside myself with joy. I told them, "Tingume." They stood up. Then I said, "Durup me." They sat down. When I said "Al me" they started scribbling on their slates. I could not fathom whether I should rejoice at my newfound knowledge or about the fact that my two taciturn children had turned a new leaf.

I went on with new ideas about how to make those two boys more active in class room. I felt more and more drawn to my Santhali lessons. Whatever I learnt in the evening, I applied in my classroom the very next day. I also went to meet their mothers on some evenings. Majhir mother was extremely happy. Her son had

come back from school and swung around her neck informing her that the teacher speaks Hor language. Nobody in Majhi's house has ever been to school. They prepare Haria (local liquor) at home. In the evening people gather around to buy haria. They sit around to enjoy a sip. The home environment was not conducive to studying in anyway.

Next day at school both Rameshwar and Majhi seemed a little excited. During morning prayers I asked them to stand up in Santhali. They obeyed and muttered the prayer like everybody else. That day they sat with others and took out their books when I instructed them in Santhali. Gradually they started following all my instructions. During chaos in classroom when I asked them to keep quiet, they obeyed at once. I felt I had been able to make a difference to the lives of these children who would otherwise be labeled as "backward". Soon those two boys shook off their inferiority complex and joined others in boisterous games. They became voluble. Above all they started enjoying school.

In the class we recited rhymes in unison. We used picture cards to learn names of various animals and things around us. In class I showed Majhi a picture of a dog. Majhi muttered "Seta". I applauded him loudly saying, "Majhi is right. Seta means dog." Rameshwar echoed with me, "Seta means a dog." Then I showed them a frog's picture. Rameshwar said, "Rote" I again affirmed he was right and asked the other children to clap. We started learning together. Gradually friendships began to bloom. Picture reading became a rather pleasant occupation. Other children of the class started introducing Rameshwar and Majhi to Bengali. They started telling their names in Bengali and reading the picture cards. During meals I made them sit with me in order to ease things up. They did not need to be forced to come to school anymore. They were too happy to come. They took the first six months to catch up with Bengali. Now they are in Class II and have lots of friends. They have been successfully mainstreamed.

But I have been lagging behind. I haven't been able to muster Santhali as much as I would have liked to. I have only learnt whatever little I needed for primary interaction. But when I see them chatting with friends and savouring each moment in school I feel the sweet taste of success seeping within me.

Working with community for School improvement

An Evening Tutorial

Santana Das

Bamnigram, Birbhum

I am Santana Das from Bamnigram. Bamnigram is a village within Sainthia PS in Birbhum district of West Bengal. In development jargon our village can be called “backward” in a number of respects. Roads per se are practically non-existent. Though we have a primary school within the village precincts, the secondary school is about 3km away. Most of the villagers are either farmers or daily wage earners. No sooner did I pass out of the primary school, than I joined the secondary school in Class V. But when I reached Class VIII, things started getting difficult. Ultimately I had to drop out from school. I remained at home for a year but there were people around me who went on encouraging me to study and I went back to school. Then there was no stopping. I finished school and joined college for further studies.

During this time the teachers of the primary school started four evening coaching classes for retaining weak students so that they do not become drop-outs. Along with other senior students of our village I too went to the evening classes to study since we did not have electricity in our neighbourhood and there was an arrangement of lights at the classes. We did not have enough kerosene at home to see us through our lessons every evening. The unemployed youth of our village taught in these centres without accepting any remuneration. During our schooldays neither did we have such classes nor anyone at home to help us out with daily lessons. I enjoyed the atmosphere at the coaching centres and gradually found myself getting involved in the day to day activities. I look after the coaching centre that is run at our neighbourhood. Children come to my centre for lessons and I try to help them as much as I can with every little difficulty that they have. Gradually a practice of revising lessons every evening has started among the children of our community. Earlier some people would get drunk in the evening but due to regular visits of the teachers that unpleasant affair has been put to an end. Besides other malpractices, there was also a tradition of early marriage. Girls would drop out of

school and get married early. Sometimes young mothers would come to the centre to study and I have taught many to read and write. But for obvious reasons I couldn't teach them much. But the effects of these lessons translated into a far reaching effect. Later we found students seldom remained absent from primary school. Parents interacted regularly with me and the school. At present we have quite a number of school pass-outs from our community.

In spite of this success it is unfortunate that these centres are not running regularly in our village. Many of us are studying or working out of the village. Since I am training to become a nurse, I cannot manage enough time for the centres. I am sorry to say the teachers of the primary schools also don't seem interested enough to run the coaching centre.

Challenges before a Shishu Shiksha Kendra

A field Diary

Ila Paira

Sahayika, Betkundri Shishu Shiksha Kendra
Jhargram, Paschim Medinipur

Human civilization is so much like a flowing stream. Every droplet resembles an individual. “Education” is the driving force that develops an individual. An individual begins her journey from the womb and then finds herself in a family. Her first interaction with the outside world begins at the Shishu shiksha Kendra (Centre for Primary Education run by the Department of Panchayat and Rural Development). Therefore these centres are of paramount importance; at least I feel it that way. We, who have embraced the work of Sahayak or Sahayikas in the SSKs, on our own or as means to sustenance, they need to be dutiful, tender, responsible along with professionalism to be successful.

In a country like India where diversity joins hands with under-development, this work is exceptionally complex. If we cannot adjust ourselves in different circumstances then it would be difficult to shape future citizens of the state. Difficulties would overwhelm success.

I will now bring forth my experiences as a Sahayika of Betkundri shishu Shiksha Kendra situated Jhargram sub division of Paschim Medinipur District. I used to work for a Voluntary Organization working on health issues. After having served for twenty years in 2002 I was offered voluntary retirement which landed me in trouble. Then in 2004 when I was offered a job as Sahayika in exchange of meager remuneration I agreed immediately. I tried to put in my best in my new job. To begin with my school did not have any building. My assisstant and I started off with around 15 children in a goat-shed in a tribal neighbourhood about 5-6 kms from Jhargram. Now we have our own school building with brick walls roofed by asbestos. We also have toilets. There are pumps for tap water. The children have regular mid-day meals. Books and school dress reach the children regularly.

Yet I have my questions. To me it is not very important whether the children are studying in a modern building or under the tree. Real lessons should be effective enough to awaken the inner self. But of course school building has its importance too.

Though with abysmally sloth, education is gradually making its presence felt. But what I feel is true education is losing its place in today's society. Every strata of our society has some role to play in this downfall. Parents, teachers, administrators, pedagogy and the environment around us are instrumental in turning education into rudderless boat. The children are mere victims. The children are dollops of soft mud that can be moulded into any shape by the environment around her. In order to make them into better human beings the grownups must set examples of integrity and sincerity. It makes me sorry to say that we are not setting good examples for them to follow. So, how can we expect them to turn out to be sensible human beings?

During the left front rule the supply of rice for mid-day meal was highly irregular. The people of *Jangalmahal* had lots of complaints against it. Today the problem has been mitigated to quite some extent. But nowadays we are hardly visited by any academic supervisors whom we met earlier quite frequently. The academic supervisors visited schools, asked the children questions, set some arithmetic problems for them to solve and provided patient hearing to all our problems. Many a times they have helped us out with working solutions just as a friend. Now all they are concerned about are reports. Their annual visits are drives to collect data. They are so shallow about their ideas that it is difficult to seek the slightest advice from them.

Let me share some snippets of my experience with you. I love spending time with children. I don't feel comfortable visiting the offices of Education Department. But the floor and verandah of my schoolroom are in a despicable condition. The floor is cracked I often find scorpions and other poisonous insects hovering. The adivasi children are not scared of insects. They catch rats and eat them roasted. They hunt chameleons with catapults. But they have no idea how venomous some insects can be! I remain forever alarmed if they get bitten by some insect or manage to swallow them. In the last two years I have spent money for school maintenance, school grant and a few thousand from my own to take care of the property. I spent

the amount allotted for this year to pay off last year's debt. This gives rise to complexities which hasn't been solved.

We do not have proper kitchen for preparing mid-day meal hence use a shed belonging to a neighbouring club. The self help workers who cook meals are Muslims by faith. The musical instruments used by the adivasi boys of the club often made from pig skin. Pigs also stray around the place. One fine day a cook declared they would not be able to cook under such conditions. Next day I found they had bought packets of dry rice crispies for the children. I had to send them back. The parents complained about the lack of meals. Another instance was when the cooks had kept fast for Ramzan so did not turn up. I went up to Jhargram Block office to find a solution. The Mid-day meal department advised me to talk to the BDO. The BDO was busy with meeting. I framed a letter detailing the problem and submitted it in his office and returned the next day. After waiting for quite some time I had a long talk with the BDO. It was decided that mid-day meal could not be stopped for any reason whatsoever. If the usual cooks couldn't do the job somebody else should step in. The meals cannot be cooked in unhygienic condition. Kitchen sheds are being built for primary schools, the SSKs need to wait. He also promised to send his representative in order to motivate the villagers. I could not find any solution to my present problems. He promised me some money but I refused since I was tired of red-tapism.

I am quoting these incidents in order to highlight how much of the teaching hour a teacher has to spend to get simple things done. If all of us want teaching-learning process to be smooth we have to put in something more than just doing just a job. I feel sorry to say that with time I have become rigid and inflexible too.

The SSKs receive minimum grant which I must say is more than what we received earlier. But coping with incessant price hike has now become next to impossible. In order to be a part of "Nirmal Vidyalay" drive we must ensure soap for children's hand wash, equipments for cleaning the rooms and surrounding land, First-aid box, pencil, chalk, registers and hundreds of other things which can hardly be procured. Earlier the school chairman lived close by and knew all the difficulties. But now things have changed. The little money that comes cannot be utilized timely. Nobody spares time for the school anymore. Even in dire crisis we have to move

from person to person to get a cheque signed. A lot of words and time gets spent over nothing.

Putting children at the centre of school activities

Tilak Mukherjee

Sarapul Hatkhola Free Primary School
Swarupnagar

Education or “Shikkha” as it is called in Bengali has its origin in Sanskrit root “Shas”. The root “Shas” is akin to “Shashon” which in Bengali means “to rule” or in more familiar terms “to teach a lesson”. To most of us a teacher “teaches a lesson” but in a very negative way. I was admitted straightaway to Class II in a local primary school. The Maths teacher terrified to such an extent that I was a drop out for over a year. Hence I can feel the insecurity and fear that a child feels on entering a school.

To me education or “shikkha” is comprehensive development of any child. To meet this aim the seeds need to be sown from the primary level of education. And we the primary school teachers in every way are the farmers who nurture the tender seeds to initial maturity. We, the teachers in Swarupnagar are fighting thousands of odds to provide our children with a better childhood. Our aim is to ensure that the children are eager to come to school and whatever time they spend here are filled with unadulterated joy and happiness. And to those pedagogical experts, who straightaway make statements like Government schools comprise unwilling teachers, tortured students and poor quality of education, I would humbly request to come and visit my school so that they can see for themselves. The difference that we have brought about in our school did not happen in an 8 hour shift job rather we have dedicated all 24 hours of a day to the children and have been richly rewarded for it.

Now let me begin from a little earlier. I joined my service in late April, 2010 in Shanrapool Hatkhola Free primary School located in Bashirhat sub-division In 2 Parganas (North).The area around our school is inhabited by fisher-people. There are some who are engaged in farming or business activities. Since the area is bordered by Bangladesh smuggling of illegal goods is not uncommon. The livelihood pattern of the inhabitants clearly points out its backward economic status. Despite struggling against these economic odds the parents ensure that their

children come to school regularly. Their faith on us humbles me and I try my utmost to give make the best out of a difficult situation.

The children and the school are synonymous to me in every way; hence nurturing them is my sole aim as a teacher. The declarations laid down by different commissions, Government orders and numerous workshops all lead to the aim--- adding more colour to the lives of children. But while teaching I have noticed it is best to put theories aside and become one with the children. The children seem to echo what I had heard from a senior educationist,

Tell me I will forget.

Show me I will remember.

Involve me I will understand.

If a child is linked with an activity which she can call her own she will chart her own pathway. In my school the children's monthly journal "Rang-Berang" (A splash of colours) gets published regularly. This journal saw light of the day in April 2013 as a wall magazine. To keep pace with our literary activities we joined hands with Pratchi Institute to organize a book reading festival called the "Joy of reading". The entire day of the festival was spent in a picnic mood by reading storybooks, solving quiz, music-dance recital and lunching together. The children wrote down their experiences at the end of the day. Later a Gokulpur Uttarpara Colony Free Primary School joined the meet and another such festival was held with 60 children from 10 schools of Swarupnagar. Around 10 wall magazines from different schools were published on the day of the festival. Our own "Rang-Berang" is full of write-ups by students of classes III and IV. I am confident that if a any of my students understands the subject matter s/he won't find it difficult to write out 6-7 sentences on it. To ensure the cleanliness of the school premises, punctuality and wholesome involvement of the students the children of classes III and IV receive a special prize.

We also organize different cultural meets and invite parents as spectators. The parents' active participation provides our mission an added boost. Many a times, we teachers venture out in the villages to hold meetings with the teachers. We have a journal called "Shishu-Spandan" where children from our district as well as

others contribute regularly. In September 2013 we organized a discussion on quality of education imparted in schools and rewarded the talented teachers who graced the occasion. Our children have also collaborated with “Sanlaap” theatre group where along with six more schools they organized a seven-day long theatre festival. I notice that the most hyperactive child has calmed down to some extent after participating in these workshops. I derive utmost satisfaction when I am with the children. What I enjoy most is answering each one of their questions, “Sir why didn’t you turn up yesterday?” This occurs whenever I take leave even for a day. I feel happy about the fact they consider me one of them.

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