

Studying While You Work

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THE village was bathed in the soft glow of the receding afternoon. The name of the village is Darirampur, in Trishal thana, district Mymensingh. A lush paddy field radiates all around and a ribbon-like mud track winds through the middle of the field in a zig-zag course. As I was walking through the mud track I caught sight of him. He was well-built, dark-complexioned, with an enchanted look in his eyes. He was wearing a green checkered lungi. His age — it must be seven or eight.

His name is Swapon. Only an hour earlier I was talking with him. Within this short time a vast change has come upon him. At that time he was holding books; now he is holding a pair of shears for cutting paddy.

It's you! Hearing me Swapon looked up towards me and smiled.

What are you doing here?

I am harvesting paddy. The smile still clung to his face.

Is it your land?

No, the land belongs to the chairman.

My father has been hired as a farm land. Father told me, 'Go to school on time and come back on time to work in the field.'

Swapon is following his father's advice in letters and spirit. As soon as his school breaks up, he joins his father in work. He either works on the land or weaves fences or removes the weeds.

He has a younger brother, Ripon who also goes to school and studies in the same class — class One. They go to school together and come home together. The name of their school is Darirampur Ananda Niketan Primary School. It is run by Gano Sahajya Sangstha (GSS).

The school is in a tree-shaded environment, surrounded by bamboo clumps. It has low brick walls topped by bamboo posts and fencing that support a tin roof. In front of the school is a little bit of open space used as play ground. A few dwelling houses have risen in proximity to the school.

Like Swapon and Ripon, Akhram, Farida, Rozina study in this school. They are all students of class One. The school has been started only this year and class Two will be added next year, according to Shirin Akhter, the teacher-in-charge of the school. She also related her problems. The problems of tubewell and sanitary latrine are the most pressing ones. The Supervisor Botu Gopal said the same thing.

Surmounting all these problems the school is going on. Students are coming and studying and playing. A different system is following here. Class is held in two shifts — from 9 to 11:30 and again from 12 noon to 3. GSA's teaching method also differs from that followed in our primary schools. The students sit on gunny-bag mats and the teacher sits on a cane stool. This makes the teacher look like someone very close to the

students. Then starts exchange of welfare and preliminaries. This is called group participation class. Students narrate what they have seen or heard at home, in their neighbourhood or on their way to school. The teacher may ask questions. Questions are also asked about any major world event that students may have heard of. By reporting the news the students acquire language skill. They speak in their local dialect.

Then follows story telling. The teacher reads to them a story from the syllabus and explains it with the help of illustrations. After story telling is over, discussion on the story takes place between the teacher and the students.

After story telling class starts Math class. Numbers, add, subtract, divide. These are taught either by giving demonstration on the black board or using teaching aids.

Next is language training — alphabet, word making, sentence making etc. After this, the teacher asks a student who happened to be absent in the previous class the reason for his or her absence and tells that student not to remain absent in future, except for reasons of illness.

Every Saturday, during language training and discussions about Math, Project class is held. In this class the teacher introduces a profile of some commodity or species from animal life that is of value in the socio-economic development of Bangladesh and holds discussion on it. While discussing he also exhibits pictures. Then students make drawing on the subject on three pieces of paper and present their own views. Drawing materials like paper and crayon are supplied by the school. A copy of their drawings is fixed on the wall of the class every Thursday, so that on Saturday, the first workday of the week, they can see their work displayed on the wall. One copy is kept in the school. And one drawing sheet is taken by the students to their homes so that they can show it to others.

The first part of the class ends amid so much activities. Time taken is 35 minutes. The second part follows which takes 75 minutes. Every class has three tables and six benches. The tables bear particular names — creative table, Bangla table and table for doing arithmetic. At creative table students draw whatever comes to their mind and write a story based on their drawing. In the case of those who cannot write, the teacher after knowing from the student what story is sought to be told, does the writing and the student copies it. The teacher arranges the students into groups. Eight students sit at creative table, six at Math table and six at Bangla table. Of the others, two play with kitchen uten-

sils, four play with teaching aids, two with blocks and two with pictures of animals.

At first the teacher goes to the creative table and gets the students to read Bangla. After he has three of them to read, he does creative writing for the fourth. In this way it takes 20 minutes to get eight students to do reading and creative writing. Later these eight students can play as they wish or do some work on Bangla and Math.

In the same way the teacher calls eight more students at the creative table, gets them to do reading or does creative writing for them. This takes another 20 minutes. Next the teacher calls another eight students at the creative table. Getting them to read and doing creative writing for four of them takes 18 minutes. Then the teacher calls six more students at the creative table. It takes the teacher 12 minutes to listen to the readings and creative writings of six students. The number can be varied according to the size of attendance. For five minutes the teacher looks at the drawings done by students in the class.

The third part of the class extends for 40 minutes. The first 20 minutes is taken up by Math of the small groups, the next 20 minutes by reading and games. This part is completed sitting on gunny-bag mats. Math is taught in small groups. Reading and games classes are taken in similar small groups. In games class a card is shown on which a sentence is printed. The words used in that sentence are separately printed on another card. Students learn to copy the sentence by putting together the disjointed words. They thus practise sentence making by observing the shapes of the words. They learn the words and their pronunciation. In other words, they themselves string the words together, pronounce it and form the right idea about a sentence. In the same class some students are reading, some writing and some playing, divergent activities going on. The teacher is keeping a watch on all.

When the teacher feels that students have acquired self-taught abilities of reading and writing, they are taught English instead of reading and games. The books approved by the government School Text Book Board are followed.

Besides, every Thursday after groups participation class, class-based cultural programme is held. The students take part in songs, dance, rhymes, poetry, recitation and acting. For acting there is no script and they just imitate what they see in their homes and surroundings.

Merit is tested not through conventional examination but through a method of evaluation. The GSS is going ahead with this innovative

method of education and trying to ensure basic literacy for every man.

Great enthusiasm is seen among the local people about the school. Earlier the guardians had no hope that their children would study in school. The reason was given by a guardian, Safiruddin: For going to school a child has to cross the highway which is risky, as vehicles ply on it busily all day.

Two other guardians, Jasimuddin and Abdul Gafur, spoke in the same vein. Fear of accident had kept the people of Darirampur away from education. They felt insecure. But today Darirampur Ananda Niketan School is the answer to their need. The school is within their village and does not require crossing the highway, a child just has to take the mud track. Today the people are sending their own children to school, encouraging others and asking teachers how their children are doing.

The magic touch of education has leavened up the people of Darirampur. They are almost entirely day-labourers and mostly work as farm hands. They live in houses made of mud or frail bamboo mats fenced with banana trees. With their meagre income they cannot afford anything better. But the want to see their children receive education and grow up as enlightened men and women.

The children at that early age have learnt different kinds of works. Girls assist their mothers, boys assist their fathers. Farida after her school picks dry leaves to light their stove. Her brother and sister also read in this school, in class One. Farida even got four other children enrolled in this school. In harvesting season they go to the paddy field in groups. Some girls comb through the fields to pick out some edible leafy vegetables. They dry the paddy with their mothers. And alongside all household activities, education goes on unimpeded.

These children are a proof that household chores do not stand in the way of education. They are never overcome with fatigue. Their lives are interwoven with the field and crops. Therefore Swapon keeps his father satisfied by working with him. At the same time he feels terribly attracted to the school. He says he wants to study up to SSC level. He faces no problem. He studies when it is time to study and works at working time. Can he play? On some days, yes; on some other days he can't. He stays by his father's side all the time.

Swapon says, you can study even though you have to work. He told this to his cousin, son of his maternal uncle. The cousin is his own age, but does not go to school. He weeds out the grass with his father. Swapon's maternal uncle too is unwilling to put him in school. Who will do the work? But Swapon does not accept the argument. He says, I took work with my father and also go to school.

— Development Features