

## **1. The walled education system and suffocation of children**

Everyone has been slowly realizing that the bookish and mug-gish education system has no space for the free ideas of children. Their thoughts, emotions and ideas remain unexpressed. We have been refusing the free, joyful, stress-free time to children. We have given up thinking about their pass time which might help them to reduce the stress on their minds.

## **2. Shantiniketan**

Such times often remind me of Rabindranath. I am reminded of his Shantiniketan. It was his answer to the system which had taken up putting everyone in the clerical mould and making all nothing else but clerks. Even in his times he found the education system back then as something that restricts the natural development of children. One hundred and fifty years later, we have failed to change it; rather we have made it crueller and more heartless. All it is doing is chaining the children to conventions.

And that is why

I keep feeling that everyone should experience Shantiniketan, strongly.

## **3. With the Nature**

All should gather. Experience and observe nature wholeheartedly. Sing songs. Compose them. Dance. Should write and read something. Look for the moments of joy. Have a desire for beauty. Prepare them. They should Experience friendship and Think of the welfare the world. They should think of ethics, debate and should dream of the future. They should shape as they wish and should have the courage to fight the stream to swim against it. They should trace the universal truth and look for the hidden qualities in them. They should let such qualities bloom and nurture them.

## **4. Dialogue with children.**

We should have a dialogue with the children for that to happen. We should develop their sensibilities by finding our way to their minds and hearts. It will be crucial in giving them the direction.

## **5. Theatre: a Life experience.**

Theatre is a laboratory that can do all those things. It is an amazing life experience. It is a wonderful medium that binds us all.

I have been working with the kids at Shiragaon and doing all these things with them using theatre as a medium for last two decades or more. The journey is full of beautiful things and unforgettable memories. When Mr. Waman Pandit of Kankavli's Vasantarao Acharekar Sanskrutik Pratishthan asked me about these activities with the kids of Kankavali, I told him with joy that I would love to work on such activities.

I had conducted this camp in the April of 2012. It was organized by Vasantarao Acharekar Sanskrutik Pratishthan. The camp included kids between the age group of 5 to 15. It was not only about theatre. It was a step-in search of Shantiniketan. Therefore, it was not named of children's theatre workshop; it was called Pathways to Creativity.

## **6. Rabindranath in the mind!**

Theatre is an occasion.

We will weave friendships

And with those friendly hands

In unison we will roam, wander

And search for the

Pathways to creativity.

We will walk far

While creating

Something meaningful

By finding a harmony

Between

Words, tunes and images.

We will create

New worlds and views

On our way

We will

Play with the rainbows

And sing songs

Of the

Trees, birds, hills, and water.

Shantiniketan is an experience

It is neither a place nor a school

It is a chance to become

Rabindranath in the mind!

It is a chance to farm

And to create

Stories, poems, drawings,

Sculpture, music, and theatre.

## **7. The beginning**

We began with such an aim. There is always a possibility of a poet's idea being ridiculed in the real world; but no one had the chance to do so. On the first day, Prof. Anil Farakate spoke to the kids and their parents about the beauty of creativity. Many heard the word "creativity" for the first time.

## **8. The Evening of Joy**

I admire the volunteers of Vasantarao Acharekar Sanskrutik Pratishthan and how disciplined they are. They look after everything standing at a distance. They always make them available whenever children call them out. We, that is, more than forty kids, their parents and the volunteers of Vasantarao Acharekar Sanskrutik Pratishthan started gathering. It would begin at 6 in the evening to around 10 in the night. We became friends. We got along really well. We were like one family. Every evening, became an evening of joy. We got to know each other; various games had begun. We started calling out to each other. Roads were built to bridge the gaps in us and our minds. Some were silent, while the other was a chatterbox. Some were quiet, the others were notorious. We got to each other's nature and got used to the space between us.

## **9. Fun, Chatting and Songs**

It was decided that the first hour or hour and half was dedicated to chatting, songs, stories, reading and a game. We would move to the drama after the evening snacks and we used to follow that.

## **10. The Poets' Corner**

Until it was dark, we used to sit at the Poets' Corner at the bank of the river. The flow of the *Gad* River is visible from there so are two bridges, one for the railway and other for the vehicles. Birds make their presence felt here. While some soar, some relax on the wire. It's fun to observe their reflections in the water. We used to laugh at the backward running reflections of the cars in the water. Many saw the kingfisher there for the first time as he dives in a flash towards the water for the fish and soars back. The place is ideal to observe the birds of all kinds. Everyone loves sitting there on the steps, touching the tree and the leaves and looking for seeds. While observing the currents of the water, we even had a heavy debate over existence of god. We arrived concluded that God is a concept of goodness and the stories from the mythology is the study of good and bad and everyone him or herself is the best judge of that. We discuss on it every now and then. We used to talk about various things from how the universe came into existence to how do eclipses take place to if magic is real. It is then we realized that agreeing is not important but provoking a thought and discussing over it is.

## **11. Raining questions**

Everyone has something to say to the other. It remains unsaid if there is no listener. Kids have too many unasked questions and these unanswered questions trouble them a lot. The camp was a nice place to speak their minds. Everyone spoke, every question of the world was asked here. The nature of the dialogue was such that the kids were allowed to ask anything under the sun. Everyone was told to speak their minds and ask questions to know answers. That

is why I find this question answer session very important. The dialogues with the grandparents don't happen anymore. Parents do not always have time on their hands and whatever time remains, is consumed by the TV sets. The kids liked the fact that I have ample time to talk to and listen to them. The aim was not for me to talk, but the kids could talk. It often leads to noise and chaos, because everyone has something to say but kids find a way through it. It is how they learn to listen to each other. I have always liked the chatterboxes than the ones who leave in stress under the name of discipline. In the long run these expressive kids will not only learn self-discipline but will also not hesitate putting down their opinions. This hour includes what not from jokes, funny moments in the class, comments on the news, the puzzles, and the picnics to the questions from the exam and the gossips of the celebrity and then to complaints and childhood memories.