

+ COVER STORY | NEAR AND DEAR | SPOOF

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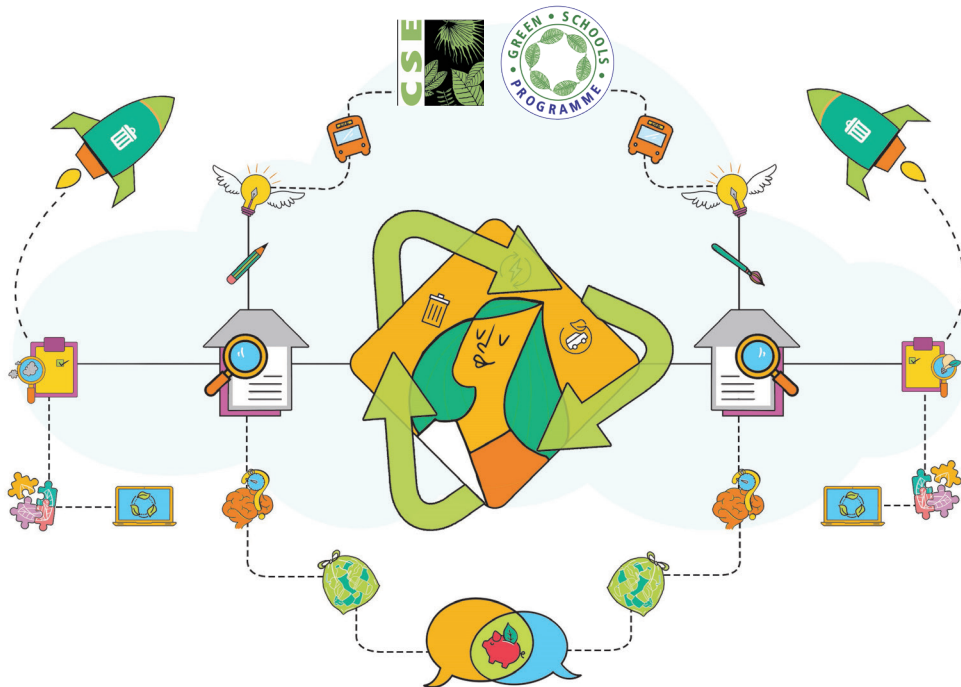
A DOWN TO EARTH SUPPLEMENT FOR THE YOUNG AND CURIOUS



The Bagpiper with Books

As corona sweeps like a wiper,
Studies and games aren't riper.
As normalcy plays hitch-hiker,
Teachers lead like a pied piper.





Green Schools Programme

AUDIT@HOME WASTE WARRIORS

An online waste audit that you can do in your homes

Dear Student,

Hello from the [Green Schools Programme](#) of Centre for Science and Environment!

We are excited to announce that GSP Audit@Home is back in a new form! After the audit survey on energy, **Audit@Home will now focus on waste management at home.**

GSP Audit@Home: Waste Warriors

Do you know that more than 50 per cent of the solid waste generated in India is biodegradable—it can break down on its own given the adequate conditions? This means that half of the waste can be treated at source and need not go to the landfills at all. Still, the mountains of waste in landfills are increasing at such a fast rate that most of them have run out of their storage capacity!

We need to start taking responsibility for the waste we generate. Take the Audit@Home survey and learn what you can do to be a part of the solution.

The first step to this is to benchmark how much waste we generate, and then finally reduce and manage it. **GSP Audit@Home: Waste Warriors** is a

survey to help you learn to manage your household waste efficiently by answering questions regarding waste, its segregation, appropriate disposal, etc. The first task is to understand the status of waste in India. Take a quick quiz to check your knowledge on waste and then move to the next task to assess your household practices.

Participation in the survey is free. Ideally, it can be taken by students of Grades 5 to 10, but other students are also welcome to participate. It takes 5 to 7 days to observe the household practices and answer the questions. You may take help from your teachers or family members in completing the survey.

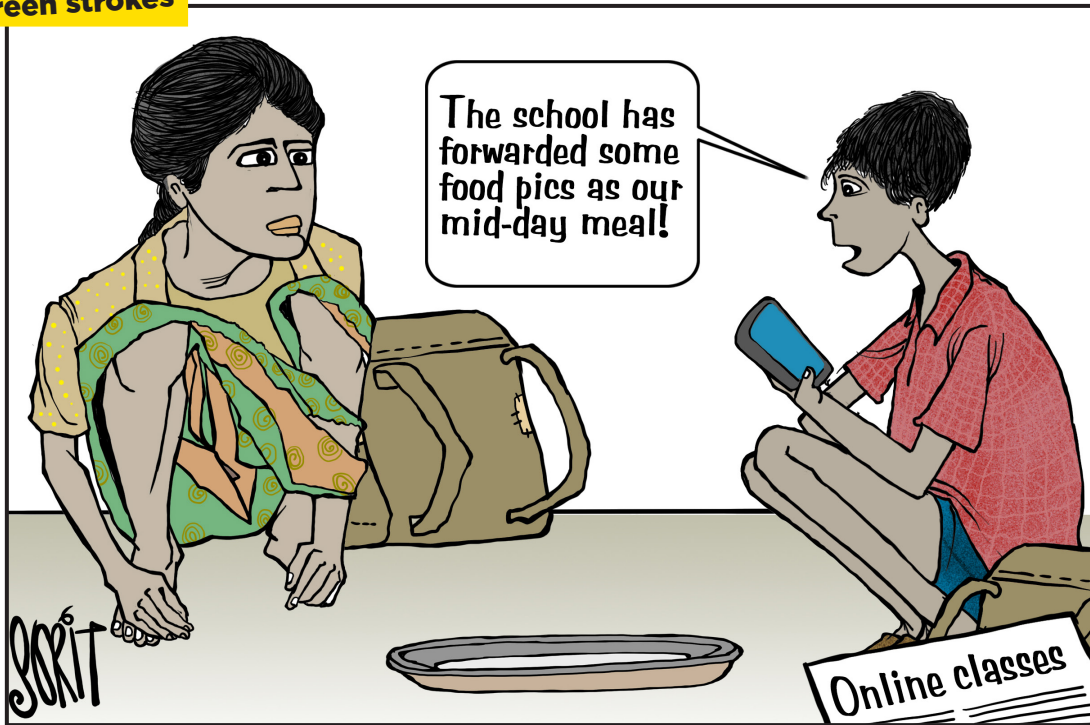
Please note that you can use the same login details that you used for the energy audit.

All the participants who successfully submit the survey will be provided with personalised scorecards – a detailed report that tells how environmentally-sustainable your waste management practices are and how those can be improved!

The last date to submit the survey is Monday, September 20, 2021.

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Green strokes



The Duishens of the Pandemic

Chinghiz Aitmatov was a Kyrgyz author. In his bestseller, *The First Teacher*, he narrated how a character named Duishen, who was himself not very educated, taught the kids of his extremely backward village to upgrade their lives and their society. Its story revolves around Altynai, a teenage girl who really wanted to attend school but her conservative parents strongly objected. That's when Duishen took the responsibility to educate her along with several other poor kids. He transformed a deserted hut in a nearby hillock into a classroom and overcame a series of obstacles to teach them. At the end, we see that with the help of this 'first teacher' Altynai not only managed to study but also became a famous academic.

We often take our education for granted because we can easily access our schools, buy books, play sports, etc. But in a country like ours, there are countless living under destitution in rural areas for

whom these basic facilities are not less than any dream or a luxury. And as if this poverty was not enough, we already have the COVID-19 on a gigantic scale. When the privileged kids managed to go online, what happened to these poor kids? It's unfair to ask them to purchase a smartphone when they can't even afford two square meals.

Even as you read this, there are countless dropping out of their classrooms. For them corona is more than just a disease. It is not only a discontinuation of their studies, mid-day meals, subsidised books, and scholarships, but a struggle for survival and a loss of a lifetime. However, the picture is not all that gloomy, thanks to some good Samaritans who lead our kids like a Pied Piper and served as their 'first teachers'. As we celebrate 5th September as our Teacher's day, *Gobar Times* salutes these Duishens and Pied Pipers of our country.



Enlightenment under the Tree

A standing ovation to those who actually do something about the problems they see around them—a story of a simple teacher who rescues kids without a future.

Amit Rajbhar

Namaste friends! My name is Amit Rajbhar. I stay in Chaknapur (Kosda) village, which lies in the Arajai Line Block of Varanasi. Since the past 15 years, I have been working as a school teacher in the Asha Samajik Vidyalaya. It is run by an NGO called 'Asha for Education'.

In the village that I belong, about 90 per cent of the residents are daily labourers who work as masons or helpers at construction sites. Last year, after the first nationwide lockdown, all these people lost their livelihoods completely. They almost fell on the verge of extreme poverty and starvation.





All the schools were also shut down completely as a result of which their children's studies got ruined entirely. In such a situation, various social organisations were trying to help the people in different ways. That was when I felt that I too should do something, like teach the kids in my village. So, I started doing so.

In just a matter of time, about 55-60 students started attending my classes. To keep them safe, most importantly, I divided them into two groups and scheduled them as per different timetables. Then, with the help of my friends, I arranged for some masks, sanitizers, and a rug or a plastic sheet to sit on, to hold their classes.

During the second wave of COVID, we stopped our classes for some time. But as soon as the situation normalised, with the financial help provided by some of my friends, I distributed notebooks and some essential food items to each of my students. Their headcount had reached 65 by then. That's how we initiated their studies with a renewed sense of energy and enthusiasm, which is still continuing these days.

In this whole endeavour, safety was our greatest challenge. We had to keep ourselves safe and we also had to keep our children safe. Alongside, we had to carry forward their studies. So, the solution we found was to arrange

for their classes in an open area instead of any closed room—in the shade of a tree, on a durrie, using masks and following social-distancing norms.

The second problem was that I was the lone teacher of a class where all the students were of different ages, different grades, and different schools. So, I felt the need for a support staff. Since I do not accept any salary and all the students in my class are also taught absolutely free of cost, we do not have any funds of our own. Hence, no one came forward willingly to offer any help in my school. So, what was the solution? My dear wife volunteered to teach the little kids and is still offering me the biggest support.

Next hurdle in my journey: during the rainy days, it was not possible to teach anyone in the open, under the tree. So, out of my savings, at the corner of my farm field, I made available a *kuchcha* (mud) hut and a room made of bare bricks and tin shade. This became our classroom whenever it rained outside.

Even these days, when the schools are shut, we continue to teach our kids and hope they gain enlightenment just as Buddha once did under the tree.





Haan, Hum Padhate Hain... Tum Padhoge?

(Yes, I teach... Will you learn?)

Story of an inspiring teacher who sets up classes where most desired but none took the initiative.

Ramesh Prasad



Friends, this story belongs to the period when corona had stretched its arms wide across our country. The way this pandemic spread worldwide, it seemed as if this planet was welcoming it willingly. Gradually, it spread into the nook and corners of our villages as well.

On 21st March 2020, the lockdown was imposed in Uttar Pradesh. We were asked to beat our 'taali aur thaali' (claps and plates) to destroy this airborne virus. Our village elders used to believe that banging plates and beating

claps deprives us of our livelihood. That is exactly what happened. Uncountable people lost their lives and numerous others their *roji-roti* (daily bread). Children too were not spared and their studies took a hard-hit.

In July-August that year, the government arranged for online classes. Many school teachers connected with their students through WhatsApp to complete their courses. But all this could not leverage the poor kids in other schools in any way. Many over there did not have any

mobiles and the ones who did had keypad-based phones, which did not have any Internet. Further, whenever they had phones, they mostly played games on them. The children of landless labourers suffered the most this way. These kids spent most of their time shepherding goats, cows, and buffaloes or fished in the river nearby. Meanwhile, the affluent homes in cities provided their kids with online classes.

In my Rajvari village, there is a Savitri Bai Phule Educational Centre run by the Asha Trust, an

NGO, which runs classes absolutely free of cost for underprivileged students. That's how it occurred to me that the adults in our village should, as much as possible, spend at least 4-6 hours daily among our children. This will engage them in some learning activities and also keep us entertained alongside. Slowly and steadily, we felt the need for some resources to pursue these tasks. Some of my friends thus helped me to carry them out.

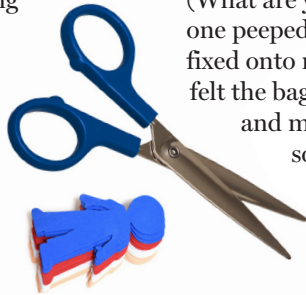
The Asha Trust distributed about 300 notebooks, 500 masks, and tasty biscuits to my little children. We shortlisted ten villages where I could hold my classes and toured 3-4 of them every day. We identified the places where children could assemble—under the tree or on a riverside. As all of this proceeded, my colleagues from a private school, though supportive, were a little doubtful. More than corona, which hadn't attacked their village, they were weary of the government's notice—'*Do gaz ki doori, mask hai zaroori* (Two feet distance and mask maintenance)', which could shut down my classes even if corona wouldn't.

Actually, such a government dictum is not implementable in our villages where most people live in small, congested houses and families include cows, goats, and hens. Upon children, this protocol is useless even more. Nonetheless, I cycled from village to village

carrying my bag of books, masks, and sanitizers.

One day, I reached a place where some children were grazing goats. On spotting them, I landed up with them. One child scanned me and asked, "*Kya bech rahe ho?* (What are you selling?)." Another one peeped into my bag that I had fixed onto my bicycle carrier. He felt the bag with both his hands and made out that there were some books inside.

"*Aap padhate ho?* (Do you teach?)," he inquired.



"*Haan, hum padhate hain. Tum padhoge?* (Yes, I teach. Will you learn?)"

And hence, my classes began under a tree close by. As I bicycled each day from village to village, many good Samaritans came my way. That's how at 10am the next morning, my kids and I reassembled in Roshni's mud hut. Likewise, in Sirayyiya village, we sat inside Sanjay bhai's straw hut. Thus, I rode to six different villages to deliver my classes. Day-by-day this journey kickstarted—



masks and sanitizers distributed, corona protocols explained, books opened, pages turned, destinies rewritten.

The classes soon became very popular and we never had to invite children for attendance. In Siraiyya itself, about 30-35 students sat with me daily. Through fun and play, I taught them logic, narrated inspiring stories of great people, showed pictures of flora and fauna, and explained other subjects. Equally soon, people also made fun of my initiatives.

Narsingh bhai, a village

resident, snapped, "*Kaho Master! Bakri charaane waalon ko DM bana doge ka?* (Hey Master! Are you gonna convert goat shepherds into District Magistrates or what?)"

In Dhakwa village, Budhna *kaki* (aunt) was pissed, "*Bachwa, kahe ko jaan de rahe ho?* (Dude, why are you wasting your life over this?)"

In Kaithi village, I was dubbed as the *jholawala master* (Bag Master).

In Siraiyya village, Santoshi *Dadi* (granny) minding her pig with a stick warned, "*Kaho Master? Tumhare aane se*

mahamari nahi hogi?... Bacha kar padhaiyega. (Hey, Master! You think the pandemic won't hit us if you come over?... Keep safe as you preach)."

In the second wave of COVID, our study enterprise ran slow. But, some days later, my kids and I were back inside the classroom.

This is how the story of education during COVID had been in the small, decrepit Rajvari Nayay Panchayat of Varanasi.



Peti Waali Didi

Reeta Mondal, a teacher at the PG Umathe Upper Primary Government School, Raipur, volunteers to colour the doomsdays of lockdown with her bag of crayons.

Purusottam Singh Thakur



When the countrywide lockdown was imposed last year, we witnessed three kinds of people. The first were those who locked themselves inside their houses. The second were those who couldn't afford to do so like, the migrant labourers. And the third were those who had no option, like the doctors, medical staff, and police. Among these third kind was a very important but quiet community and this was of the teachers.



Several passionate educators came forward to contribute towards the society, including Reeta Mondal. "As the COVID era dawned precisely from the 23rd March, 2020, there was a complete shutdown of schools. Nobody was able to understand what to do. For some days, we ourselves remained within the four walls. We feared the pandemic. So, escaping it was our highest priority. We barely thought about studies. The entire April

to June became a summer holiday," recalls Reeta.

Since everyone stayed at home, the students were even promoted to higher classes without exams. Though the schools were about to reopen in July, they didn't. "We formed WhatsApp groups for our children and I circulated some videos relating to their new courses," volunteered Reeta. "We had developed these videos based on our study material, which we taught in our classes. The children also submitted their homework based on them."

Later, Reeta got to know that the State Council for Education, Research and Training was training those interested in conducting online classes. She seized this opportunity to learn all about them. Then, she held sessions through Webex and her students enjoyed them thoroughly. Reeta proudly tells this reporter, "When I started sharing my links in different WhatsApp



groups, to my surprise, about 110-120 students began participating enthusiastically."

However, many others couldn't join her as they didn't have mobiles. "So, I arranged for 'mohalla classes' in marginalised localities where pre-primary to middle schoolers attended my classes physically. When I engaged them further through creative activities, I found that they didn't have any colour pencils or crayons as they couldn't afford them! So, I brought all those things for them in an old suitcase on my bike every day. Hence, they called me the 'peti waali didi' (suitcase-bearing didi)—a title which I loved very much!"



Gradually, Reeta involved two young people as 'Shiksha Mitra,' whom she paid a token amount for assisting her. In this way, Reeta by herself organised two mohalla classes and became an inspiration for the people around her.



The Veranda Classes

Navdeep Salam, a teacher at the Government Primary School, Nathukonha village, Dhamtari district, Chhattisgarh, redefines the grim ground reality by creating a room-to-read where none existed.

Purusottam Singh Thakur

The road leading towards Nathukonha, the only one connecting it with the rest of the world, is undoubtedly its most recent and significant development. Nathukonha is a small, remote village of the Gond tribe. Situated in the Nagri block in Dhamtari district in Chhattisgarh, the struggle for survival for this decrepit village during lockdown was much harder than for many others. Of particular urgency was the problem of its children who were down because of the lock imposed on their education. However, the way in which one of its young boys beat and overcame this challenge, Nathukonha indeed has a hero to reckon with.

Navdeep Salam is a young, Gond tribal boy who was a student of the same school where he is teaching right now. Before joining here, he was working in the postal department for one and half years.

A teacher at the Government Primary School in the village, Navdeep recollects humbly about how his story began.

"We waited for some time for the government to announce its decision (on the schools). But when we did not hear any news, then we initiated these 'mohalla classes' on our own. We started them in the verandah of my home!"

"As a child, I always wanted to be a teacher. So, when I got the opportunity, I left the job of the postal department and came here in 2013. When there was lockdown, our entire village was cut off from the outside world. As a resident of the village, I observed and understood the problems of our children. So, I started these classes in my verandah. I was aware that

the students don't have an apt atmosphere of reading and writing in their homes. Therefore, they had to be offered such an environment only within a classroom. Thus, I spoke to the people in my community and they all willingly allowed me to run these classes."

"I was taking these *mohalla* classes for three hours in the morning. Then, I also used to take evening classes for those aspirants who were preparing for the entrance exam of the Navodaya Vidyalayas," describes Navdeep in some detail.

When this reporter visited his veranda classes, he witnessed their vibrance and the sanctity of the efforts invested by Navdeep. As his students began taking interest in these classes, he began living his dream of being a teacher and also enabled many others to cherish a dream of their own. With hopes kindling within the little minds of these veranda classes, the road to the future of Nathukonha seems to be a much prosperous one.



I Love Teaching

Rupali Dhruv, a young student volunteer-turned-teacher in the Sarbada village, Dhamtari District, Chhattisgarh, rises up in the challenging times when many were found wanting.

Purusottam Singh Thakur

“I love teaching and the kids in my neighbourhood also enjoy my company,” describes Rupali Dhruv when asked about her source of motivation behind pursuing teaching. Besides online classes that were offered by most established schools, many *mohalla* classes came up during the lockdown. These gave the opportunity to several volunteers, like Rupali, to contribute their learning towards promoting children’s



education. Many of these volunteers were college-going students or young professionals pursuing work-from-home. Or they were even younger like Rupali who was barely studying in class 12th. Often, they were motivated by their well-wishers to set up these local classes.

“At that time (lockdown), the 'Seekh program (Learning program)' was launched by the government and I was contacted by Kuleshwar Sahuji, the Headmaster of the Government Primary School of my village. He asked me if I can assist him in teaching the students of his

Rupali Dhruv appreciated by Anurag Behar, Vice Chancellor, Azim Premji University when he was on a visit to the Sarbada village.

school. I willingly agreed and began holding my classes in the community center of our village. I was assigned the students of classes 3rd to 5th. These had about 60 students. I enjoyed taking their sessions. Further, this was also an opportunity for me to get some teaching experience,” recalls Rupali on how it all kickstarted.

Kuleshwar Sahu, her Headmaster, also appreciated her hard work and enthusiasm and that of her friend, Damini

Sahu. “Due to the efforts of these two young girls, the students of Sarbada were not deprived of their classes during the COVID. They held their classes between 10:30am and 1:30pm regularly and it was not an easy task at all. But the girls have done very well that too without any remuneration,” praised Kuleshwar Sahu for all their generosity.

As Rupali gains greater recognition for her services, she stands glowing under the sunlight as this reporter records her story.



Vigyaan@Rural India

When altruism overcomes geography to teach physics, chemistry, maths, and biology in the far flung areas of the country via regional languages during COVID times.

Prof Rahul Pandey

Lockdown' is a word which not only the whole world is familiar with but is also a victim of. Following its imposition last year, the children staying in my campus—the Indian Institute of Sciences (IISc), Bengaluru—got engaged with their online classes. On observing them, I wondered as to how many kids are actually able to log-in in our country? They are barely a handful. So, what should one really do so that the poor and tribal children based in the nook-and-corners of India are also able to study?

Seeking a solution, I interacted with many teachers from my institute, the IISc, plus various IIT professors and those retired from the IIMs. In conclusion, at least a dozen of them voluntarily agreed to teach such kids by streaming online classes from Bengaluru onto very inaccessible areas.

Now, the biggest question was: how will the kids, living in such distant locations, avail a laptop or access the Internet? So, we collaborated with some NGOs in these regions. They assembled the kids under one roof and provided them with laptops and even projectors, which served the classes like digital blackboards.

But it is still not easy for the underprivileged children to attend such tuitions. Good teachers are also difficult to find. Anyway, we were determined to eliminate these limitations. Most teachers in our panel were already associated with some prestigious institutions. They began holding classes for 1-1.5 hours and encouraged to-and-fro discussions within their classrooms.

We also know that physics, chemistry, mathematics, and biology are among the toughest subjects for young learners. In addition to them, is the know-how of the English language. Hence, we focused on these subjects. But the grasping level of our students was pretty modest. So, we delivered our lectures in their mother tongue, including for English. As we simplified various scientific concepts through

regional languages, these kids successfully combated their fear of science. They also participated enthusiastically in our classes as all our teammates are very passionate teachers.

By now, it has been a year since we began this initiative and currently have seven centres countrywide. There are two in Karnataka, two in Tamil Nadu, three in Kerala, and four in UP. When I look at our kids, I am left amazed by their talent and potential. Hence, we swear to make every possible effort to ensure that their growth remains uninhibited even though the covid has shaken the nuts and bolts of our society. We swear to make available some of the best science teachers to the poorest children of our country.

Prof Rahul Pandey is associated with IISc, Bengaluru.





The Teaching Top-Up

A grassroots warrior goes an extra mile to arrange for, run, and improve classes for underprivileged little girls during the pandemic.

Smriti Rao

I am Smriti, a Teach For India fellow from Bengaluru. As part of my fellowship, I teach a bunch of adorable grade three girls at the Bright High School.

When I was about to start my teaching journey, unfortunately, we were all stuck by the COVID-19 pandemic. That's when we were forced to think about alternate teaching methods for kids. Like most teachers all over the world, I decided to start teaching through Zoom classes. Being a new teacher, I had a set of my own challenges.

Firstly, I needed to reach out to the kids and even their parents, introduce myself, and convince the kids to attend my classes. Next, I needed to arrange for tablets and Internet top-ups for the parents so that their children could attend my classes. Further, due to the pandemic, most of these kids had moved back to their villages and were unreachable.

Of course, this wasn't going to be an easy task. Even after the distribution of tabs, the girls faced a lot technical difficulties or network issues. There were days when both the kids and I were usually frustrated or upset because of the digital divide we were facing. Also, there were days when my kids were falling sick or had seen their loved ones falling sick, and experienced losses in their families.

The last year hasn't been easy for either the students or us as we had to adjust and adapt to a whole new learning system.

There are days when we crave for schools to reopen so that we can teach our kids in-person.

But there is a silver lining to this gloomy cloud as well. During my online classes, I was able to make my classroom learning very fun-filled in many ways.

I played music, made my students dance, and taught them difficult concepts

through interesting videos. Of course, there are days when even after a lot of planning and preparation my girls are clueless and end up not gathering anything. Now, that the schools are partially opening, I go there and spend time often by giving out worksheet sets to my students. Many times while visiting the school these days, I notice that our neighbourhood community is quite dirty and polluted, and the kids are very unaware of the cleanliness required. Hence, my co-fellow and I started a project where we conducted online classes once a week to teach them about cleanliness and sustainability. I, personally, believe that initiatives like these will make the kids more aware, concerned, and proactive about cleaning and conserving our environment.

We, teachers, have gone an extra mile during this pandemic to ensure that there is no loss of learning for our children. I appreciate all my peers out there who keep doing amazing work and wish them all a very Happy Teachers Day!

Smriti is a Teach for India fellow in Bengaluru.





The Society Lovers

Transforming children for a better tomorrow.

Jebashree Jenifer Kennedy

A true transformation can only happen within a classroom, I believe. Hence, I chose to drop out of my civil services preparation and pursue a career in teaching. I taught seventh grade social sciences to 70 brilliant children from low-income homes in North Chennai. On my first day, I was somewhat nervous but their athletic, musical, and learning ability surprised me.

Because they came from poor families, these children encountered a variety of social issues at their home and community, which influenced their education highly. I struggled mightily in my first year to keep the classroom free of bullying and behavioral issues. Furthermore, I witnessed a lot of gender imbalance among them with violence posing the greatest threat.

My initial goal was to persuade them to accept me as a teacher and a trustworthy adult. I tried achieving this by building relationships with them. My co-teacher used to say that the best way to change a child's behaviour is to model it. That's why we started doing some team-building activities, like decorating the classroom, to encourage the kids to interact with one another without fighting and accepting each other's point-of-view. This was done to channelise their potential towards nurturing their creativity. My children also competed in an inter-school dance competition where they were given the opportunity to perform



thrice, something no other team had done before. They were wildly praised by the audience, which included the Educational Officer, who was present as a special guest. On the same day, one of the kids commented, "Now, I understand why you made us redo the dance moves for every tiny mistake." That was a defining event in our relationship.

Every student in my classroom, regardless of their test scores, had their voices heard and participated through debates, projects, and performances. During the pandemic, as teachers, we were able to bring around 25 children online and set up a community space where they could learn in-person.

I've always felt that children have the potential to renovate our society. So, to encourage them to pursue a social activity, one of my pupils suggested

that we should organise a squad called the 'Society Lovers'. This outdoor activity of cleaning up a local beach in the city inspired them all to volunteer and work together. Thus, after my two years of teaching, I was able to boost their inter-personal bonding. On the last day of my class, my girl children revealed that they had gained more confidence that they previously lacked. They are aware that their opinions matter and have clarity to pursue what they truly desire. Such rewarding comments encouraged me to continue as a true Society Lover!

Jebashree is a Teach for India fellow (2019-20) based in Chennai.



Project Tomato

A visionary teacher who nurtures young minds to develop their scientific temperament and brighten their future.

Janani Ramachandran

When I chose teaching as my career, I had forgone multiple job offers that I had received after my graduation. I still remember telling a lot of people, “Career is the most important part of anyone’s life. It continues till our retirement, that is, almost two-thirds of our lifetime. When I look back, I have to be happy and feel

time. Sometimes, their questions leave me dumbfounded. I should say that though I am their teacher, I learn a lot from them.

As a class teacher of grade three, I have always aspired equal opportunities for my students, most of who are underprivileged, to excel them not only academically but also socially. To build their awareness about

significance in our environment. That was a really proud and truly enlightening moment for me as a teacher. It made me realise that even if I don’t spoon feed my children with every important detail, they can still reach their end goal if I just guide them rightly. This made me feel that I should strive to provide them with more resources to help them grow in future.

To cultivate their social and emotional learning, I encourage them to attend their weekly Yoga-Ed classes. This makes them calmer and improves their focus and concentration. They also have a regular ‘Feelings Circle’ and ‘Friends Circle’ to express their emotions and to talk to their friends.

I am currently working on ‘Project Vidhya,’ where I introduce the students to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). I have especially designed it after being aware of the common misconception that studying mere engineering these days will not fetch anyone a good job. As an engineer and their teacher, I wish to build their awareness about the vast opportunities in STEM related fields and the vast scope of jobs outside. This will give them the wings to soar high and fulfill their dreams just as I am fulfilling mine.

*Janani Ramachandran
is a Teach For India fellow
based in Chennai.*



fulfilled with what I have done. There should be no regrets.”

Though I had a lot of self-doubt on how I’ll be able to provide a holistic education to my students during the pandemic, I believe that the secret of getting ahead is in getting started. My students are a very curious lot and most of the time their query sessions even exceed my teaching

their surroundings, I started the ‘Project Tomato,’ which inspired them to pursue gardening. After four months, when their plants ripened, I held a ‘Reflection Circle’ where they shared about their experiences. The cherry on top was that, even though I never discussed this in the classroom, my kids themselves realised the importance of plants and their



The House of Sparrows

Where happiness comes in small packages—the ever-delightful house sparrow.

Gargi Mishra

We often ignore our immediate periphery in our quest for finding excitement. Just think of the house sparrows! As a kid, out of sheer ignorance, I recall embarrassingly how I plundered their nests. But now, I compensate by feeding their chicks, watering them, and sheltering them in their cushy abodes.

In all this while, these humble birds never ever deserted their homes nor me. We often take them for granted because we grow up with them in our surroundings—they are a part of our natural world. But, of late, I feel, that we too are a part of their natural world. They are well-acquainted with our presence—our smell and sight. This is particularly so where people live under traditional thatched roofs. As most of us became city-dwellers, I am very happy that these birdies have not chosen to abandon us.

Diligent little sparrows still build nests near my house

and frequently visit my balcony. They are here in large numbers because they enjoy the fig trees, food, water bath and dust bath that is available here. Please also note that all this is in the midst of a megalopolis like Delhi. Their chirpiness caught the attention of one of our family friends, who after seeing their large crowd, chuckled, "Who says all sparrows have become extinct? Rather, all of them have taken shelter at your place!"

It is believed that house sparrows have been living with humans since the Stone Age. They originated from the Middle East and as humans expanded agriculture and sailed across the seas, sparrows too flew alongside. Thus, the 'spearwa' of old Greek times became the 'sparrow' as we know today.

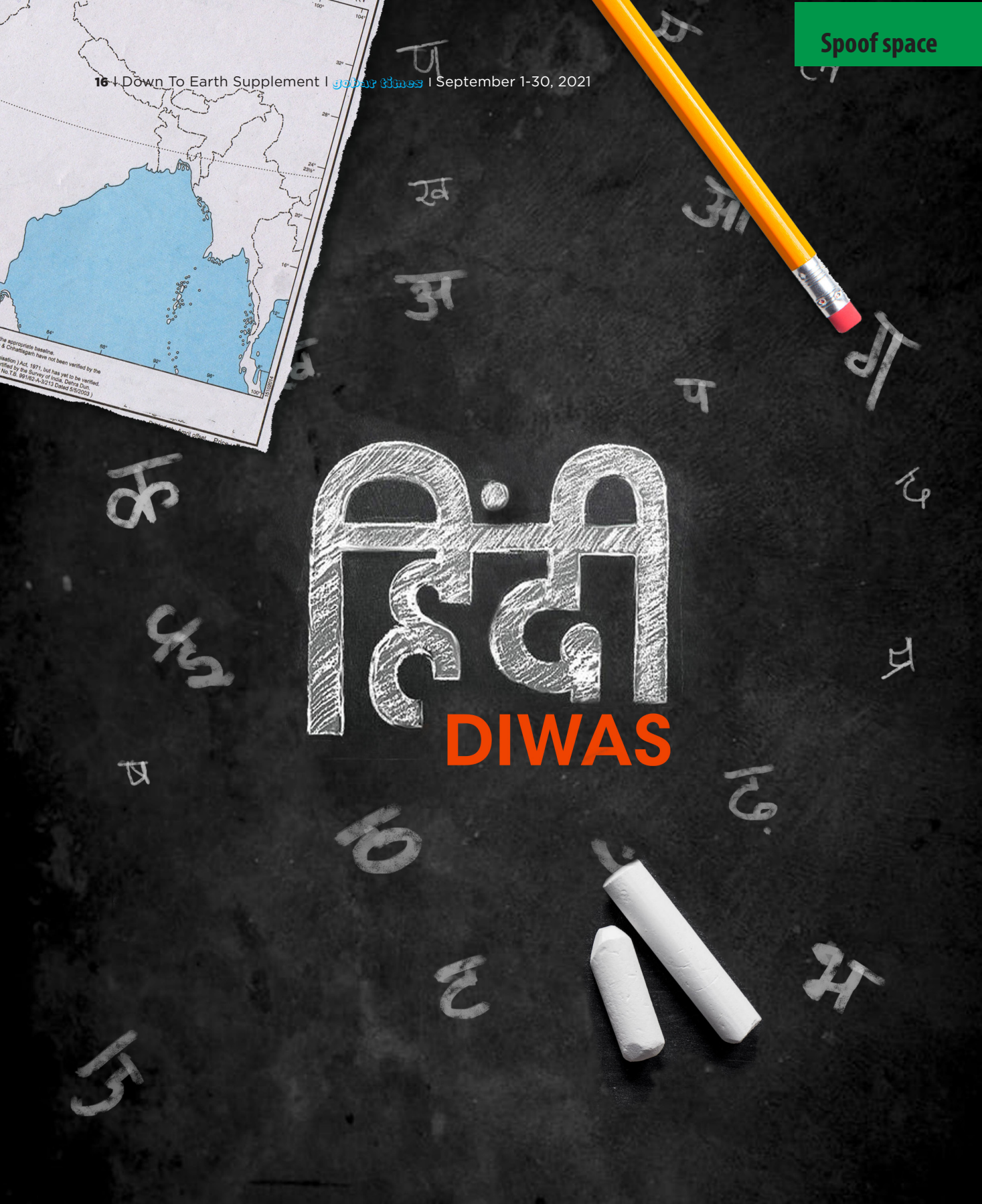
Sparrows adapted themselves to a broad climate range, including dry and saline areas. They evolved to survive

on less water and developed an omnivorous diet, mainly comprising berries. They can even swim short distances underwater to evade predators in spite of not being waterbirds. This is how they adapted to their immediate environment. Such few secrets enabled these tiny fliers to disperse throughout the planet.

Today, sparrows are widely distributed across India and the world. They are strictly non-migratory. They avoid deserts, grasslands, and woodlands. Rather, they are adapted to live with humans, both in rural and urban areas, though they have a new set of predators here. Cats, dogs, birds of prey, squirrels, snakes plus humans are the main reasons behind their declining numbers. Heavy use of agrochemicals also drastically dipped their population. Even more horrifying is the 'Sparrow pie,' a pudding made of sparrow meat, for which they were hunted rampantly until the most of 1950s.

So, let's get together and build a safe house for sparrows.





The Hindi Diwas or the National Hindi Day is celebrated on 14th September every year. It marks the day when Hindi (written in Devanagari script) was adopted as our official language in 1949.

Hindi is the fifth most widely spoken language in the world with about 52 crore speakers.

Apart from the Hindi Diwas, the World Hindi Day is observed on 10th January every year to commemorate the first World Hindi Conference held in 1975 in Nagpur.