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Green schools are the game changers

ANJANA PRADHAN 31st Jul

Environment-studies courses and nature excursions have long been popular in Indian schools. But lately, 'green' schools are perceived as game-changers in the global fight to combat climate change. We handpicked a few such schools in the country, including Aman Setu school in Pune; Vishva Bharati at Shantiniketan; Kendriya Vidyalaya, Vigyan Vihar, New Delhi; and Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV) in Andhra Pradesh, which are designed to give children a sense of how to live sustainably, without being too idealistic.

At first glance, Aman Setu (meaning 'bridge of peace') school gives an impression of a regular school with unusual co-curricular activities. But if you really want to see what distinguishes it from the rest, one needs to delve deeper, literally. The school is entirely made of recycled materials. Old advertisement hoardings form its roofs and walls are fashioned out of plastic bottles and old uniforms. The school, with its nature-centric curriculum, has a lot of outdoor and field activities. "Children roam about freely inside the premises. Teachers arrange short drives and visits outside the school two or three times a month. If rice is being sown in a neighbourhood field, students are allowed to participate in it," says Madhavi Kapur, who started the school in 2008 with just four students.

The school now has over 140 students studying up to class V. Classes are conducted in two single-storeyed structures and students sit on mats which are spread on a cow dung-plastered floor. They use text books which are handed over to them by their seniors. An old bus acquired from the state transport department was refurbished and converted into a classroom.

The concept of alternative schools and campuses which are energy-efficient and ecologically friendly are helping to unfold unknown skills and thought processes within a child. It was in the beginning of the 20th Century that the alternative education movement began as a productive and creative reaction to conventional schools. In India, the traditional places of learning like gurukuls and madarsas provided a grounded education for centuries. But gradually, these were replaced by schools based on a derivative model.

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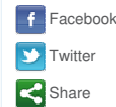
Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore had set up Vishva Bharati in 1921 at Shantiniketan, where classes were and are still held in the lap of nature. The eco-friendly teaching methods and policies adopted by schools help sensitising students about the environment, which is the need of the hour, says Meenu Wadhwa, environment project coordinator Kendriya Vidyalaya, Vigyan Vihar, New Delhi. Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV) in Andhra Pradesh, Kendriya Vidyalaya, Vigyan Vihar, and Delhi's Salwan Public School, were adjudged the country's 'greenest' schools, and won the Green School Awards- 2011, organised by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).



Students at Aman Setu school in Pune



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"During ancient times, eco-system was an intrinsic part of the education system. But today, a lot needs to be done to re-familiarise the students with it," says Sumita Dasgupta, programme director of CSE's education unit. She adds, "but schools have shown some impact in bringing environment changes within their premises and, also, the level of awareness has increased among the school communities and their support staff."

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