

The makers of modern India, like Baba Saheb Ambedkar and Rabindranath Tagore, strongly believed that India could not be a nation until it was made to become one. In other words, they believed that India was a nation-in-the-making. In this sense, nations are not merely made of geographical boundaries, standing armies or elected representatives, but of *citizens*: citizens who are good and are critical in their thoughts and spirit, who are *made* and not just born in a country. Some institutions, like family, religion, schools, peer groups, political organisations, media etc, influence our day-to-day lives. We often approach the concept of citizenship with larger political ideas, such as nationalism, universal adult franchise and elections, but forget about being responsible members of our families and our schools. This article sheds light on how certain practices in schools nurture the characteristics of a good citizen.

Children as evolving citizens

The government schools in Ballari district follow the general practice of forming a school parliament in which each child is designated a role so that they may discuss, debate and execute issues related to the school. The schools worked with the Azim Premji Foundation on a project called *Arogya Suraksha Abhiyan*, resulting in a collaboration with the village panchayat libraries. *Odhava Belaku*, a joint programme of the rural development department and the panchayats to engage children of public schools in reading and learning in public libraries in rural Karnataka, gave us an opportunity to provide books with contents on our Constitution to the panchayats. This encouraged many of our teachers to take this unique opportunity to design new pedagogical processes to inculcate the values of citizenship amongst their students.

A teacher named Manjappa from Hosur Higher Primary School, Hospet initiated a programme of forming a school *panchayat*. He was able to form a team of children from different schools of the Vinobha Bhave cluster and asked them to observe the issues in their locality, like open sewages, leaking taps, dumping of waste in public places

etc. Children collected the information from the community, resulting in an interaction between the children, the teachers and the *panchayat* officials. Their discussions not only gave them an understanding of local governance, but also of the issues they were facing in their surroundings. Every child's voice was heard with respect and dignity. With the help of the officials, the children later organised themselves to solve the problems of the villages by cleaning up the school premises and repairing leaking taps.

Children as reflective practitioners

Shivakumara and Akkamahadevi, teachers from Ambedkar Lower Primary School, Kottur, Kudligi Taluk created a skit that portrayed children as workers in a railway station and post office and doctors in a government hospital. While creating the skit, the children focused on the aspects of cleanliness and hygiene in the hospital and their acting showed their strong conviction that a hospital should help people.

The teachers took these children to the local hospital and railway station and the children were shocked when they saw that these places were not as clean as they had imagined in the classroom. The teachers told them to make careful observations and reflect on why these places were not kept clean. Back in school, the children's response was that people did not feel they owned these places, they thought that the hospital and station did not *belong* to them.

This helped Shivakumar and Akkamahadevi to initiate thinking among their children about owning their school. It was surprising how, when they understood this idea, the children started to keep their school premises clean and even asked the adults to stop dumping garbage in their school premises. This sense of ownership made them actual 'citizens' of their schools.

Being effective in the field

Having attended the workshop conducted by Azim Premji Foundation as part of a social science workshop, we were able to discuss the concept of

'citizenship'. Volunteer Teacher Forums (VTFs) on the theme Citizenship were organised. Ravindra B, a teacher from Bevoor Higher Primary School, chose Discussion as his pedagogy in the classroom. While teaching a lesson on Public Property from the civics textbook to classes VI and VII, he asked them a few questions, such as, Who constitutes the public? What is public property? Who is a taxpayer? The children discussed the questions and responded saying the public was everyone and when everyone paid taxes, the property would automatically belong to everyone.

The next day, the children went to the village public bus stand close to their school with their teacher and cleaned it. They requested the people present to keep the area clean as it belonged to the public. It was a common practice in the village to use Bevoor Higher Primary School premises as a grazing ground for their cattle which destroyed the plants and trees growing inside the school premises. But after these insights, with the help of the teacher, the children stayed even after school hours to fence the trees and lock the gates to secure the property. The villagers stopped bringing their cattle into the school premises.

As part of the *Oduva Belaku* programme, the same teacher mobilised parents in *Makkala Grama Sabha* (Children's village sabha) along with the children and explained the importance of Child Rights to parents and the importance of consulting children in decisions taken in the family. They asked the parents to listen to their children's experiences. The parents in the gathering agreed wholeheartedly

and also agreed that they would take their children to public institutions like banks, police stations and *gram panchayats*.

Conclusion

Enabling children to exercise their rights and duties thoughtfully should be the larger goal of every educational institution. We believe that every school should design activities like these to inculcate the values enshrined by our Constitution. This will help in the process of making good citizens and bring into reality the visions of the founders of a modern, democratic country. As mentioned in the introduction, nations are not merely formed, they have to be built. In the same way, good citizens have to be created. Empowering them with information and educating them about the various perspectives of being a modern, empathetic and a liberal citizen should be one of the most important goals of a public school.



Anil Ausha is an associate with the Azim Premji Foundation, Kudligi block, Ballari district for the last four years. He completed his master's in development from Azim Premji University. His hobbies include reading, cooking and watching movies. He can be contacted at anil.ausha@azimpremjifoundation.org



Sanjay Daniel has done his master's in Archeology. He joined the Azim Premji Foundation as Associate in 2016. He can be contacted at sanjaydaniel1993@gmail.com