



Nachiket Children's Libraries in Rural Areas

Imagine Promise & Hope! Infinite Possibilities!

Mothers for Reading and Learning

As fundamental technological and demographic challenges reshape our economies, the quality of student learning is the yardstick for long-term growth. *Angel Guurria*, secretary-general of the Organization for economic Co-operation and Development. Education is a way out of poverty. With the scientific advances we have better understanding of how children learn. Not having an appropriate environment that will nurture children's intrinsic learning ability is the biggest threat for achieving quality education. Mothers are the first educators. Study after study has shown that as mothers' literacy improves, the whole family's economic situation improves. With fast changing information-based world, mothers from lower income homes, are being left behind and are in no position to ensure whether their children are being properly educated for the 21st century. A house doesn't rest upon a ground but upon a woman, a *mother* (a Mexican proverb). Even though there are millions of verses, stories, and movies, depicting glories of motherhood, in reality, there are neither sufficient resources nor enough political will to help mothers in doing their job in the most effective way.

Children's Right in Rural Areas

Children's Rights" were first enshrined in UN convention, 1989. An adequate standard of living, good health, and freedom from harm are important. What about starving brain? Reading matters for mental health and providing brain-nourishing environment are just as important if not more. For the proper mental health and development, every child has right to grow in the surrounding that nourishes her/his learning capability.

We need to view inequality in educational quality as a fundamental threat to democracy and peace. *Saman sandhi* is the fundamental for functioning healthy democracy. In Maharashtra, like the rest of India, primary education was made mandatory only after 1947 and it took several years to open schools in rural and tribal areas. Compare this with Briton where the state supported education was established in 1860. In 1879, British Education Act authorized public boards to assess the needs for more schools and to use public funds to fill the gap" (Neil Reynolds, *Globe and Mail*, 28-03-11). Therefore, it's not realistic to expect the government to be able to provide quality education, innovative programs for earlier years, and training for mothers that are available in Western democracies. In developed democratic nations, ordinary citizens need to take the responsibility of unattended tasks and they do.

Paving Path to Success: Partners in Learning

Mothers have to have some understanding as well as access to the means to secure better education for their children. Children begin to learn literacy skills at birth. One cannot separate the development of learning capability and mother's interaction with a child (or in some cases total lack of it). In order to help mothers, we need to have

realistic understanding of their life experiences. Then only we will know how to create awareness regarding the importance of early literacy and teach parents how to develop critical pre-reading skills so that their children enter school ready to learn to read (actually ready to learn period. *I need help with this sentence*). This will maximize children's learning capability. We have to devise easily implement-able simple solutions. The path of effective learning starts with them right in their own homes. However, we need to keep in mind that these are the homes with no books and 'reading for fun' is beyond comprehension.

Quality education is an achievable goal. The key lies in the commitment of ordinary people. Strategy-planners and the front line workers should be fully oriented towards the task at hands, i.e., about how to best prepare mothers to help their children acquire learning skills. With mothers on board, we could achieve much more even with the limited resources we have at our disposal, i.e., without any expansive fancy devices). Same rules apply to charity organization as any other small business organization. The most important commodity is "Experience for the particular marketplace." We need to have thorough understanding of the way they live their lives (or rather their daily struggle to survive), their problems, hopes, and aspirations. From every point of view-historical, cultural, social, and political, the situation is unique. Our strong point is we share the love of the same land and we speak the same language. We are them- there is no them and we. To communicate our ideas, we need a person with good communication skill, preferably from the community we are planning to serve.

Why Should We Help?

If we cherish in the true sense individual freedom, i.e., everyone should have freedom to live according to their own nature, *swadharm in Dyaneshvarian* term, then we need to create an environment that will enable every mother to fulfill her duties as a mother. No matter where we live, who we are, or what we do, this common thread of fierce love for our children, binds us together. We understand each other as no other group members understand each other.

We know from our own experiences that no one else cares about or more importantly feels responsible for our children's well being. There is a small critical window of opportunity for these disadvantaged children. If we don't intervene during this crucial period of their lives, their learning capacity will be adversely affected. There is no world federation of libraries and it's not seen as violation of a child's right if she doesn't have access to books. We, mothers residing in North America, have seen the crucial role of public libraries in a child's life. We could be a voice of mother (partner in learning) and a child reader and/or a child who can't even dream about reading.

Therefore we need to do what we can to help mothers in securing their children's future at this critical time. Here we need to dig even deeper, not only to feed but also create a hunger for knowledge. Only you could help them most effectively. No one is going to care as much to see whether each child is ready to learn. All educators and Gurus come much later, after the critical period of preparation is long gone. "We can make a difference," should be a powerful motivation.

Flagship Program Of Nachiket

Our aim is to ensure that every child is ready to read and learn before she/he enters primary school. A failure to attend the grade and "Age Appropriate Reading Level" is the root cause of poor educational quality. Nachiket libraries have started early years programs for mothers and infants/toddlers to encourage mothers to read to their children. This is groundbreaking in that it is trying to reach mothers who have never been read to themselves and to establish a culture of reading from birth.

Could you imagine anything more enchanting than a mother and child sharing a joy of reading? Our aim is to help younger children discover the joy of reading. We wish to recreate and keep alive the magical wonder of childhood stories read aloud. . Establishing such an environment is crucial for instilling and nourishing a love of reading. This will help create "a culture of learning" in their homes. "Research has consistently found that preschoolers who are read to have better cognitive and behaviour skills and are better prepared when they enter school." We believe that change is driven by our willingness to work together to get things done. Nachiket Children's libraries are making a difference and it is the start of a long but powerful change.