

Weekend Haven for **SCHOOL-GOING CHILDREN**

2009-08-25

AREDS Children Theatre School (ACTS):

The place is full of verdant trees and flowering plants, there is a placid swimming pool, gentle breeze creates ripples on the surface of the water, there is a meeting hall with thatched roof, a mirror wall on one side of the hall, a spacious dining hall roofed with climbers and creepers, pervading silence, the silence is adorned with the chirping of birds... the silence is broken with the hilarious shouts of children and the splash of water – it is nowhere but in the AREDS Children Theatre School.

It is a common seen here at each weekend. About 40 school-going children throng at this place on every weekends. Irrespective of colour, caste and religion they all sing, play, swim and interact with each other and share their feelings and emotions. The vague but monstrous barriers being nurtured in the world of adults seems to be nothing before these children. They simply breakthrough the meaningless but discriminating caste and religious barriers and create their own world.

Association of Rural Education and Development Service (AREDS) is a non-governmental organization, working for rural women, children, youth and unorganized labourers for the past 30 years in Karur district. AREDS strongly believes that education is the prerequisite for any social transformation and will help the masses act irrespective of colour, caste and creed. Hence, it started its service with non-formal education in Renganathapuram, the very first place where AREDS set foot on, by involving the youth of the village.

AREDS has initiated different child centered activities in Karur district for the development of the students, who are socially and economically backward. It has been running AREDS Play-way School, Tulir Thalir Students' Movement (TTSM) and AREDS Children's Theatre School (ACTS).

Since its beginning in 2003, ACTS (AREDS Children's Theatre School) has been working with the idea that education should include society and positive identification. True education includes nurturing positive identification and a healthy curiosity. Handicrafts, drawing, folklore, street theatre techniques, games and the like are main features in the ACTS syllabus. The ACTS campus has a



swimming pool, dormitories, furniture, adequate number of toilets and bathrooms, a kitchen and a dining hall. Weekend programmes and summer camps, workshops for specific child demographics are undertaken in this campus with the help of resource persons and experts in respective fields.

Apart from swimming, extracurricular activities like games, mind games, cultural activities and street theatre techniques are also taught at ACTS. Programmes on street theatre and cultural activities are being organised for school going adolescent boys and girls in order to bring their latent talents to the surface. Awareness on social issues, need for education and importance of preserving the environment are imparted to them. Children reflect what they learn in their artworks, skits, street plays etc.

Learning extra curricular activities help the adolescents perform well in their studies and this has been proved in their progress reports. Above all, the adolescent students, viewing ACTS as a platform for exhibiting their talents and views, go to school with enthusiasm and participate in all programmes organized by AREDS.

The summer camp is the highlight of AREDS' child centered activities. These camps are organized to provide the children with a space to acquire and tune hobbies, interests and dreams and the skills to express and communicate the same. Summer camps include cultural programmes, spoken English classes, computer skills acquisition, and general knowledge courses, playing and swimming. The summer camps motivate adolescent boys and girls to go for higher studies after completing schooling. All the children sing, play, swim, eat and stay together – irrespective of castes and religion for the duration of the camp.

The children identify the dropouts in their respective villages and motivate them to join school again or they inform the staff of AREDS. What attracted them most in ACTS is the collective living.

In response to the question of a foreigner, who visited ACTS once, a boy answered that he loved that place for he found no caste disparity there. "It is a place for children and we provide only an opportunity for them to learn and they create their own world," says Mr. L. A. Samy, the director of AREDS.

200th weekend Programme

ACTS has conducted 200 Weekend Programmes for the members of Tular Thalir Students Movement (TTSM) (Movement for young students and adolescents), so far. The 200th Weekend Programme was observed in a special manner on the 22nd of August 2009 on the premises of ACTS. A meeting was held on the premises of ACTS, which in government officers from Women Development Programme and educational Department participated and spoke. Mr. L. A. Samy presided over the meeting. Children themselves conducted the entire meeting proceedings.

The manager of Indian Overseas Bank – the lead bank in giving credit to women Self-help Groups – said “While television channels are celebrating trash mega serials that have been screening for two years or three years or five years...depending on the volume of episodes, AREDS has been silently celebrating the 200th Weekend Programme that is aimed towards developing the rural poor children in Karur district. It is an achievement indeed.”

An exhibition of drawings and collage made by the children was also organized. The children performed the cultural also. The chief guests and the invitees witnessed the exhibition and appreciated the potentials of the children and efforts of AREDS that have nurtured the talents in children. Children put shawl to the chief guests and the invitees. Midday meal was served to the participants, chief guests and the children. Children were very happy to dine together

