

One step towards changing the world

The boy bent down, picked up yet another starfish and threw it as far as he could into the ocean. Then he turned, smiled and said, "It made a difference to that one!". The starfish story has been read, understood and narrated by us as educationists on numerous occasions in different fora/school/lecture or classroom as motivational speech.

Recently, I volunteered as Chairperson of Anganwadi project of Delhi Govt. My name figured in the list for Sanjay Camp Chanakyapuri, New Delhi. I was really excited that I will be able to contribute for a good cause. Anganwadi is a type of rural mother and child care centre in India. Concept of Anganwadi was started by the Indian Government way back in 1975, as part of the Integrated Child Development Services program to combat child hunger and malnutrition. Anganwadi is a colloquial term, meaning "courtyard shelter".

I was shocked, when I faced actual ground reality. Chanakyapuri is the elite area located in the heart of New Delhi, amongst the diplomatic embassies of the richest and most progressive countries of the world. Residences of senior Govt officials, offices of state govts and top hotels are located within stone's throw. Amidst the greenest belt of Delhi are the residences of top railway officials and one of the most elite schools of Delhi sharing its boundary with Sanjay Camp. It would be beyond anybody's imagination to find a slum called the "Sanjay Camp" located within 500m from five star Hotels, ITC Maurya and Taj Palace where American President was put up during his official visit to India.

Friends, the picture is disturbing, Anganwadi project, an excellent initiative by Govt, but marred by unorganised implementation, corrupt practices and exploited subjects. I found myself, grouped by innocent and helpless infants and nursing mothers, who don't even know what benefits they are being offered by Govt. I was aghast to see the miserable conditions with broken shelter, no place to sit or stand for 60 infants, officially on roll. Daliya supposedly cooked in milk for 60 infants was reportedly consumed regularly, with not more than 8, seen at sight at any given time. I am trying to pick up one starfish and throw into polluted & contaminated ocean where there is no scope of survival.

I am neither a pessimistic nor critic, but my heart and mind is wondering, that even after 70 years of independence we are still on the crossroads where education, malnutrition & health take back seat. Large number of NGOs, Self-motivated individuals like Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi and Govt policy on CSR fund are available, but it's like a drop-in ocean. May be the number is too large to make a visible impact.

Is it all eyewash Or who cares for poor is the attitude of society? No scheme of uplifting & incorporating have-nots' segment of society will help unless there is will to do so.

Catch them young, and Anganwadi is the right platform from where we can nurture infants born to under privileged and deprived members of society. More

practical and organised efforts can target these infants from playschool age and let the state own it, but not just for 2-3 hours a day in Anganwadis, but wholistic transformation of these citizens into educated and equally valuable adults of society. Automated, digital transformation of entire programme with real time monitoring of implementation and execution may show desired results. The constructive hand holding of underprivileged from Anganwadis to IIT/IIMs can transform inequality, poverty and eradicate social evils and criminal activities. Dovetailing health programmes with education will fulfil social responsibility of the state enshrined in Directive Principles for the state in Constitution of India.