

# THE TIMES OF CHILDREN

Children's Day, November 14, 2013

Children share their observations and become the mirror of the society by sharing small and real life touching stories **2**



The Constitution of India recognises the vulnerable position of children and their right to protection **4**



THE TIMES OF CHILDREN, LUCKNOW

A CONSUMER CONNECT INITIATIVE



## As the Curtain Rises...

Girls from rural schools of Mirzapur speak out their mind through drama...

**T**welve-year-old Pooja looks in the mirror anxiously at the white paint on her hair. She glances over her shoulder to see Preeti, her friend playing with the new pair of spectacles on her nose. Both of them have been practicing for more than a month now for their roles in their play Astiva (The Existence). These spectacles are of Preeti's teacher, who has also been busy doing make up for all these girls. Preeti is playing the role of a teacher, and needs the spectacles, while Pooja is donning a role of a mother-in-law.

While the show is slated for today, their parents are eagerly waiting for the play to begin. Likewise, the elders of the village are sitting huddled together to see their little ones perform. Women have covered face with their colourful *ghoonghat* over their faces as men are also around. In the midst, the village pradhan sits proudly, as if he is about to call 'play'.

The play is conducted in a large room in recently constructed Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya of Mirzapur district of UP. One cannot miss the smell of fresh paint. Girls who had dropped out of regular school have been admitted in these KGBVs all over the state, and more often than

not, these girls are from most deprived backgrounds. It all started about a month ago, when a dialogue was initiated with the girls of some KGBVs about their vulnerabilities in the society. At first, these girls took time to open up. Eventually, when they started talking about these issues, it led to a new sense of

**The play is all about a simple message - she wants to study. Let her. And, it is also her right. Domestic violence, child marriage, and alcoholism dominate the script**

their issues. The shackle of silence seems to be broken in this school. Secondly, and importantly, they feel strongly that they must make their voice reach out to all those who make decisions on their behalf.

Grasping this small window of opportunity, Study Hall Education Foundation (SHEF), the NGO which had initiated this critical dialogue with the girls and their parents, takes another innovative decision. They decide to train the wardens of these schools to prepare plays around these issues and present them in front of their families and village elders.

One month of excitement follows this decision. Some girls are selected. This is the toughest part, as many more girls want to be a part. The warden does the difficult job of selecting those who speak about their issues, and are keen to express their thoughts to others. A script is developed. Practice sessions are planned after class time. Girls rehearse their lines loudly in their hostel corridors. Some of them even whisper these lines as they go to bed at night.

**The big day arrives. It's show time**

Girls scamper around to prepare for the show. But there are many challenges. There is no hall. There are no curtains, no stage and no lights.

Innovation is the need of the hour. Necessity is the mother of creativity. A big room is emptied. Wooden beds are joined together to



make a small stage, with mattresses working like a carpet. The Warden pulls down the curtains from her office door, and ties it on a long string to make a token curtain. The teachers prepare the girls with their make up, colouring their hair and faces.

As their parents arrive, the girls are nervous. They have never been allowed to speak freely to the village elders, and today they will be presenting a bold play in front of all, including their parents. The teacher gives them confidence. A few words of encouragement, and there is a last minute rehearsal of the lines once again.

**The curtain rises, as if it ever covered anything**

What follows is sheer magic. These girls, who were known to be shy and quiet, project their voices to all those sitting in this makeshift auditorium. Even a stage-whisper is loud enough to reach the last row of audience. The nervous girl is no longer scared of portraying the role of an alcoholic father beating up his wife. She has been practicing this scene for weeks now. She utters some touching dialogues with tears

in her eyes about her wanting to study further. 'I too have dreams', says the young actress with a confidence that no one can take away.

One scene follows another. Child marriage, domestic violence and alcoholism



a simple message - She wants to study. Let her. And, it is also her right.

There is a pin drop silence in the audience. They are mesmerised with the performances. A mother has tears in her eyes, as she quickly covers her face. Her young daughter has spoken today.

The curtains fall, as the beaten up character of an abusive husband is still trying to get up. There is thunderous applause. These girls are not used to a making a curtain call. Yet, they do so. Each one

of them is introduced, and turn by turn, their parents applaud the loudest.

The girls are excited. They will now go to Lucknow to perform in front of more people.

They have never been to a town before. And they plan to make the most of it. Their message must reach out to many more. After all, they are not only our future, they also have a present.



The stage awaits. This time, the applause is going to be louder.

TEXT BY ATUL KUMAR

