

I. Caring for Tribal Children

She is now the Blue-Eyed Girl of Her Neighbourhood

In many tribal communities of Orissa girl child is viewed as only an extra hand in domestic work in the family, and so, the parents do not allow the girls to study. Although the tribal boys do not enjoy adequate opportunities, comparable to those available to boys in the plains, they still a prospect of availing education. After realizing this issue Vikash put its endeavor to establish Early Childhood Development Centers in its operational areas, to co-opt boys as well girls to education.

This Early Childhood Development Center is an interim arrangement for schooling with play-way methods adopted to make the children feel at home in a new and initially alien environment, and prepare them to overcome the challenges in their future. It also tries to generate enthusiasm among tribal girls and their parents to acquire education, especially girl's education.



Take the case of Sumita, a girl child of six years. She was helping her mother in domestic work ever since she was of four. Belonging to the backward *Kandha* (a tribal community of Orissa) family in the village of Jhankarguda in the district of Koraput, where education for girl child is hardly heard of, Sumita had never dreamt of going to school. As the division of work is heavily loaded against women in this area, she had to help her mother in household chores and child rearing.

Her life would have been different, had she not joined the school



After intervention of Vikash the fortune of Sumita changed. Volunteers tried a lot to make her parents see the sense in giving her education. In the beginning her father, Sambu Pangi was reluctant to send his daughter to the center. But finally Vikash volunteers succeeded in convincing him. Sumita joined the center at the age of four. Then she started learning dance, songs, drawings, games etc. Besides that she was also educated in personal hygiene and sanitation practices.

Today, two years have passed. Sumita is still in the process of learning. But now she has experienced several changes in her life. She is confident of doing well. She not only keeps herself clean but also and urges her mother to keep the household surrounding clean. "I love my teacher and I want to be one like her," she says. It is unbelievable for Sumita's parents and neighbours that the girl who was scared to open her mouth is going outside of the village for picnics and sports with her friends and teachers. Her father is very happy in seeing a different Sumita. He says, "It is a great thing for her, spend time away from her parents for 4-5 days. Her life would have been different, had she not joined the school."

The role of the volunteers of Vikash, who exhibited a great commitment in bringing about the attitudinal change, is remarkable. The center has now been able to bring about gradual change and development in the scenario of education in the area. Now the children are joining the nearby Government schools. The Early Childhood Development Center initiated by Vikash has brought about a minor revolution among poor children of Jhankarguda village.