
SOCIETY FOR STUDY OF EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT (SANDHAN), RAJASTHAN

Sharada Jain's life orientation comes from her grandfather. A physicist who worked with the likes of CV Raman, he declined offers to pursue his work overseas. He wrote the first physics textbook in Hindi in the belief that the people of our country must be restored the opportunity to read books they had been deprived of. Sharada Jain was inspired by this faith in the potential and greatness of mind of the people of India. She too, believes that the Indian people have tremendous power to learn, to do, to contribute and to create; they have been subjected to systematic subordination and dependence on the West. They are instructed in a manner that makes them feel helpless, and the only way for them to enter the power citadel is by enhancing their knowledge.

The Society for Study of Education and Development (Sandhan) was founded in 1983, by a group of 'achievers' in a range of fields – academia, activism and rural development. One of the key founders was Anil Bordia, an education

visionary. The organization was envisaged as a clearinghouse for ideas and discourse – a space for people from different walks of life to carry out concerted, collaborative and not-for-profit work with the disadvantaged. They would help those who have been pushed to the margins to come back into the mainstream so that they could not only articulate their concerns and interests, but also ensure that they were heard. Sandhan, has in its core, the vision of a just and equitable society in which people live in dignity and harmony. A non-government organization, it undertakes support and sponsors study and action in education and development. It aims to counter the process of marginalization through systematically designed education.

Always ahead of her age in the education ladder, Sharada Jain cleared her masters at the age of 19. After her marriage, she travelled extensively in the country accompanying her husband where his work took him. Wherever she



Eager to learn: Sharada Jain with an enthusiastic group of boys



Interactive session between teachers and students

went, she felt restless and tried her hands in diverse areas – setting up a primary school or a youth club, teaching in a college, setting up a women's resource centre in an institute, among others. In all, she changed 11 professions. She did new things, without calculation. Through all this, she learnt, for selfless and relevant work done with faith, help is always forthcoming.

Sharada Jain worked closely with Sandhan since its inception, formally joining it in 1993. Under her leadership, the organization developed into a training support and resource agency. In 2000, Sandhan reorganized its erstwhile training and research wings into a single unit. Today, it works on policy advocacy and facilitates networking among like-minded interveners. In Sandhan's framework for critical impact, the efforts of the government, researchers and activists, have to all converge. It utilizes community development activities and efforts of existing organizations, without creating any parallel structures. It collaborates with those whose value frameworks are built on a culture of equality, religious tolerance and gender equity and are dedicated to the pursuit of quality education for the most deprived sections.

Sandhan's research protocol is inspired by its core vision. It is built around the capacity of the marginalized to reflect upon their situations. They are not studied; their needs are addressed through appropriate research and training. It feeds authentic research into planning processes and



Sandhan's focus: the education of adolescents

sensitizes policy makers to respond to educational needs. Further, it supports and trains government functionaries and voluntary agencies to respond to specific and diverse educational expectations on the ground.

Adolescent education is Sandhan's primary focus. Adolescents, caught between being children and adults, are being instructed as children without any effort in understanding the identity crisis and changes that they go through, and must adjust to. Sandhan, through its work, has identified the need to integrate life skills education into its training effort, to enhance the reflective, social-negotiation and relationship skills of adolescents. Significant among its current engagements is that with Action Aid India in Khilti Kaliyan, a program for empowering children of rag pickers from parts of Rajasthan. One of the worst victims of the process of urbanization, these children require a unique approach in being brought from the margin to the mainstream. Sandhan has developed and conducted tailor-made training programs for teachers and an integrated, life skills-based education curriculum for the children.

Sandhan works closely with Doosra Dashak, an education initiative for adolescents built around the core strategy of organizing residential learning camps. As its technical resource agency, Sandhan's research has provided a background for the organization's work, in turn helping to

validate its theories on education management.

Sandhan's commitment to inform and influence government policy with inputs from ground reality is operationalized in its recent engagement in helping create an effective model for implementing the government's school midday meal program. In collaboration with Akshyapatra Foundation, a non-government organization, Sandhan is helping create a model for the program that gives space for local women to participate. The other significant programs that Sandhan is involved in at present include: an evaluation of village libraries supported by Rajiv Gandhi Foundation to assess their potential for revival and strengthening; classroom observation under the state's District Primary Education Program for strengthening and creating effective teaching-learning methods; a school sanitation program in association with UNICEF which has, in turn, helped inform Sandhan's priority in hygiene as part of education.

Over the years, Sandhan has epitomized Sharada Jain's belief that in order to realize a dream, one has to leap forward with two feet in the air. She has believed in her dream and has

been helped, and trusted, on the way by diverse people and agencies. It is this ring of trust that she has found in her association with Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, too. At a time when Sandhan was deep in debt, the Trust believed in its conviction and supported it. The Trust has supported the organization since 1999 with core funding. In the first three years, this support was allocated to Sandhan's research work and helped bring about contextual changes in it. Over the years, the Trust's support has helped Sandhan redefine itself in response to the changing context of work. While specific programs have been supported by other collaborating agencies, the core support from the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust has been especially significant because of the flexibility it has provided to Sandhan to explore and understand issues of education that fall outside the purview of specific projects. These have helped inform the organization's work by deepening its insight of contextual issues of education. The current funding to Sandhan is a core support of Rs. 6.59 million against which the organization has raised a matching grant from other agencies.

