

## **A teacher for all times**

**P V Satya Ramesh**

A 65-year old man along with several other visitors waits outside the room of the Mandal Revenue Officer. The people are waiting to submit their applications for clearance of the dues that they are entitled to under various government schemes. The old man was lost in his thoughts, when an attendant called out to him to meet the MRO. When he went inside the room, he was taken aback to see the officer touching his feet. He was warmly received and the officer introduced himself as Ramana who had studied under him during his tenure as a teacher in the tribal region, when he had been known as a teacher for all times. Ramana took the application from his teacher and assured him that he would get his pension dues immediately. Ramana escorted his teacher to the car and asked his driver to drop him home. The old man, Arunoday, sat in the car and his thoughts turned to the time when he was a 25-year old at the beginning of his career.

Arunoday received orders from the government that he had been posted as a primary school teacher in one of the tribal regions of Andhra Pradesh. His happiness knew no bounds as he was desperately waiting to move out of the city and work with children born in the cradle of nature. After an arduous journey of almost four hours by bus through mountains, valleys and tunnels, he reached his destination. Other than an old man sitting under a tree with a cigar in his mouth, he couldn't find anyone around from whom he could enquire about reaching the school. The old man was kind enough to allow his grandson who was sitting atop a tree unnoticed to accompany him to the school.

Arunoday found someone waiting at the school building. The man had come from the Gram Panchayat to hand over the keys of the school building and a file which had some papers related to the school. The school building consisted of one room and a verandah with a hand pump nearby. At 10 the next morning, children gradually started coming to the school. After a careful observation, Arunoday could find not a single child who was healthy. Most of them had their hair infected with lice, dirty finger nails and running noses which they wiped with their hands. They had a cloth bag which contained a plate and a glass, but no slate, notebook or pencil. For a moment he did not know what to do and then took them to the Primary

Health Centre, where he got the height and weight of each child checked. On calculating the BMI, he found that three-fourths of them were under-nourished.

Arunoday strongly believed that a healthy mind resides in a healthy body. He understood that effective teaching–learning comes later and that it was important for him to attend immediately to the children’s physiological needs. He prepared a plan which would be executed with the help of a lady assistant deputed for preparing the mid-day meals. The difficulty which Arunoday experienced during the mid-day meal time was the non-availability of plates and glasses. Some children came to school without bringing their own plates and glasses. In order to overcome this problem, he collected as many almond leaves as possible and made a few plates. Gradually, he trained students of class IV and V to make plates stitching three or four leaves using small pieces of hay. In addition to serving the primary purpose, this training helped students to understand the efficient use of available natural resources.

Each child was given a tablespoon of honey regularly on reaching the school. Knowing well that unadulterated honey is the only food item which can never get spoiled, he collected sufficient amount of honey extracted from the bee hives present in the surroundings with the help of a young tribal.

Arunoday took all the parents into confidence and ensured that they contributed a small amount of their agricultural produce - be it fruits, nuts or vegetables to the school. This helped him to make sure that each child had one fruit daily and a vegetable as part of the salad during the mid-day meal and a few dry fruits before they left school. Soon, several plants bearing fruits and vegetables were cultivated in the school surroundings and there was no need to depend upon the parents.

Arunoday also improvised the water filtration model within the school with the help of three earthen pots, charcoal, gravel, and sand. Students were actively involved in these activities. Teaching of concepts was never a challenge for him with things being easily accessible. A sun dial and an anemometer were improvised and installed in the school campus. Teaching different kinds of plants and animals always was a pleasure as he was able to give the children a first-hand experience to touch, feel, and care for these. Students were made to see the laying of an egg by a hen, how it incubates, the hatching and growth and development of a chick into an adult. They were made to record the number of days required for a chick to come out of the egg and also observe how a hen protected its young from predators such as

eagles. Gradually, the learning was extended to domestic animals too. Similarly, the children could understand practically the difference between a tree, a climber, a creeper, a shrub etc. They understood the rationale behind the creation of a huge banyan tree with a tiny fruit and a tender creeper with a huge pumpkin.

Teaching – learning was always at its best with the mother tongue being the medium of instruction up to class V. A general health checkup became a regular feature and across the years Arunoday noticed an improvement in the health of most of the students.

The toughest moment for him was when he had to bid farewell to all the students who passed out of Class V and had to go to a distant place for their high school education. He worked in the same school for more than 12 years before being promoted and transferred to a high school in a suburban area. He received the Best Teacher Award when he was in his 50s and retired at 58. Even after retirement, his passion did not let him relax and enjoy his life. He used to write articles to various educational magazines, actively involve himself in all programmes related to the environment and innovation in education.

Arunoday broke free from his thoughts when he realized he had reached home. He opened the door and sat in his chair and pondered why he was remembered as a teacher for all times. He soon realized that education and environment were two things he valued throughout his life. He understood the inherent meaning behind his name and thanked his teachers for giving him the needed strength to realize the purpose of his life.

The author is a teacher at Shanti Asiatic School, Ahmedabad. He can be reached at <[ramesh.satya77@gmail.com](mailto:ramesh.satya77@gmail.com)>.