

12 OCT 2001

# Experimental school falls prey to modernisation

**CHANCHAL PAL CHAUHAN**  
STATESMAN MEWS SERVICE.

NEW DELHI, Oct. 11. — A farm in the school's backyard served as a fields for the students to grow plants and vegetables. Potatoes, spinach, radish and even sugarcane were grown.

All the work from sowing to reaping was done by the students and this activity was to teach them different aspects of life.

The students - from classes one to eight - learned how produce was measured, numbered, its quality gauged and were asked to make varying calculations related to farming and produce. After this exercise they were supposed to sell the produce in a nearby market.

Apart from farming there was

a gardening period daily. In the absence of text books, newspapers formed an integral part of general knowledge acquisition. Debates were initiated by teachers on social, current and local topics.

That was the Experimental Basic School of the Central Institute of Education, Delhi University. "These concepts were based on the the theory of self-reliance. A student was supposed to be self-dependent till the age of 12 years, as Mahatma Gandhi had advocated," recalls the principal, Ms Harsh Kumari. But that was then - from 1951 to the mid-seventies. Today to keep up with the times, the school is a far cry from the originally conceptualised "no books, no syllabus".

Text books were introduced as a step to get the school recog-

nised at the Directorate of Education, Delhi government, about 30 years ago.

Gradually, other moves shifting the school's focus towards mainstream education came in and the school was transformed into a somewhat "normal" school.

Former students nostalgically remember the days of "Sahboj" when students and teachers prepared food in a community kitchen and ate together.

A bulk of the raw material for the "Sahboj" meals came from the students' produce. Today the common meal concept still exists but all the raw material is purchased from outside.

And naturally since money has to be spent for the meal, former students are no longer invited as freely as before.

The Panchayat system has tak-

en a beating too. Students were taught about the importance of exercising discretion and judgement when electing a representative. Now the school sticks to the "house" system like other mainstream schools.

Earlier, turn wise each student in the school had to compulsorily speak at the morning assembly. "Atm Bhava Prakshan" was designed to instill confidence in the student as no fixed topic was set. "It had tremendous results on the student's personality and confidence," say teachers. But now each house selects its representative and the child is assigned to speak on a main topic. The principal, says, "The main transformation took place after the school was recognised. Books were introduced and modern aspects of career orientation emerged".

**ED1**

**Alternative curriculum schools**