

18 JULY 2002

Connecting with nature in school

Landscape designer Vijaya Chakravarty is working to help children appreciate greenery and nature, making gardening a part of their school curriculum, finds RAJSHRI MEHTA

EXCEPT during the nine months before he draws his first breath, no man manages his affairs as well as a tree does," George Bernard Shaw had once said. That is the ideology which landscape designer Vijaya Chakravarty has been trying to instill in the minds of young children, for the last three and a half years. Her commitment prompted her to return to the rudimentary, in association with the Sanjivani Deep School for the Paraplegic Foundation, Navi Mumbai. The students at Sanjivani now connect with nature through the medium of gardening, taught the intricacies of growing different varieties of vegetables, flowers, indoor and outdoor plants, under various conditions and soil types.

The unique alternative education is aimed at developing a child's agricultural skills. "Intelligence in children varies from



Vijaya Chakravarty with her wards at a school run by the NGO Aarambh

one to another. Some might excel in a particular field and others will have other inclinations. Some would surely be talented in

landscaping. So, why not harness that?" asks Chakravarty, who also teaches gardening in a school for slum children run by the non

governmental organisation Aarambh.

Initially, the idea to make gardening a subject at Sanjivani was actually aimed at growing leafy vegetables in a kitchen garden, which would help meet the requirements for the students' midday meal. However, finding the children enthused by the idea and the ease with which they correlated nature with simple life issues, it became a daily subject."The idea was also to help them grow into self-reliant adults. They can find jobs as a supervisor or gardener, since they are taught the techniques of taking care of indoor and outdoor plants, make hanging baskets, balcony gardens, etc," say! Chakravarty.

The school sometimes invites guest speakers from the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) to speak on different plants, insects etc. Slide shows are also held along with field visits. How successful the training has been is evident from the fact that the Sanjivani school's students successfully participated in the National Science Congress held in the city recently.

Chakravarty says "This is also a way of reintroducing them to nature. Though Indians, as a rule, have high naturistic intelligence considering their love for collecting things like rocks and shells, children lose their connection with nature once they are in an urban setting. The disconnection with nature is more so with mentally challenged children, which we reintroduce through gardening."

ED1

Alternative curriculum schools