



a natural instinct of the children. In other schools, from the kindergarten stage children are taught not to help others, that their marks alone matter and so on. We have a completely different system where the children help and support each other and so the teacher also plays that role.

A further extension of this is that they take care of each other. For whatever reasons, we do not have disciplinary problems in the school. The older children take care of the young and of each other. There is no effort in this process. When children quarrel, some older child comes in and settles it. At times teachers interfere but only to help children see what they have done without reprimanding them.

Integrity also appears to be an essential quality. We do not have cases of cheating or stealing. Nothing in the school is locked away. We have never had to talk about honesty.

Our assembly sessions in the morning are crucial and all teachers and students attend these. This is where we talk about whatever needs to be done in the school and how we have to relate to each other. We are willing to sacrifice any class for these sessions. Children have the right to express their feelings, talk about their work, their work-duties in the school, the subjects, the craft and games they participate in. They can also talk about their problems at home. It is also a time for celebration

of ourselves and so often we also have singing and dancing.

We celebrate festivals of all religions so that children are familiar with the main aspects of them. We are very conscious that we live in a pluralistic world and although the adivasi communities themselves have over time been excluded, it is important that they know and appreciate other communities and other communities respect them too. It is through these we expose children to tradition and how some important aspects of living are passed on through such practices. Tradition also helps in building dignity and a sense of identity in people. Children are taught at an early age to respect and appreciate the diversity that they see around them.

Above all, what allows the school and its teachers to function in the way they do, which includes bringing in the ethos of the adivasi culture, is the freedom they have to make the kind of decisions they want. Managing the funds, deciding on the aspects of the syllabus, the kind of programmes to have with children are all decisions of teachers. The teachers meeting is the final decision-making authority on all matters and recommendations from here are passed on to the management committee. This attitude, this culture of freedom and responsibility gets passed on to the rest of the school too. Teachers in turn allow children to take decisions about various programmes that

they have to undertake, the duties that have to be carried out, and sometimes even whether they would like to attend class or go for a walk. Teachers do not see themselves as a separate entity and many of them share the lives of the children.

Finally, whatever else the school may teach, if one of the main purposes is to teach children to live in the world, then it must also teach them how to build relationships. Competition has driven a wedge into these relationships. As they grow, they have to live in families, in communities, in a nation and in a diverse world. In all these, we have to relate to others, whether with those of the other sex, or other communities, other religions, other creeds. In our school we never miss the opportunity to bring people from diverse languages, cultures and nations to help understand and build bonds. There have been instances when young children have wanted to touch another person to feel what it is to have another coloured skin.

A school is essentially a cultural space. One kind of culture or the other is being transmitted there. If we are not conscious of what we want to get across, then the easiest and sometimes, basest of it all gets carried across. It is important that we remember that it is not a culture-neutral space.