

# THE MEADOW SCHOOL

By Tarabai Modak



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**Experiments in Education**

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by

**Shrimati Tarabai Modak**



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## FOREWORD

Shrimati Tarabai Modak is a pioneer in the field of pre-primary education and there are not many persons in our country who can speak with such great authority on the subject as Shrimati Modak. During the last twenty years she has been running an experimental school at Kosbad (Thana District), Maharashtra, for the children of Adivasis. This pamphlet which was originally written in Marathi has now been translated into English so that a larger number of teachers and parents may benefit by experiences of this veteran educationist.

We are at present engaged in planning education for our people out of which a good proportion are Adivasis. We have therefore to give special attention to their problems. In the process of taking the modern civilisation to their doors we must make sure that it does not do any violence to their culture which has given them a sense of security, beauty and dignity to their life. We may have to change many of our preconceived notions about civilisation when we are dealing with the Adivasis. I, therefore, welcome this publication by one of our eminent educationists—Shrimati Tarabai Modak—and I sincerely hope that it will be read widely by our teachers.

*K. L. Shrimali.*

*New Delhi,  
December 12, 1961.*

## PREFACE

The Nutan Bal Shikshan Sangh, founded in 1926, with the object of spreading right ideas about the education of pre-school children among parents and teachers decided, in 1945, to extend its work to the rural areas. The work of organising and running a rural centre was entrusted to me and the Gram Bal Shiksha Kendra was started at Bordi in Thana District. Round Bordi, there are a number of hamlets or wadis inhabited chiefly by Adivasis. While working in our centre at Bordi, we came face to face with the problem of the education of Adivasi children. Though there were a number of primary schools in the area, these children are unwilling to attend school regularly and receive education. At first, the reason for this unwillingness appeared to us to be economic. It was necessary for children to earn money to keep the family going and their parents could not spare them for schooling. We, therefore, tried to make it possible for the children to earn while they learnt in the primary school we started for them. Then we came up against another difficulty. We found that because these children were used to a life of roaming about as they pleased, the usual school routine appeared very irksome to them and they absconded from the classes on the slightest pretext. We, therefore, felt that if they were to attend a Balwadi for a while they would gradually get accustomed to school routine and develop habits of application and steady work. There was also the problem of the younger brothers and sisters who had to be looked after by our pupils. The toddlers accompanied the elder children to school and would not leave their juvenile guardians. We reconciled ourselves to the situation and decided to try an unorthodox experiment of combining a creche, a Balwadi and a primary school in one unit. The plan, we felt, would make it easier for the children to fit into the disciplined life and programme of a primary school.

But we soon found that this was not enough and that something more was needed. We reached the conviction that certain fundamental needs of these children were not met by the present type of primary school. The teachers engaged there were entirely unsuited to inspire them to learn. Not only is the average teacher not equipped to deal with rural conditions and village emergencies, but he has a positive dislike of rural life and is anxious to be relieved from what he considers a punishment and exile. Nothing could be a more serious disqualification than this in a teacher who is to work in the Adivasi tracts. The course of studies also is thoroughly unsuited to rouse the children's enthusiasm and the school routine is extremely boring and

dull. This was the real crux of the problem which we were out to solve. We were in search of a new type of school that would fit in with the Adivasi way of life and, at the same time, bring them the benefits of education. The result of this long research was "Our Meadow School".

We tried different measures as problems arose and modified them in the light of our practical experience. "Our Meadow School" is thus a novel and to a certain extent an original way of tackling the problem. Our experiences in this line were very encouraging and open before us a new vista of work.

Here we came into closer contact with these children and their parents, and understood their way of life and learnt the basic facts of their socio-economic conditions. The following pages describe faithfully the situations—both physical and mental—into which we continuously ran, while running our meadow school, and the daring adjustments with which we tried to meet them. It is far from my intention to claim that our findings are the last word in the matter. Our procedure was frankly empirical. We went ahead in an unorthodox manner, mixing with the children freely and informally, utilising their natural environment, and leaving aside the idea of going there with a set purpose to teach. We proceeded to find their inner urges, leanings, skills and aptitudes, as well as their likes and dislikes. There were of course certain broad ideas at the back of our mind to guide us, and our goal too was clear. It was to evolve a new type of school that would harmonise with their simple life, and at the same time, enrich it. We felt we could achieve this by kindling in them a thirst for knowledge and helping them to understand Mother Nature, who seemed to be so intimately connected with the whole gamut of their existence.

After a long period of observation and earnest thought, I am convinced that mere multiplication of the type of school considered or reckoned successful in towns and cities will do no good to the backward areas. The average teacher today is not equipped to deal with rural conditions and village emergencies. Nay he suffers from a more serious disqualification still, his dislike of rural life and his anxiety to be released from what he considers an exile. Unless the Education Department is prepared to overhaul the whole set-up of primary training in rural parts and to bring about radical changes therein, I do not see any ray of hope in this respect. On the other hand, I feel that we have definitely found the way, the direction in which to proceed if our programme of education is to succeed, not only in the scheduled areas, but throughout the backward countryside. Many more surveys

will be needed regarding the subject, for India is vast, and conditions and habits of life differ markedly from place to place. Further research on strictly scientific lines will have to be undertaken. In doing this, it is important to select varied fields in the districts, such as sea-coast places, hilly parts and jungle tracts. This is essential because the basic conditions in such typically different regions are sure to be unequal, and so also the response to our experimental methods. It will thus be seen how this pre-supposes the need for suitable changes in the syllabus and practice lessons prescribed for training colleges.

I feel that this small brochure can serve as a sign-post, as a hand pointing in the direction in which earnest reformers, desirous of remoulding child-education in backward areas, may proceed with profit. Considering the magnitude of our sub-continent, this is a gigantic task, beyond the power of one person or institution. Several clear thinkers and devoted workers must come together and join forces. Educationists, both in voluntary service and government employment must cooperate whole-heartedly. And last but not least, adequate funds must be made available for these experiments and surveys in the different parts of the country. Our own experiments and findings are, at the most, tentative first steps in that direction. They are published here with the hope that more competent brains and powerful engines may come to be yoked to this car of rural education which is too heavy for the half-starved country bullocks struggling with it today. I shall be satisfied if I succeed in drawing the attention of the right persons to the urgency of this problem. If this booklet reaches the hands of those facing similar situations in other parts of the country, and brings them together for intellectual cooperation, the great cause which I hold dear will be fully served.

I have faith in right education which alone can help children to grow to their full stature as harmonised human beings and good citizens of a reborn country. I, therefore, feel strongly that educational programmes must be given equal importance with other welfare schemes, and that the scheduled and backward areas must find a prominent place in the benefits of national projects.

I must make grateful mention here of the assistance I received for the Vikaswadi Project at Kosbad, District Thana, from the Ministry of Education, Government of India, under their scheme to assist voluntary agencies in the Second Five Year Plan. I am also deeply indebted to philanthropists and personal friends for the generous assistance received from them. But for this assistance, it would not have been possible for me to work out my ideas and try the bold experiments described in the following pages. Much remains to be done, and I hope to get further facilities from some source or the other for that purpose.

I must also make a frank admission that, at this age and in my present state of health, I am not able to go through much physical activity. I have to depend almost entirely on my colleagues who do most of the field work and make me aware of the true state of things. It is the "headmistress" and the "teacher" (who are very often the same person) and others who look after the creche and the Balwadi, who carry out our workshop programme, who run the night-shifts, and who conduct games and scouting, it is they who are the real workers. Without them, it would have been impossible for me to achieve anything personally.

I must also mention the valuable collaboration of the Evaluation Committee of the Vikaswadi Project which consists of renowned educationists. Lastly, I also acknowledge the ready help of an old friend who has rendered this brochure, which was originally written in Marathi, into English.

Tarabai Modak.



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