



WHY THE EARTH MATTERS: NAI TALEEM

"Why would it not rain? What will happen to the birds then?" One child answered indignantly, when I casually asked, *"What would happen if it doesn't rain this year?"* I was sitting with the children of Grade VI, from Ananda Niketan school in Sewagram, in front of a plot of land that they had tilled. They had sowed brinjal and okra on this plot, irrigated minimally, and weeded the area. Now, we were waiting for the rains. It was the last week of July, and we hadn't spotted any dark clouds. The summer had extended over more than two months, and even the leaves on the neem tree had started drying.

As per our practice in Nai Taleem, the children had begun engaging with the craft of agriculture. We had started infusing this ongoing activity with concepts of math, science, social studies, and languages. But that is not all that happens. The children develop a deeper connection with the land, birds, insects, and seasons. For them, the first rain isn't only about playing in the wet mud, although that is an essential aspect of their experience. They observe the soil quenching its thirst, the leaves flourishing into a deeper hue, the birds bathing in puddles, the farmer heaving a sigh of relief. These are lived experiences. Their knowledge of photosynthesis, pollination, transpiration, and anatomy isn't an efficient arrangement of air-tight boxes in the brain. It is an evolving method of experiencing

a concept, not in isolation, but in the continuous network of beings and non-beings. It mingles with mathematics, engages with social studies, bonds with languages.

When the monsoons arrived a few days later, the children were overjoyed. They worked tirelessly on their plot to ensure that the weeds didn't overgrow the crop. It isn't easy to de-weed a thriving farm that is full of insects and ants, but they knew it was worth the effort. We didn't need to tell them why the earth mattered.



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