

Azim Premji Foundation in collaboration with the State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Chhattisgarh has launched a *Sadbhavna* School Programme, which aims to encourage '*sadbhavna*' values in the classroom and school practices of the participating schools. The pilot programme has been implemented in 183 schools in 6 districts of Chhattisgarh.

A girl in a government high school in a small village in Chhattisgarh says that she feels sad that she cannot take her best friend, who is from the same village, to her home. She says, 'We sit together, study together and eat our lunch together in school.' However, unlike some of her other friends who belong to the same caste as hers, her best friend is not allowed in her home because she belongs to a so-called lower caste. Her mother, who is also educated up to higher secondary, teaches her to view everyone as equal, however, the rest of the family thinks otherwise, and as a result, she cannot take her best friend home. If the girls were not in school, would they have got the opportunity to know each other, be friends with each other, or think differently from their families about caste and the superiority and inferiority associated with it?

Schools have the potential to work as the place where children from different backgrounds come together and experience and appreciate for themselves their similarities and differences and be able to shake off the shackles of prejudices, discrimination and violence of different types that exist in society. The Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 also guarantees all children the right to go to school, the right to be treated with love and care, and the right to be treated equally and with dignity. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005, in its position paper on 'Aims of Education', envisages education to be a liberating process, where the process of education must free itself from the shackles of all kinds of exploitation and injustice (for example, poverty, gender discrimination, caste and communal biases).

However, news from across different parts of the country suggests that different kinds of exclusion, discrimination and unequal treatment are part of the daily routine of children in schools, in both subtle and crude forms. Here are some instances:

- Not participating in the mid-day meal (MDM) because of the caste of the cook or other such reasons
- Girls facing harassment both on their way to school and inside the school, resulting sometimes in their dropping out
- Teasing peers for their disabilities, physical appearance, their parents' profession, and their socio-economic status
- Small arguments leading to violent exchanges

Different forms of exclusion, discrimination, harassment, and violence are part of the daily life experience of many children, particularly those from socially marginalised groups.

Also, in the age of globalisation and technological advancements, along with many opportunities, new challenges have emerged. Cyberspace is one such area where children need to be equipped with abilities to protect themselves. A flood of wrong, hateful, biased information with technological advancements and penetration of social media warrants that children develop abilities to critically examine information and arrive at correct decisions.

Origin of *Sadbhavna* School Programme

Value education has been a broad umbrella under which concerns of equity and inclusion have been tried to be addressed in school education. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 articulates the aims of education as producing engaged, productive, and contributing citizens for building an equitable, inclusive, and plural society as envisaged by the Constitution of India. Its guiding principles are ethics and human and Constitutional values, such as empathy, respect for others, cleanliness, courtesy, democratic spirit, respect for public property, scientific temper, liberty, responsibility, pluralism, and justice. However,

value education/moral education is often taught as per a set curriculum in schools, mostly limited to a designated textbook. The school culture is often disconnected from what is taught in the value education class.

Education plays a significant role in creating a just, equitable, humane, and sustainable society. The role of education in developing people equipped with the abilities and dispositions to play their roles in such a society is of paramount importance along with the all-around development of an individual. There are a set of universally recognised values, such as dignity, freedom, justice, peace etc., which play a crucial role in determining and guiding human action as they are internalised structures that evoke a sense of right or wrong as also a sense of priorities. Values can be seen both at the individual level and at the community level.

Some schools in Chhattisgarh have come forward to live the constitutional values through all their school and classroom practices and implement the *Sadbhavna School Programme*.

Sadbhavna School Programme

The word *sadbhavna* means to have peace, harmony, unity, and integrity in society. Relationships based on respect, kindness, and cooperation towards each other are foundations for such a society. Since the school is seen as an institutional arrangement for facilitating and nurturing such dispositions and abilities, the school and classroom practices become the site where teachers and students work together to learn and live these values of a secular and democratic system ensuring unity and integrity of the nation as enshrined in the Preamble of the Constitution of India.

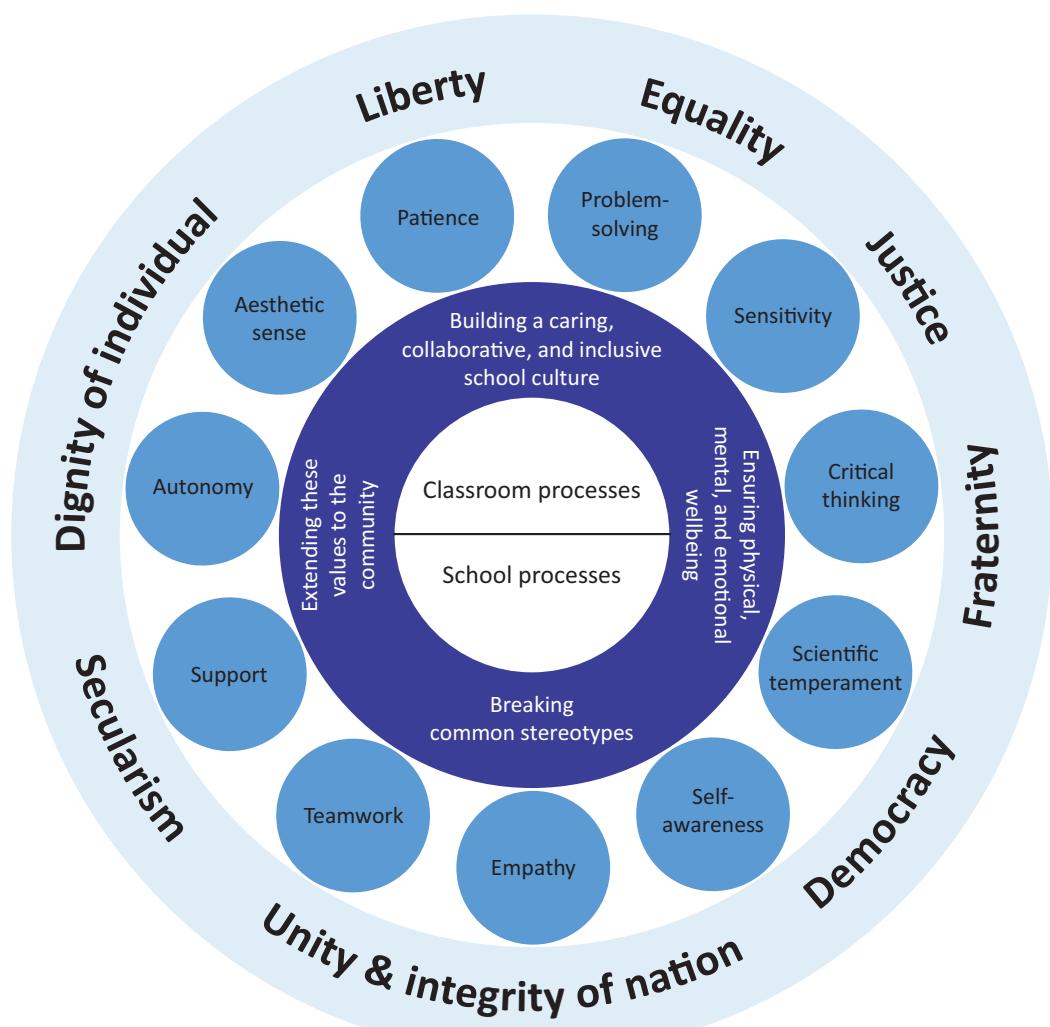


Figure 1. The framework of *Sadbhavna School Programme*

Guiding principles

Curricular integration and periodic self-assessment are two important components of the programme. Curricular integration is aimed at amalgamating the programme into everyday classroom activities, instead of running it as an isolated activity. The five guiding principles of the programme are:

1. Practise rather than preach

It is well-understood that values can be nurtured best by practising them. The focus of the programme, therefore, is not only on learning about these values but also practising them in all the interactions and activities of the school. A list of tangible practices relating to assembly, MDM, peer relationships of students, student-teacher relationships, classroom management etc., has been identified which the schools will aim to slowly make part of their school culture.

2. Seamless integration into all school and classroom activities

Any special programme tends to be limited to a special activity, curriculum, or event. To have any meaningful effect, the *Sadbhavna* School Programme will have to be seamlessly integrated into all the school and classroom activities. Curricular integration is one such strategy aimed at amalgamating the programme into everyday classroom activities, instead of running it as an isolated activity.

3. Collaborative efforts of all stakeholders

The school will have to work on the programme as a team and will have to regularly deliberate and build consensus to keep efforts aligned to objectives. Support from functionaries will also be very crucial for the success of this programme.

4. Long-term commitment

Developing something as part of an institution's culture takes time and it cannot be expected to happen immediately. It will need constant effort over a period of time.

5. Regular self-assessment

Periodic self-assessment will help the schools appreciate the achievements and identify the areas where they need to make more efforts.

Domains of work

Four domains to work on in the abilities and dispositions in everyday activities of the schools have been identified as:

1. Building a caring, collaborative, and inclusive school culture

2. Ensuring physical, mental, and emotional safety in schools
3. Breaking commonly-held stereotypes
4. Extending these values to the community

Domain 1. Building a caring, collaborative, and inclusive school culture

Both as a social and a learning process, learning happens best in an inclusive environment with cooperation and collaboration where everyone feels cared for and is exposed to diverse backgrounds and viewpoints. This also provides opportunities to work as a team and be able to appreciate and understand different contexts because students then learn how to articulate and defend their ideas and views. This gives students the opportunity to develop their own framework for building knowledge. Collaboration, communication, and flexibility are the three core skills of this domain.

Collaboration between students of different gender, caste, religion, academic and other abilities will give them the opportunities to know and be friends with each other. Such opportunities will not only help students learn better but will also help them develop skills for working in groups and teams.

Communication with sensitivity and empathy is an important skill that can enable children to communicate their feelings and thoughts with others and help them understand and know each other.

Flexibility is the ability to adapt to a diverse changing environment and context.

Some of the practices that schools have decided to encourage in their schools are:

- Develop a positive and collaborative classroom and school culture through various committees of students, student body participation in the formation of norms, planning of events, participation of community members in school management etc.
- Follow an impartial process of displaying the work of all the students and not just the 'best' ones.
- Cultivate a democratic and empathetic culture by celebrating festivals of all religions.
- To not practise any explicit or implicit form of discrimination in the school based on students' or teachers' caste, socio-economic class, gender, religion, food habits, ability, or intelligence.
- Maintain an active and engaged relationship with the community and caregivers/parents.

Domain 2. Ensuring physical, mental, and emotional safety in schools

An unsafe, abusive, discriminatory, and violent environment hinders the academic performance of children, it even pushes many to drop out of school. Such an environment may result in low self-esteem and confidence and desensitise others into thinking of such things as normal and part of acceptable social behaviour. The school is required to provide a positive environment with no punishment, bullying, harassment, intimidation, or use of derogatory language within the school premises. It also needs to build a safe physical environment with safe drinking water, clean toilets, safe playground with minimum risk of accidents and hazards. Online safety is another important area schools may need to address, as technology in the form of mobiles and the internet has entered the lives of children.

Sensitivity and empathy

These two values are at the core of this domain and enable children to understand how others feel and how their words and action may affect others. It also helps them acquire the ability to appreciate the thoughts and feelings of others.

Self-awareness

When children understand themselves better, it is easier for them to build self-esteem. This is very important for children who face difficulties in school or in friendships with other children.

Self-management

This helps children to modify their behaviour, such as controlling their temper. It not only gives them opportunities to understand their challenges but also gives them a sense of what they are doing well. The ability to properly understand one's own and others' feelings affects personal behaviour, such as self-control, which is necessary and empowering.

Schools have decided to bring in practices that will facilitate the development of the above-mentioned dispositions and abilities. Following are some examples of such strategies:

- No corporal punishment of any form in school
- Review and work on issues related to the safety of students such as safe drinking water, clean toilets, safe and clean classrooms, seating arrangements, playgrounds, MDM arrangements etc.
- Develop abilities to provide socio-emotional support to children
- Focus on classroom processes that encourage active learning – thinking and expression.

Encourage children to engage in debates, questioning and critical thinking during classroom transactions. Provide opportunities for self-reflection.

- Demonstrate respect in all their interactions by actively listening to students and their views without any judgement and practising respectful behaviour and language during classroom activities. They will also provide positive reinforcement in the form of praise to those who follow such behaviour.
- Model empathy by expressing their care and concern for the wellbeing of children and responding to them with compassion
- Provide opportunities to all children which will build their self-esteem
- Empower children to be safe in cyberspace

Domain 3. Breaking common stereotypes

Stereotypes are generalised, unsubstantiated and unexamined beliefs about a particular group (caste, class, gender, etc.) of people. Such views are generally used against the minority, deprived and underprivileged sections of society and are used to justify exclusion, discrimination, oppression, harassment, and violence. In a society laden with caste, class, and gender inequalities such stereotypes are divisive and discriminatory barriers to our Constitutional ideals of freedom, equality, justice, and fraternity which the programme seeks to promote.

Many of the challenges in schools are often based on belief in such stereotypes by teachers as well as students and need collective reflection to break. For instance, one commonly-held view is that children from a particular caste or class cannot do well in academics. In a discussion with a group of teachers, this stereotype was placed for reflection on when and how such a belief could have been shaped and who benefits or loses from it. The group concluded that in olden times, feudal landowners must have promoted this view so that the labouring class did not leave their work to get an education.

Analysis and understanding are required to understand that with the appropriate supportive environment, every child can be enabled to study well. Giving children opportunities to learn, is one of the aims of the *Sadbhavna* School Programme.

The dispositions of respect and dignity, critical thinking, sensitivity and collaboration are at the core of this domain. Here are some of the practices that schools implementing this programme have

grouped under this domain:

- Ensure gender equality across all processes by girls and boys working together in school processes, such as MDM. Traditional roles and activities are challenged – girls play games such as football and cricket and boys serve at the mid-day meal (MDM) and sweep the classrooms.
- Establish an egalitarian school culture by encouraging students from all castes to sit, eat and play together. Students follow a rotational seating arrangement where every student gets the opportunity to sit in the front row.
- Encourage a secular environment by promoting secular, patriotic songs in assembly, celebrating major festivals of all religions etc.
- Encourage students from all socio-economic backgrounds to participate in teaching-learning processes and all activities, and take on leadership roles. Representing the school in inter-school competitions and other activities is strongly encouraged.

Domain 4. Extension to community

Parents and the community are important stakeholders in the institution of school. Institutional arrangements have been made to ensure the participation of the community in the management

of schools. However, there is still scope for better collaboration between the community and the school. There remains a need for understanding on the part of the teachers about the parents' abilities to support the children academically. Community backing and participation are essential for the programme and, equally, teachers have to appreciate the constraints of the families. Understanding the local context/language can also help teachers build strong relationships with children and it can also help them design better pedagogic strategies.

All communities have good as well as regressive practices. Teachers can bring the good practices to the fore by inviting community members to share these with the children in school. This will not only help build a connection with the community but also encourage students to appreciate good culture, practices, knowledge and art etc. Similarly, awareness about regressive practices will help teachers design strategies to work on these in school through discussions, analysis and reflections.

The practice of *sadbhavna* is treated as an evolving school order which needs continuous nurturing both within and outside school boundaries in order to gain universality.

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Suresh Sahu works with Azim Premji Foundation and is based in Raipur, Chhattisgarh. He also contributes to the Foundation's Field Research. He has an experience of more than 20 years in the field of development and education. He may be reached at suresh.sahu@azimpunjifoundation.org