LIFE AT MIRAMBIKA

A FREE PROGRESS SCHOOL

ANJUM SIBIA

(Published by the NCERT, Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi Rs 90/-)

PREFACE

All schools aim at providing education, though, they may differ in various aspects: their stated objectives; their definition of schooling; goals set for children; teaching approach adopted; the total atmosphere for teaching-learning interactions; the relationship between the teacher and the taught; the manner in which the school day is organised; and the mode of assessment. These variations are indeed the outcome of the differing ideologies practiced by schools. In this context, insights of innovations carried out in schools can be obtained by examining the initiatives undertaken by them in seeking alternatives in curriculum, teaching and learning, measuring success, involving children in the process of learning and approaches to learning from one another. Sri Aurobindo's educational thought lays emphasis on holistic development of the children and education paced according to the needs and capacities of the child. The implied role of the teacher in this process is that of a facilitator. Mirambika - A Free Progress School seeks innovations/alternatives in curriculum with respect to both content as well as transaction by putting into practice the educational thoughts of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

This book based on the research study attempts to explicate the pedagogic processes taking place in the classroom at Mirambika with the view to examine the probable influence of school philosophy on school organisation, teaching-learning process and student outcomes. This in turn reveals the school culture and ethos. The book provides the reader a simple functional view of the school processes with the aim to help build an understanding of the schooling at Mirambika. A case study approach to study Mirambika helped to evolve an understanding of the school through detailed observation of its people and their activities. An understanding of the school was built mainly through personal observations, informal interactions and by examining the perceptions of the participants namely, the teachers, the students and the parents. It is sought to provide an interpretation of the various school processes by giving a feel' of what they mean to the participants. While highlighting the significant issues an attempt has been made to reconstruct the ambience of the school and to examine the influence of ideology on it.

The book is organised to provide a brief overview of education in India (Section I), along with the views of Indian Philosophers on education. More specifically, the salient features of Sri Aurobindo's educational thought and principles of teaching are presented, as they form the base and provide guidelines for the functioning of Mirambika. Section II introduces the school - Mirambika, by giving the background of the school, its physical organisation and resources. Section III on organisational structure, focuses on the roles and responsibilities of the participants and decision-making in school. How teaching learning is organised in school is dealt with in Section IV. It examines the strategies evolved, activities carried out, nature and type of evaluation and the interactions observed between the teacher and the students that shape the learning taking place in the

classroom. The 'school culture' is the net total of the norms and values underlying the various activities (i.e. routine and formal) carried out in school. Section V on school culture provides a comprehensive view of the various activities undertaken in Mirambika and the meaning that these activities have for its participants. The teachers (or the *'Diyas'* as they are referred to in Mirambika) are the main focus of Section VI. An attempt is made to present a comprehensive profile of the teacher, their expectations, aspirations and roles along with their understanding of the various activities in school. The parents and their recollections of Mirambika, expectations from the school and their own children form part of Section VII. A follow-up of students who joined the Mother's International School after completion of their studies in Mirambika is the main concern of Section VIII. It deals with two aspects, the personal-social characteristics of the Mirambika child and the academic achievement of these students in different subject areas across Classes VI to XII. The perceptions of the parents, teachers and children are weaved in, in order to provide a profile of the Mirambika child. Lastly, reflecting on the role of ideology in shaping the work undertaken in school, a few thoughts on some lines of enquiry emerging from the present research are presented in Section IX. Appendix A provides an account of experiences in the field delineating the processes of data collection along with methods of enquiry. It provides an idea to the readers about entry to the research site, data collection and exit.

The innovative teaching and learning approach followed in Mirambika provides an alternative perspective to schooling. I do hope that this will stimulate educators to think laterally and initiate a change in the present classroom teaching environment/ethos which is highly structured, time-wise rigid and examination oriented.

<div align="right">**ANJUM SIBIA**</div>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

1

INTRODUCTION

EDUCATION IN INDIA: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Education has received the highest priority right from pre-historic days. Concerns for education in India can be traced back to the Vedic age, from the age of *Upanishads,* the *Gita,* the Buddhist and Jain scriptures, Smritis, etc., through the medieval and British period to the post colonial systems of traditional education. However the aims of teaching-learning have been shifting their focus during different periods. As described by Altekar (1965), during the Vedic period focus was on imparting sacred literature and family occupation to the children. Memorisation was the dominant pedagogical method along with interpretation and creativity. These, however, became less important during the *Upanishadic* period where the emphasis was on accuracy, correct accent and

intonation. In *Dharamashastric* period systematic teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic was done by the teacher. The focus was also on memorising the Vedas. *Puranic* period had four types of teachers - the *Acharya,* the Guru, the *.Shikshak* and the *Upadhyaya.* The *Acharya* was the highest level, which a teacher could attain. During the Buddhist period the *Upadhyaya* was considered the most revered teacher who instructed students in proper conduct, morality and notions of *Vinaya* (humility) and *Dharma* (duty). The nature of pedagogy during the early period was "oral, repetitive and exemplary" (Altekar, 1965). Prior to colonisation the teacher or Guru provided practical instruction to students in the local schools in villages or pathshalss. Reading, writing, arithmetic and Sanskrit were the main subjects. Teachers had an authoritative role and students related to the teachers with reverence (Dharampal, 1983).

During the colonial period the British introduced a complete English system of education in India. Rote learning was encouraged and the presence of British knowledge or curriculum (as embodied in the textbook) played a prominent role (Kumar, 1991:14). In *Political Agenda of Education* Kumar (1991) points that the British curriculum was not related to the experiences of the Indian child and, represented discontinuity. As a result of this discontinuity Indian students were forced to memorise the information. As Clarke (2001) in her work on *Teaching and Learning: The Culture of Pedagogy* states, "it is difficult to conceive that British could have transformed this pervasive practice of rote entrenched among us for generations even with curriculum that may not have represented discontinuity with our own culture and traditions". Even though the British attempted to transform pedagogy by a "more progressive" method of learning (through Froebel's method of instruction) they were not successful.

The assumption that the system of education in its entirety is still completely Western oriented has been the basis for several reform initiatives for education in India. The innovations in pedagogy after independence were attempts towards indigenising the education. It was held that the education system could be transformed and enriched by including the core elements of being Indian. One of the early initiatives in the process of indigenisation of education was Gandhiji's Basic Education *(Buniyadi Talim)* in 1930s. He believed this was possible through craft learning, not as a subject of instruction but by imparting the whole process of education through some handicraft specific to the local context. Gandhiji believed that education in India should represent the Indian ethos and required the teachers to be virtuous. The post-Independence period was characterised by a series of reforms "to give an indigenous identity so as to reflect the Indian ethos and concern for society" (National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education - A Framework 1988:2).

The educational system of modern India has its beginnings in the nineteenth century. *Lord* Macaulay could be said to have laid the foundation of the modern Indian education system through his well-known Minutes on *Education* in February 1835. It would not be wrong to say that one effectively has in Indian education a continuation of an imperial culture and unfortunately Macaulay's ideas still dominate education in India. Elements of colonialism are evident in the authoritarian position of teachers in the class, control of student's responses, employing teacher-centred methods, which lead to passive acquisition of knowledge. "Teachers, regulated by the primacy of the syllabus, help their students understand and know this syllabus in its entirety through repetition and memorisation. Higher order thinking typified by analysis and the reasoning is largely

upheld in the Indian educational system" (Clarke, 2001:166-167). It is suggested that the culturally defined patterns of hierarchical interaction influence the teacher's pivotal authoritative role within the classroom in India. Kumar's study (1991) traces the dominance of the teacher in the classroom as a natural outcome of the respect and authority that is given to age and experience within the religious, social and cultural ethos of the country. From a developmental standpoint, Kakar (1971) described the authority conferred on the adult by children in Indian society. Adults accede to all the demands of the child generally till the child is about five years old. After that the roles reverse: the child is required to respect and obey the adult. It is suggested that teachers are aware of and are constrained by these tacit understandings of authoritative adult roles within society and tend to fashion their pedagogy and classroom organisation accordingly. Besides the teacher, the textbooks have played a major role in the way teaching learning is organised in classrooms. The Yash Pal Committee report during mid 1990s identified the information overload in textbooks used in schools across the country as the major problem in the Indian educational system.

The educational traditions of the colonial times still permeate the practices in post-colonial India. This is so despite the fact that a number of education commissions and policies, such as the University Education Commission led by Dr S Radhakrishnan (1946-48), the Secondary Education Commission headed by Dr A L Mudaliar (1952-53), the Education Commission headed by Dr D S Kothari (1964-66), and the National Policy on Education 1968 and 1986, were concerned about the state of education. It has been observed that the Westernisation of the education system has been far greater since Independence than under the British rule.

In present times, the teaching-learning in schools is subject specific and time-bound, focusing on structured forms of learning, characterised by repetition, rote memorisation and examinations. Schools create a fear of failure in the students and have become centres dominated by tests and examinations. As Shotton (1998) observed "what one effectively has in Indian education is a continuation of an imperial culture, something that is essentially elitist and autocratic" (p.32). He further states, variations through innovations to the traditional, mainstream schooling do exist but are nominal, marginal and peripheral. These alternatives challenge the existing culture of rote learning, cramming arising from the structured manner of teaching, teacher dominance in classroom transaction, learning focussed on securing marks, and evaluations to create comparisons and feeling of inferiority and insecurity, hi view of the existing realities there is a need to address the question: what is the aim of education? The educational ideas of Indian thinkers provide a base to build a perspective for a new system of education.

EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT: SOME INDIAN VIEWS

The philosophical thinking of eminent personalities like Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, J. Krishnamurti, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Zakir Hussain and others, has influenced the system of education in India. Gandhi's Basic Education Scheme *(Buniyadi Talim)* formed the basis for various education committees, which were set up after India's Independence. Education for Gandhiji, "is one in which the individual develops his character, trains his faculties, and leans to control his passions in the service

of the community" (Kabir, 1961: 202). Tagore pleaded for an education, which would make an "all-sided and well-integrated development of the human personality". He also felt that education should be truly creative and should be in touch with the complete life of people — economic, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual. Sri Aurobindo too has placed emphasis on all-round development of personality, which includes education of the senses, body, mind, moral and spiritual education. Swami Vivekananda's educational thought laid emphasis on realisation of the perfection already in man. He placed greatest stress on education as the gradual unfolding of the intrinsic quality of the individual and was of the view that no knowledge comes from outside. To Iqbal, the essential purpose of education was to develop man's individuality. He saw education as a process, which ensures the possibility of eternal progress. Indian philosophers, according to Kabir (1961), "regard education essentially as process of drawing out what is implicit in the individual and to develop his latent potentialities till they become actualities". The Indian thought as expressed in the educational philosophies of Indian thinkers lays stress on comprehensive education aiming at the development of the total personality of the individual in harmony with society and nature.

Amongst the various thinkers and writers on education who contributed to the philosophy of education in India, Sri Aurobindo's perspective is significant in the light of comprehensive education and all-round development of the learner. It calls for a shift in the educational paradigm, where curriculum is individualised, establishes linkages with life experiences, creates a love for learning and aims at personal growth of the learner. It seeks a new approach to schooling: it considers alternatives to curriculum planning, teaching approaches, role of teacher and the learner in the learning process, and evaluation procedures.

SRI AUROBINDO'S IDEAS ON EDUCATION

The educational views of Sri Aurobindo are closely linked with his futuristic vision of human destiny. He maintains that the kind of education, we need in our country, is an education *"proper to the Indian soul and need and temperament and culture that we are in quest of, not indeed something faithful merely to the past, but to the developing soul of India, to her future need, to the greatness of her coming-self creation, to her eternal spirit."* Sri Aurobindo's (1956) concept of 'education' is not only acquiring information, *"But the acquiring of various kinds of information'',* he points out, "is only one *and not the chief of the means and necessities of education: its central aim* is the *building of the powers of the human mind and spirit, it is the formation or, as I would prefer to view it, the evoking of knowledge, character, culture — that at least if no more. And this distinction makes an enormous difference."*

Sri Aurobindo's chief concern is not merely with acquisition of the information put at our disposal by science of the West, 'in *an undigested whole or in carefully packed morsels'* but to him, "the *major question is not merely what science we learn, but what we shall do with our science and how to, acquiring the scientific mind and recovering the habit of scientific discovery... we shall relate it to others powers of the human mind and scientific knowledge to other knowledge more intimate to other and not less light-giving and power-giving parts of our intelligence and nature."*.

The aim and principle of true national education according to Sri Aurobindo is, "not, certainly, to *ignore modern truth and knowledge, but to take our foundation on our own being, our own mind, our own spirit.*" A truly national system of education according to him will be "as *comprehensive as the European and more thorough, without the evils of strain and cramming.*" This can only be done as pointed out by him, "by *studying the instruments of knowledge and finding a system of teaching which shall be natural, easy and effective.*"

Aurobindo enunciates certain sound principles of good teaching, which have to be kept in mind when actually engaged in the process of learning. According to Sri Aurobindo, the first principle of true teaching is "that *nothing can be taught.*" He explains that the knowledge is already dormant within the child and for this reason. *The teacher is not an instructor or task-master; he is a helper and a guide.*" The role of the teacher "is to *suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil's mind, he only shows him how to perfect the instruments of knowledge and helps* him *and encourages him in the process. He does not impart knowledge to him; he shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself. He does not call forth the knowledge that is within; he only shows him where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface.*"

The second principle of true teaching, according to Sri Aurobindo, is that *"the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The idea of hammering the child into the shape designed by the parent or the teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition"* Sri Aurobindo has more faith in the *Swabhava* of the educand, i.e. *"it is he himself who* must *be induced to expand in accordance with his own nature."* He states: *"To force the nature to abandon its own dharma is to do it permanent harm, mutilate its growth and deface its perfection. It is a selfish tyranny over a human soul and a wound to the nation which loses the benefit of the best that a man could have given it and is forced to accept instead something imperfect and artificial, second rate, perfunctory and common"*

Sri Aurobindo's chief aim of education is that it should help each and every soul to draw out its best. He believes very firmly that every one has his own individuality and potentiality, with a chance of perfection and strength, however imperfect. As succinctly observed by Sri Aurobindo: *"Every one has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of perfection and strength in however small a sphere which God offers him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it and use it. The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use"*

The third principle of education, in view of Aurobindo, is 'to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be'. As Sri Aurobindo states, *The basis of a man's nature is almost always, in addition to his soul's past, his heredity, his surroundings, his nationality, his country, the soil from which he draws sustenance, the air which he breathes, the sights, sounds, habits to which he is accustomed. They mould him not the less powerfully because insensibly, and from that then we must begin"*.

Sri Aurobindo observed that if genuine development is to take place *"We must not take up the nature by the roots from the earth in which it must grow or surround the mind with images and ideas of a life which is alien to that in which it must physically move: If anything has to be brought in from outside, it must be offered, not forced on the mind, A free and natural growth is the condition of genuine development"*

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of education is based on the principle of evocation of potentialities of the individual in all its entirety, which should be developed according to human nature. The Free Progress Education is based on the assumption that a human being is good in itself and that a positive freedom is a pre-requisite to help children by allowing them space to experiment and provide opportunities for growth. As the Mother says 'A free and natural growth is the condition of genuine development'. Free progress is *"a progress guided by the soul and not subjected to habits, conventions or pre-conceived ideas"* (Mother, 1956). For education to be complete according to the Mother (1956) it must have five principal aspects relating to the five principal activities of the human being: physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual.

To summarise, Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of education aims at modifying the school curricula, maximising the learning modalities, helping the child to achieve his potentiality at his own pace and level and devote his time to discover his 'unique set[1]. This kind of schooling is seen as an anti-thesis of an imposed uniformity of prescribed courses and teaching (Gutek, 1988) which the traditional schools purport to do and can be linked to what was taught in schools under the colonial rule (Kumar,1991; Scrase, 1993). The type of schooling visualised by Sri Aurobindo is seen as aiming to bridge the gap between the child's life at school and that at home.

In contrast to the educational ideas of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the present day education system in India is purely a instruction-of-information enterprise, supported by a subject-time-bound curriculum, which neither relates to the needs or abilities of the learner nor takes into consideration the way children learn successfully. Instead of being child-oriented it is subject-oriented. The schools focus on competition with others, mastery of subject matter for getting better marks or grades than on learning in cooperation with and from one another for personal growth and for welfare of others. This is not exclusive to Indian phenomenon, rather all over the world education is largely reductionist, materialist, ego enforcing, and devoid of the joys of the spirit (Comelissen, 2003). It is in this context that there is a need to examine initiatives which are rooted in Indian tradition, seek alternatives in curriculum teaching and learning for measuring success, involve children in the process of learning and focus on learning from the another and not from an authoritative pedagogue.

It is against this backdrop the present research attempts to study the innovative teaching-learning approach followed in Mirambika - school based on educational thought of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The school, Mirambika therefore, is studied in relation to its goals i.e. ideological and operative. Ideological or transcendental goals are governed by the underlying philosophy and provide guidelines on how the school ought to function, whereas the operative goals are the actual school processes which are governed by the ideological goals and external factors like admission to higher educational institutions, board examinations, parent's pressures, and examinations (Thapan, 1991). In order to gain an understanding of the internal organisation in school, perceptions about the roles and responsibilities of the key functionaries i.e. the managing committee, Principal, parents, students and teachers were examined. In order to depict the culture of the school a study was made of the routine and formal activities like meditation, lunch, projects, formal training, and cultural programmes. These characterise the dally and yearly round of activities. The 'project work' and 'training' the two important pedagogic processes, provide a view of the teaching-learning taking place in

Mirambika. A follow up of students who on completion of their studies in Mirambika joined Mother's International School (M.I.S.) helped to discern their psycho-social characteristics and provides a view of what Mirambika has given them.

2

MIRAMBIKA - THE SCHOOL

Mirambika is a co-educational school located in Southern part of New Delhi with a strength of 127 students (as on September 1995). Though the school has a very small number of students by contemporary standards, it gains prominence by having a reputation of being popularly known as an 'innovative' school. This study aims at portraying a comprehensive picture of Mirambika, especially in the context of its philosophy and the socio-cultural milieu.

INTRODUCING THE SCHOOL

Genesis

Mirambika came into being in 1981 as a result of All India Teachers' meet held in October 1980, in which the need emerged to set up an Integral Teacher's Training College in Delhi along with a pilot school embodying and manifesting the ideal of Free Progress Education as envisioned by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. An effort was made to put Sri Aurobindo's ideas into practice by starting an innovative school based on his principles of teaching and inviting teachers from all over India to participate for a duration of at least one year. The training was also open to those who felt the need for a change in education but did not have teaching experience. Mirambika started with 57 children and 10 teachers, and has 127 children (number of girls and boys is almost the same) and approximately 40 teachers (1995-96 session). Mirambika Free Progress School (1996, Prospectus) has its base in the teaching methods of Sri Aurobindo who visualised education according to the child's needs and capacities. The main objectives of Mirambika (as stated in the school prospectus) are to help children explore one's 'aim in life', 'potential', discover their 'faculties and capacities', relate to all beings and 'findings one's direction in life'. The school aims to achieve these by providing an environment to help each child make an attempt to seek perfection in all his actions, providing experience for learning through activities and to help the child discover his unique set (personal capacities). That being so, the school then seeks to provide an environment, where learning is self-motivated, self-directed, interactive and participative.

The Site

Nestled among the trees in the premises of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in South Delhi, is Mirambika. Also situated on the Ashram premises are the Mother's International School and the Mira Nursery School. The approach to Mirambika is the 'Sunlit Path' which has the statue of Sri Aurobindo, signifying the road taking Sri Aurobindo's vision to the outside world. Wide open, green spaces lined with eucalyptus trees surround the school which has swings, slides, neem grooves - which at various junctures provide space for learning activities for different groups.

The school's building speaks of the attempts made to integrate Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's presence in its architecture. On completion (a part of it is under construction) the school building would resemble the Mother's symbol i.e. twelve petals and a centre *'Aditi'* signifying the 'flame of fire'. The petals indicate various virtues to be inculcated in a person and a group of four petals indicate the four powers of the Mother: *Mahamaheshwari* (goodness, generosity, equality), *Mahakali* (gratitude, perseverance, aspiration), *Mahalaxmi* (peace, sincerity, humility^ and *Mahasaraswathi* (receptivity, progress, courage). Sri Aurobindo's presence is seen at the centre of the school which is shaped as his symbol and each sub-area in the school also acquires this shape. The two triangles indicate the process of transformation with the upward pointing triangle as ascent into the divine and downward pointing triangle as manifestation of divine on this earth. The seven layers of water in the middle indicate seven layers of consciousness, with the lotus indicating the flowering of divine aspiration in a person. Keeping in tune with this symbol, the foyer has green plants and an artificially constructed pond with bamboo stalks, aquatic plants and fishes and attempts to grow lotus in it are made. The inside of the school building, the foyer has the main office and the store for stationery. On one side of the foyer is the office of the Principal and some areas of common use. The living museum, library, art room, sports room, science laboratory, gymnasium and dining hall are some of the resources in Mirambika. On the other side of the foyer are the computer room, talk room and classrooms for junior children. The first floor has classrooms for older students, the meditation hall, music room, resource room and teacher training room. The classrooms for younger children have an annexe where children do activities without much distraction. A round sunken area inside the room is also used for searing children while adjacent to the classroom is a sand pit. A separate gate leads to the small park which has swings, slides etc. for children. Large cupboards in the room are used for storing toys, colours, crayons, paper and other things used by the children. The classrooms or areas of work for older groups have tables and chairs arranged in a circular fashion which facilitates discussion in the group. These are reorganised while doing individual work. Blackboard, individual cupboards, common cupboards and spaces for Sri Aurobindo and 'Mother's photograph comprises the classroom. The areas of work for different classes (groups) are separated by low walls, giving an impression of large space with different groups of children working in different areas. Large glass windows is a notable feature of the school which creates an impression of unobstructed space at the same time give the building the benefit of natural light and breeze. The architectural and physical organisation in classrooms of older and junior groups children has a distinct structure which may be seen as the schools' attempts at fostering an environment conducive to its ideology of free progress education.

Admission Procedure

The child is given admission largely on the basis of parental selection. The parents are called for an interview, group discussion and filling up of a questionnaire. The initial screening of parents begins at the stage of registration. Informal talk with the prospective parents by the school personnel provides an idea of the child's residence, in terms of distance from school. Since transport is provided only for neighbouring areas, accordingly preference is given to these children. The school also gives admissions to children from other areas if the parents can arrange for their transport. After a brief talk

with the parents, the Mirambika prospectus is given and they are also called for an interview on a specified date and time.

A short interview is held with three to five parents called during a day. Both, the mother and the father are called for the interview however, in exceptional cases (like single parent or on tour etc.) interview with either parent is held. A team of three-four teachers along with the Chief Coordinator (Principal) talk to the parents to ascertain the parents' values, attitude towards schooling and to look for parents who feel the need for a different kind of schooling. Through the interview an idea is formed if the parents

(a) have clarity about the reasons for applying to Mirambika,

(b) have those values which the selection panel wants in "Mirambika parents" i.e. lack of materialistic, consumeristic orientation and a focus on the Indian *Sanatan* (spiritual or yogic values) values, (c) have time to devote to their children, (d) hold similar views as the school regarding the child's education, future, values to be inculcated etc. and (e) in case of the older children, the school attended earlier. An idea about parents' views is formed by observing the interaction between the parents during the interview.

Accordingly the parents who satisfy the above mentioned criteria are called for a detailed interview which includes a group discussion and filling up of questionnaire separately by both parents. A small group discussion takes place with two or three parents and a member of the school. Care is taken to assign separate groups to the husband and wife. The members of each group are given a different topic for discussion. The topics chosen have relevance to education and include themes like "How important is emotional education of the child and how can we foster this?" or "What changes would you like in the future education of your child?" Parents are required to express their views on the given topic in their specific group and then a member of the group presents the views of the group to the other groups.

After the detailed interview, the children come for observation, to the school. The younger children who are to join at the entry level i.e. red group come for one-day observation, whereas the older children are called for week-long observation. The children are informally observed for their behaviour and adjustment with peers and teachers.

Classes

There are no graded classrooms in Mirambika. Children are grouped according to their age and each group has a name given to it. For the younger children the groups have names of colours which are chosen by the teachers namely - the youngest group is called the Red group and has children from 3 to 4 years of age. The next group is the Blue group having children of 4-5 years of age followed by the Green group (5+ years), Yellow (6+ years), Orange {7+ years), Progress (8+ years). The two senior most groups are Humility (9+ years} and Receptivity {10+ years). There is an overlap of ages in all the groups. In the older groups names of the groups change and the teachers and the students decide the name of their group at the beginning of the year. The names given for the older groups suggest the focus of the group and the stage through which the children are going through and the mental faculty/qualities the school wants to develop.

Uniform

The school does not have any prescribed uniform. Children are asked to wear simple clothes that do not obstruct movement. Since clothes 'express something of a personality' uniformity in dressing is not expected by the school.

Teachers - The 'Diyas'

The teachers in Mirambika are called *'diyas'*. Teachers are not salaried staff but are paid a token stipend which varies for full time and trainee teachers. The teachers are chosen on the basis of their interest in working with children, affection and motivation to do their job. According to a school official, Mirambika has had from the very beginning teachers from rural as well as from urban backgrounds. Teachers in Mirambika are: full time teachers i.e. those residing in the Ashram, trainee teachers i.e. those doing B.Ed, practice teaching and volunteers who are part-time teachers. The volunteers are mainly subject specialists who take up some specific activity (like aero-modelling) and are from various institutions like I.I.T., Delhi University and private organisations. They are only paid conveyance allowance. The trainee teachers are those doing B.Ed, from Indore University (summer course), while taking up practice teaching in Mirambika, and are associated with the school's teaching programme. The number of teachers keeps changing from time to time because of the volunteer's leaving and joining the school, however the student-teacher ratio is approximately 3:1. Mirambika has a Teacher Training Wing on its premises which conducts ongoing training for its teachers-in-service as well as pre-service. The training programme focuses on the school ideology and philosophy, principles of learning which form the basis of teaching-learning in school.

Day Structure

A school day in Mirambika starts at 8.30 a.m. and continues till 3.30 p.m. The children dressed in colourful clothes start their day by having breakfast together i.e. teachers along with the students. Mornings begin with sports in which both students and teachers enjoy themselves in the field. Thereafter students and teachers together clean their rooms. This is followed by playing of music for meditation. During this the students along with their teachers sit quietly and silently with their respective groups. In the mornings, children of all age groups do 'project work'. During this time they work in small groups on specific projects which integrate different subjects and activities like viewing films, drama, model making, experimenting, art, craft, music etc. The students choose an activity of their liking while working on a project. After project work the children along with the *'diyas'* have lunch together in the school. They are served vegetarian food prepared in the Ashram kitchen. In the afternoon thrice a week, formal teaching or 'training' of specific subjects like English, Hindi and Mathematics takes place. Also, twice a week in the afternoons children have 'club' activities in areas like cooking, management, jewellery making, calligraphy, art, craft, pottery making. The children are free to choose and participate in an activity of their interest. The day schedule is not rigid and is subject to change depending on the nature of activity being undertaken by the children. At the end of the day everyone sits and concentrates on the day's happenings with meditation music

playing softly. Before going home they have a glass of milk/juice with snacks under the trees, chatting and laughing together.

Curriculum

Mirambika has a multi-level learning system, i.e. children within a group may perform at different levels in different subjects and teaching is done specifically at their individual level (Prospectus). The school follows the project approach to teaching and has no fixed curricula or syllabus. However for each group, goals in terms of qualities, mental faculties and skills to be developed during the course of one year are decided and delineated into quarterly targets. Within this broad framework the child is provided varied learning experiences by working on projects which are inter-disciplinary in nature.

During the actual course of project work, children do a lot of activities related to the project chosen by a particular group. Children collect information, experiment, have group discussions, quiz competitions, put up exhibitions and have debates on the topics. Sometimes field trips are also arranged. The groups are monitored to provide for formal learning in informal settings. A child's learning is paced according to his/her capabilities, e.g. a child may be performing a year lower to his/her age in one subject and at a higher level in another. In the afternoons the children are taught specific subject areas, e.g. English, Hindi and Mathematics. Subject specialists teach in small groups or individually depending on the need of the child, keeping in view the minimum learning required for a particular age group. The curriculum is not rigidly structured and is open-ended and evolves 'organically' i.e. in accordance with the needs and capacities of the child.

Evaluations

No tests or exams are conducted at any stage in any group (class) in Mirambika. The teacher decides the goals to be achieved during a specific time. In accordance with the group goals, activities are planned by the teachers in advance. In normal course, the teacher plans for the week. Evaluation is done to know how much the child has covered and what more is needed. The teacher makes the child's profile covering all areas of learning (mental, physical, vital and psychic). No marks or grades are given; the progress is measured against the child's own record and not with others in the group. It is viewed as feedback of child's work by the teacher to parents, is descriptive, non-judgmental and discussed individually with each parent. This is followed up by concrete action plan for the child by parents and teachers. In higher groups children undergo self-evaluation, peer evaluation on completion of a topic or activity for which proformas and schedules are prepared by the teachers.

After "Mirambika" What?

On the completion of their schooling at 9-10 years of age in Mirambika it is assumed that the children have completed their education upto approximately Class V of a conventional school. After this, majority of the students go to Mother's International School and a few to Sardar Patel Vidyalaya and other schools in the capital. The school

also plans for upgradation adding one level every year and taking it upto the level of Class X.

LEARNING RESOURCES m MIRAMBIKA

An environment that stimulates interests, permits freedom of activity, provides for creative expression, encourages contact with the physical world, stimulates the child to seek new experiences, new understanding and caters for optimum learning. The learning environment depends on the availability of physical facilities, equipment and materials which are selected and utilised in order to achieve the goals of the school. Mirambika, in view of its educational goals and its physical resources, e.g. materials, equipment and services, makes attempts to provide learning which invites the child's participation in various activities experiences that lead to the joy of discovery, of exploring, or creating, of experimenting, and of observing.

Mirambika has a number of resources - physical and material characterised by the principles of 'openness' (Malehom, 1978) i.e. of self-directed learning, enhancing uniqueness, encouraging exploration, flexibility in planning, developing sensitivity and affective awareness. Some of these are provided by the architectural layout of the school, for instance, the wide roof terrace which is used for various activities during the cool months of the year. Similarly the "neem grove" and the open spaces surrounding the school are used for multiple purposes like group walks, games, exhibitions etc. The common spaces of use located in the school include the library, science laboratory, meditation hall, art room, stationery room, gymnasium, computer room, talk room and the living museum. The physical facilities may therefore be taken as resources in the school in view of how they function i.e. activities organised, equipment and the material they provide for various school processes.

In this context, a synoptic view of the different resources in Mirambika throws light on their physical organisation, material resources and functional use. The factual description of resources in Mirambika is combined with the information obtained through informal talks with school teachers. An attempt is made to throw light on the nature of linkages established among school goals, activities and available resources. Though physical facilities may not solely determine the learning environment, yet their role in facilitating development of challenging and enriching learning environment in the school cannot be underestimated.

The *library* is situated on the ground floor and constitutes a large room, well lit with electric lights and huge windows, characteristic of all Mirambika rooms. There are wooden cupboards with obverse and reverse sides having folding doors; notice boards for putting up charts, maps and articles; besides the wooden tables, chairs and stools. Individual areas of study and areas for group activities form a part of the physical organisation. Photographs of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are placed on the shelves. The library is equipped with books ranging from encyclopaedias, adventure books, fairy tales, books on religion, philosophy, history, art, music, science etc. A large number of books are on Aurobindo and the Mother. Children's magazines like *Target, Misha, Lok Sanskritam, Mother India, Auroville Today, Swagat, National Geographic world* and many more are found in the library stacks. In addition, there are documents on library information, teaching aids, historical charts, maps and globes. The books are catalogued

alphabetically by computer and the catalogue is available in the library. The card-catalogue system with author-subject index is also available. Books in English language dominate in number though Hindi, Oriya, Sanskrit, Bengali and other foreign language books are also stocked. The library functions during the school hours on working days and is open on Saturdays also especially for teachers, this being their day of planning for the week.

The library work is co-ordinated by a school representative and a full time librarian. Books related to the project taken up by a group are displayed on the tables by the group co-ordinator for ready reference of the children. Children are allowed to get only story books issued whereas the project related books are to be used only in the school premises. No late fine is charged; instead a list of pupils not returning books on time is prepared. Books lost have to be replaced by the borrower; money is not accepted by the school. A major chunk of books have been donated by the founder Principal and in recent years by some teachers or parents. The library has the provision of reimbursement for those books which are purchased by parents for the child's reading in school.

The library, apart from being a place of reading, consultation and reference, caters to the students and teachers as a resource centre too. The general section of the library is used by students and teachers while taking up project work, while the resource section is mainly used by teachers and resource persons for personal or research work. While undertaking projects at times group work shifts from the classroom to the library which then becomes a place of group activity. Children's movement is not restricted to a specific day or time; they are free to consult the library whenever they wish to. The library in Mirambika is not a "hushed" sanctuary for children but a place where they can interact and discuss in groups. The responsibility to maintain reasonable noise levels is given to the children. The library in Mirambika is more like a learning centre where multi-use of space is made. The job of the library coordinator extends beyond cataloguing and a safe custody of books to an aide/helper who assists children in locating project related books and helps in searching other relevant material.

The teacher's training *wing* is a centre of Research for Integral Education and Human Values. According to a school official it attempts to translate the given thought of the Mother into practice "We *do not need teachers with opinion and the degree to teach the children, we need living being who can impart a sense of value, who can help to evoke in children what is best in them, who can help them discover their own inner light and nurture the instruments to express its truth"*.

The aim of the teacher education programme according to the school is thus 'not only to prepare teachers to teach children, but to go beyond the immediate objectives of teaching in school and addressing the more fundamental questions of human growth and evolution'. Mirambika teacher education programme is dynamic and flexible. It is an ongoing participative process and much of its curricular details are worked out by students and teachers together as the programme proceeds. With Integral Education at its core, certain broad areas are essentially covered as part of development of human values. The programme is further integrated at each step with practical work in Mirambika. Continuity between theory and practice and a constant endeavour to improve and learn is the spirit of the teachers training programme (Basu, 2005). The course is offered to any individual who has an inner aspiration, shows initiative and is enthusiastic, receptive,

sincere and hardworking. The trainees come from all parts of the country and from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Mirambika teacher education offers courses at two levels; Pre-primary and Elementary. The pre-primary level student teachers learn through first hand experience, i.e. practically. They spend half the time working with the children initially under supervision, learning by observing and interacting with the children and through feedback. In the' afternoon they have theory classes largely for their self-growth, understanding children's behavioural pattern, making teaching aids and in translating the school philosophy in their life and work. The elementary level student teachers are gradually inducted in the teaching learning process once they cover the various aspects of Integral Education starting with physical education. Their practical learning and experience in the classroom starts after a period of one year. Both the levels follow experimenting with learning, developing new strategies in teaching and have freedom to explore under guidance (Basu, 2005).

The art room in Mirambika is viewed as a place of significance and a lot of activity takes place in it. According to the art coordinator art room is conceptualised as a 'space to get in touch with oneself and a place used by the children and teachers to develop their sensitivity through the medium of art. Keeping in view the nature of work, the organisation of the room is such that it is well-lit, ventilated, having high tables, low tables, simple floor mats, large closet cupboards for storage of art material. Shelves for display of items, models or other art work are placed in such a way that they are visible from outside the art room.

The art room has a wide variety of materials including water colours, powder colours, brushes, canvasses, poster colours, fabric paints, waste materials (egg cartons, bottle caps, boxes etc.), clay *('pilli mitti', 'geru mitti')*, maida, beads, threads, plaster of paris, glues (fevicol, quickfix), dyes, bleaching powder, special face paints etc.

The financial allocation for purchase of material varies from Rs.4,000 - Rs.10,000 per annum; however, certain things are obtained from the store (Matri Stores) in the Ashram. Apart from this the school has the provision of purchasing any art material required on that account.

Since the art room has been conceptualised as a space for exploration, the various purposes it serves are as under:

Organising activities *with the children:* The coordinator decides on a project on 'art', plans it and executes it. For instance in the previous years the students visited Mandawa in Rajasthan, observed various art forms and reproduced them as designs made in mud, mehendi, stick painting etc.

Project related activities: The projects undertaken by the teachers at times involve integration of various kinds of art activities. These activities are planned by the group of teachers in consultation with the children. The art coordinator provides the material and helps in execution of those activities.

Training centre *for teachers:* From time to time the art coordinator holds orientation workshop for teachers in school. Teachers are made aware of the available material, and are oriented to their use and related activities which could be carried out with the children. The art room in Mirambika serves as a learning centre for teachers as well as

the children. Art activities are also organised by professionals from outside the school which includes

Chinese painting, Madhubani painting, tie and dye, paper cutting; etc. Children along with the teachers are seen actively participating in these various activities.

Club activities: Weekly activities known by the name 'clubs' are held by older children for their peers and younger children in the area of craft, mehendi, chalk making, feather painting etc. Children are provided freedom to search/ arrange for their own material, occasionally depending on the art coordinator for certain materials.

Apart from these specific functions the art room is used by the teachers as well as the children as and when they are free e.g. lunch time. They are also given full freedom to borrow whatever material is required by them for which they do not have to take permission except to enter it in the register titled "Materials borrowed". The children are oriented to the organisation of the art cupboard which facilitates borrowing of material.

The process of art education in school relates to undertaking activities for skill development and activities for inner expression. The former refers to guided activities whereas in the latter children are free to explore and create. According to the art coordinator, the atmosphere in the art room should be relaxed, beautiful and meditative. Efforts to make it so are made by proper organisation of material and by playing music while the work is going on. Flexibility in timings for organisation of art activities for different groups is also evident. The art coordinator believes that "art is science in reality" say, for example, a painting with depth perspective could teach concepts like linearity, shadows, roughness or smoothness intuitively which at a conscious level becomes science. In line with this the school plans to take up anthropometry, (subject that combines art and science) and extend the scope of the present art room to pottery, sculpture and much more.

The science *laboratory* in Mirambika is a specially designed room with designated space for chemistry, physics, biology and home science. It is divided by a row of cupboards into two main areas, chemistry and physics, biology and home science. The room is so organised that 2 or 3 groups of children can work at the same time. Cupboards are used for storing equipment and have labels of perishable and non-perishable items. According to school sources almost all materials in chemistry, physics and biology, required for children at primary level, are available in the science laboratory.

The organisation of activities in the laboratory is decided in consultation with a science team constituted for the purpose of planning, organising and guiding of various kinds of science activities throughout the year. These relate to:

• Planning and executing of projects in science. Planning is done by the concerned members/teachers in consultation with the science team.

• Integrating science activities with the projects undertaken in the group. Teachers in consultation with the science team plan activities related to the project undertaken. Keeping in view the materials available activities are organised in the form of games to inculcate certain skills in the children.

• Science workshops are held for the teachers as well as for the trainee teachers. Principles of science teaching are explored and the teacher trainees carry out individual experiments. The children then replicate these. The science laboratory is maintained by

the science team, which also plans its budget. The school has provision of borrowing materials from Mother's International School, on non-payment basis. The budget for 1995-96 session was Rs.7, 000; however there is provision for extra budget in case the expenditure exceeds the allotted budget.

The major purpose of teaching science, as it emerged from talks with the science coordinator, is to develop observing, measuring, reasoning, hypothesising, inferring and predicting skills in children. Inculcating scientific attitude in children is one of the major goals of science laboratory. Thus, children are encouraged to be inquisitive, patient, and optimistic for which relevant activities are organised for children.

The music room is an average sized room with 'durries' (floor mats) and has a guitar, piano, harmonium, tabla, flutes, tambouring daflis, damaroo, manjira, bells etc. The piano is the same which the Mother played on and thus occupies a significant place in the music room. The harmonium is a personal piece donated by the founder Principal of Mirambika. Similarly some other items have been donated by the Ashram or by parents. However, depending upon the needs of the children the music incharge buys the required instrument in consultation with the Principal.

The children in school are encouraged to make their own instruments which are then used for dances, songs etc. Natural raw or waste materials like leaves, pipes, papers, stones etc. are used for making these instruments. This results in making low-cost instruments, helping children to develop their creativity and imagination. According to the school sources the present state of the music room needs improvement, which will take place after new construction. The new construction will include audio-visual aids along with musical instruments to form a part of the music room.

The school provides inputs by letting children experiment with various instruments except for a few like piano, harmonium, sitar and guitar. The idea is to evoke the child's interest in music. However, no structured scheduled tutoring is given to the children. At times music is also taken as a weekly 'club' activity. For instance, the children as a group sang western songs and learnt dance (Scottish) daily in turns. The inputs provided by the school in this area vary depending on the resource persons available during a particular academic session.

Games and sports as a resource find expression in the school Gymnasium and Sports room which is a small room having a variety of sports equipment. The gym is a new addition in the school (1996) and is used by the children for playing table-tennis, badminton or doing gymnastics. The sports materials are kept in the small sports room, the children issue material themselves in a register kept for the purpose. The sports room is operated by the children on their own in the mornings, during lunch time and sometimes during the day too. Keys are kept at a specified place and children hold responsibility for operating, issuing, returning or breakage of any material. A sports coordinator (teacher) however, organises different games for the children as well as sports day or athletic events.

Some unique sports items like walking sticks, single pedalos, double pedalos, strength bar, bar bell, huge ball besides indoor games equipment, cricket, trampoline etc. find place in the sports room. Majority of these are primarily donated by a German coach from Pondicherry during his visit to Mirambika. Some others are donated by parents or

have been borrowed from MIS and Sports Authority of India. These materials are purchased keeping in mind the children's needs and availability of space.

The school authorities expressed that proper maintenance of the equipment is lacking primarily because of small storage place. The materials are kept in boxes and are shifted according to the requirement. The school, however, plans to improve some of these aspects since the gym is becoming more and more functional. Direct supervision by teachers of the younger groups help the children understand proper use of the equipment. Different groups are assigned one day of the week for checking whether all the equipment is kept back at the assigned places, children are using the register to issue sports material or to see if the equipment is not misused by any child. Children are free to take whichever equipment they want after making an entry in the register with the name of the equipment, child and date. The teachers also issue certain sports material for themselves after school hours, when they play games like volley ball, football, badminton etc.

The resource room is situated on the first floor, facing the inner side; in the corner is a longish room with cemented slabs, mats for sitting and low tables for working on. The resource room is the one which has been in school right from the beginning and is established with the aim of generating resources and to develop a resource bank for providing different kinds of teaching materials. Teaching aids are made by the teachers, the B.Ed, trainees, children themselves or by those parents who are interested and voluntarily opt for the same. The resource room is a place where these teaching-learning aids are designed, prepared, stored and used in. According to the resource room coordinator children's use of these materials helps to make learning interesting and experiential. The resource room also serves as a resource centre for organising workshops for parents and teachers. Networking with other organisations for materials and information on developing these forms a part of its functions. Models, charts, toys, educational games, posters, flash cards, information files, maps, activity cards, slides, projector, audio-video cassettes are some of the materials displayed. Efforts are being made to index or catalogue all the materials available in the centre. The resource centre issues material to teachers for use in their groups. Children are not issued material individually but can make use of it in the resource centre itself.

The resource centre was initially started for teachers but gradually expanded its horizons to students, parents and for exchange of information. Most of the aids are donated by the parents or Ashram visitors, while some are purchased by the school. Apart from this the centre has an allocated budget to buy its own materials.

Besides these, the other places which are significant activity centres are the meditation room, computer room, living museum and the dining hall.

The *meditation* room is a fully carpeted room used occasionally for the purpose, since meditation is a daily activity for all groups (Classes). During certain special days like Maha Samadhi day the children assemble here for meditation. Talk room is a room used for the purpose of having one to one interaction either with the child, parent or teacher. It is a small room with a table and some chairs.

The *computer room* serves as a resource by having everything documented. The coordinator documents information on all projects done in the school in the groups or by an individual child. Separate information of each child in school i.e. their background,

activities done in school (projects) etc. form a part of the information. Project wise information relates to details like students and teachers involved year when undertaken, goals of the project, materials used, activities undertaken and resources used. Apart from this, a complete teacher's profile is documented which includes year of joining, leaving, qualification, experience etc. The computer room also maintains records of library books. This resource is frequently used by teachers and coordinators to refer to projects undertaken in earlier years.

The *living museum,* unlike its name is a huge hall with floor mats and durries and bare walls. It is a multi-purpose room often used for meditation, project work, parent meetings, teacher meetings or for holding exhibitions. It changes its 'shape' and 'colour' according to the nature of the activity being undertaken at a particular time.

The *dining hall* in school is shaped in the form of a star (|*|) resembling Sri Aurobindo's symbol. It has tables and chairs, low level tables and durries, some cemented tables and chairs for children and teachers. The plates are stacked on wooden shelves and each child and teacher is allotted a number. Sinks have taps fixed at a low level for younger children. The centre of the dining hall is an open area with no roof whereas the sides are covered giving the area a look of openness. Food is served by children, in weekly turns, everyone, including teachers and Principal line up for their food and later clean their respective plates.

The infrastructural facilities in Mirambika are spaces where things "happen". These happenings then are dependent upon the materials housed and functional use they are put to, which makes them the resources for the school to function and perform its various activities to achieve its stated goals.

It is evident that there are various "rooms" serving as resources in the school which act as centres of learning for students and teachers. Organisation of activities in the school is dependent on available facilities and materials and the freedom given to the participants to use them. In Mirambika, work in class is closely linked to its 'resource centres' and integration across the various areas of work aids in linking theory with practical know-how. The organisation of activities in these resource centres is geared towards making the learner take initiative, be independent, responsible, reflective, confident and active.

To summarise, it may be said that the goals of the school give direction to the use of the equipment and materials. These are used throughout the day and during the entire school year to experiment, to feel and observe and even create some on their own. The significance of the physical resources in Mirambika lies in the space and freedom provided to the children to use them under the guidance of the teachers, more so to be able to use it on their own without constraints of imposed rules and regulations. Learning in these resource centres is not restricted to the traditional 3 R's of schooling, but children learn how to locate and use knowledge. These centres provide the evidences that learning is interactive and is integrated in a closely knit participatory fabric of experiences that lie not only inside the classroom but also outside the classroom.

3.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Mirambika, based on the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, propagates a free-progress system of education. This system emanates from the ideals of education that may be termed as the transcendental goals'. According to Thapan (1991) transcendental goals (official) are governed by the underlying philosophy and provide guidelines on how the school ought to function. The actual processes in the school are the 'operative goals' which result from the social reality as it impinges upon the school functioning. The school, as a result, is constantly making efforts to establish a harmonious relationship between the two types of goals by organising various activities in a dynamic manner.

The transcendental order forms the crux of learning experiences made available to the children for their all-round development. It strives to provide holistic education which aims at developing the body, mind, emotion, mental faculties and skills (physical, mental, vital, psychic and spiritual). The operative or the 'local order' (Thapan, 1991) is based on functioning of the school as an institution. The school at the time of this study was upto grade V only, and the children, on completing their studies in Mirambika, had an access to higher education in Mother's International School located in the same campus. It may be said that the school programme is, therefore, primarily geared to accomplishing philosophical or transcendental goals since the constraints of adhering to any examination pattern or school board's expectations do not exist.

The ideology on which the school is based influences the school organisation, physical as well as pedagogic, which in turn influences the classroom topography. Particularly so in Mirambika, time, space, material and people are differentiated in terms of the type of transaction of the subject matter (project and training work). Certain structural components of school organisation, rituals and ceremonies together help Mirambika attain a differentiating character of its own. The given model (Fig.3.1) provides a way of visualising the elements in the school system and represents a generalised picture of complex, interacting sets of relationships. The school organises its various activities in view of the ideology, learning opportunities and its interactions with its participants. It is the processes in the system (teaching-learning, evaluations, formal-informal celebrations etc.) which keeps the organisation alive and is affected by the perceived roles and responsibilities of the teachers, parents and children. These together influence the student culture.

Mirambika is composed of several distinct parts, each having its specific goals like the training wing, resource room, art room, meditation hall, talk room, computer room, living museum. Put together, these are the resources which help the school to function. Ballantine (1993) observes that in the school, each sub-part is dependent on the other for materials, resources, functioning and even for its existence (p. 147). Traces of these are found in the observations made in this study.
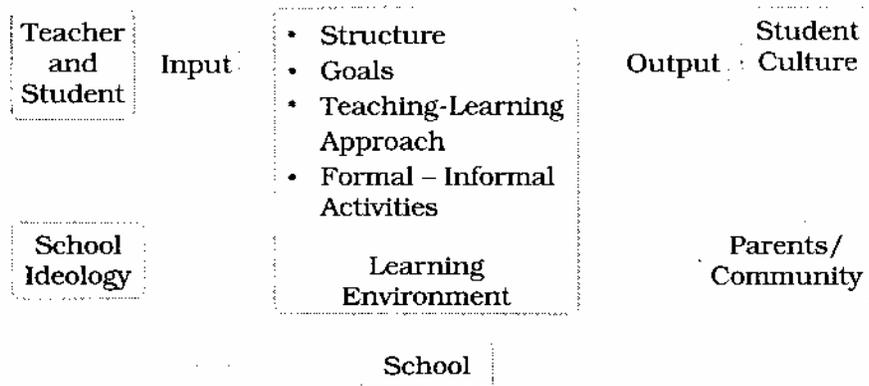
```
┌──────────┐              ┌──────────────────────────┐           ┌──────────────┐
│ Teacher  │    Input     │ • Structure              │   Output  │   Student    │
│   and    │              │ • Goals                  │           │   Culture    │
│ Student  │              │ • Teaching-Learning      │           │              │
└──────────┘              │   Approach               │           └──────────────┘
                          │ • Formal – Informal      │
                          │   Activities             │
                          │                          │
┌──────────┐              ├──────────────────────────┤           ┌──────────────┐
│  School  │              │      Learning            │           │  Parents/    │
│ Ideology │              │    Environment           │           │  Community   │
└──────────┘              └──────────────────────────┘           └──────────────┘

                              ┌──────────┐
                              │  School  │
                              └──────────┘
```

Fig. 3.1: *A Model depicting Interacting Elements in a School System*

A DAY IN MIRAMBIKA

It is Monday morning 8.30 a.m. The children, without school uniform, dressed in everyday wear, are seen approaching the school building through the Sunlit Path. Some enter; others start informal games in the grounds. No bell rings. Children move towards the dining hall for breakfast. They have informal exchanges over a bite of sandwich and fruit. Soon they are ready for studies and quietly disappear into their *'groups'* (classrooms). Children and *'Diyas'* (as the teachers are called in Mirambika), clean their work places, dusting, sweeping, mopping, etc. getting ready for the day. The term *"Diyas",* is coined from the words *'didi'* (elder sister) and *'bhaiya'* (elder brother). As explained by a teacher: it symbolises *beckoning the light, the one who kindles the light* in *children'*. Music for *'meditation'* (concentration) marks the start of the school day and a hushed silence prevails. Students and teachers are seen sitting, some standing with eyes closed, a few looking out of the large windows deep in thought. Children are told to think of what they left at home and what they will do in school. As expressed by a *'Diya'* *'these thoughts help them make a smooth transition from home to school and helps them set a pace for the day's work'.*

These observations throw light on the smooth transition the children undergo from home to school. The work culture of the school is evident in the joint cleaning efforts, regardless of one's position as teacher or student. The mornings are devoted to group work where pedagogic transaction takes place through "projects" wherein different subject areas are integrated to achieve project goals.

Children work individually, in small groups, or have field trips. The project work is evaluated either through self-evaluation sheets prepared by the *'diyas'* on by discussing in a group. Lunch for students and teachers at 12.00 noon is an informal affair where children sit on durries spread on the floor. Each group has serving duties by turn, followed by each person cleaning his/her own *'thali'* (big metallic plate) and placing it in specified cupboard/stack. After lunch 'formal training' ensues and lasts from 1.00 to 3.00 p.m. for the older groups i.e. Class II (yellow) onwards. Mathematics and languages (English and Hindi) are taken by subject specialists, majority of whom are volunteers (part-time teachers). The closure of the day's work at 3.00 p.m. is 'home session' marked

by playing of meditation music. This is followed by light snacks and milk after which the children leave for their homes.

It is evident that the organisational and architectural space of the school i.e. its building, surroundings, equipment, materials, services, and other resources set certain restrictions and at the same time offer certain degree of freedom to its inhabitants. The way the school's environment is used by each group as a pedagogic resource is of paramount importance.

The 30 or more models, charts experiments that were made as part of the 'Environment' project were displayed in the 'Living Museum' for a week and the children talked about their display, conducted small experiments, operated their models, to other children, teachers and parents who visited.

The importance of the physical organisation of the school is highlighted in the context of the cultural meaning it acquires. The building, furniture, books, and the open spaces, all assume culturally defined meanings, which determine their limits and uses. All these set a range of freedom, mobility, independence, flexibility, responsibility and opportunity. The child's experiences in school are thus moulded by her surroundings which may have a personal or, a special meaning for him/her. The perceived influence of student's preference for a particular pedagogic activity in school has certain implications for organising teaching-learning in Mirambika. For instance, analysis of word association sentences showed that project work appeared to be more liked by the students. Although project work is initiated by the school as this approach to teaching is in line with Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, which stresses on inter-disciplinary learning at the primary stage. However, it can be concluded that the perceived influence of the students' choice strengthens the school's activities, in this case, the project approach to teaching-learning.

Project Approach to Teaching

The particular pedagogical orientation dominant in a school bears on life in the school (culture) and the school's organisation (structure) (Woods, 1979). As stated earlier, the pedagogic processes in Mirambika gain importance because of their nature, structure and organisation. Organisation of pedagogic activities takes place in broad scheduled time slots i.e. morning for projects and afternoon for "training". 'Project Work' is an approach to teaching-learning which is multi-disciplinary, theme-oriented and attempts at integrating the "arts" (music, dance, drama, painting, etc.) in its curriculum. The children normally while undertaking a project, work on themes and are given a choice to work in the area of their interest i.e., subject areas like sciences, social sciences, mathematics and language.

Thus projects form the "essence of teaching-learning" in Mirambika. According to an official source, it is the training or subject-specific teaching-learning which aims at fulfilling the "operative goals" of the school. No specific books are prescribed in Mirambika; however, project specific books and dictionaries are kept in the individual and common cupboards in the class for the use of children whenever required. NCERT textbooks for Hindi and Mathematics were seen frequently being used in the two highest groups. The library is consulted quite frequently, which has a good stock of Indian as well as foreign books. No formal tests or examination are held but throughout the

academic year children undergo evaluations in the form of self-evaluation, presentations, displays and quiz. Children are promoted to the next group after the end of the academic year for which no formal year end evaluation takes place. It is evident that the curriculum and pedagogic processes in Mirambika are largely grounded in the transcendental order and the school accomplishes the goals by providing an evolutionary syllabi emerging from the needs of the students, thus making learning active, and in accordance with the child's potential. Evaluation, here, aims at self-striving towards perfection through self-improvement and hence is not constricted to measures in conventional terms. In the absence of a formal final examination, the pedagogic processes take a unique shape which is the highlight of the school's organisation. Woods, (1979:29) also observed that "the particular pedagogical orientation dominant in a school bears on life in school (culture) and the school's organisation (structure)".

DECISION MAKING IN SCHOOL

Since certain kinds of ideology foster certain kinds of structure (Butler, 1991), the school ideology has an impact on the physical and the functional structure of a school. Watching the teachers and students in Mirambika, we became convinced that the ideology of the school provides a frame for structuring and organisation of its work (see Fig. 3.2). As Brunsson (1985) states: "Ideology is important in that it provides the set of ideas that decision makers take with them to guide decision making and to interpret their context".

School
Ideology

Manpower
Financial   Resources

Structure

Centralised   Decentralised

Hierarchy   Equal Status/Power
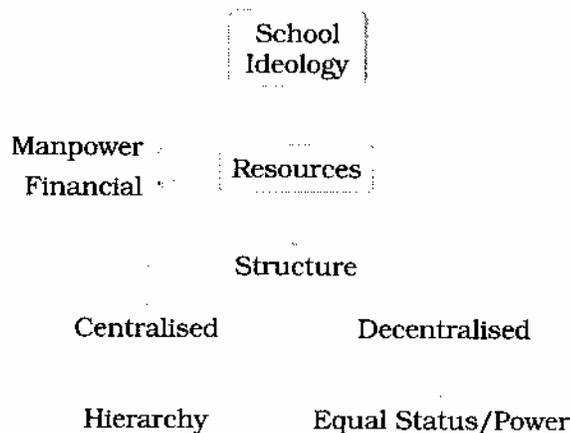
Fig. 3.2: *Ideology and Organisational Structure*

Centralised structure necessitates hierarchy, whereas decentralised organisational structure permits equal status and power to its workers (Butler, 1991). Organisational structure of the school thus provides the context which influences the decision taken.

The members of the decision taking body and their respective role in school is shown in Fig.3.3. The Principal is looked upon as the chief-coordinator of the school and is a member of the core-group of school coordinators. The core-group coordinators may be seen as the key functionaries in school and play a pivotal role in organisation of various school activities. The Principal's role is differentiated from that of the other members in

terms of decisions on administrative matters which are taken solely by him, though he keeps in contact with some of the Managing Committee members. Decisions are not taken single-handed. After discussion and consultation the core group jointly decides the major issues in the school. Interviews with teachers also revealed a similar pattern. It is interesting to note that teachers' replies on, *'who takes decisions in school'*, resulted in majority of them stating *'we all sit and talk and decide what is to be done'*. A few volunteers however, felt that the Principal was the sole decision maker.

Traces of this view point were observed in certain school related matters like selection of parents and volunteers in the school and decisions regarding upgradation of the school. The last issue i.e. upgradation was solely handled by the Principal in consultation with the Managing Committee members, according to an official source. The other coordinators claimed to know little about this matter.

Alternatives to authority in school were attempts made to make teachers and students responsible for their actions by letting the responsibility of action lie with the individual member. Therefore the participants in Mirambika may be seen as autonomously functioning individuals. The school organisation also seeks alternatives in school structure, work organisation, measuring success, classroom processes to attain the ideological goals of the school and are to be seen as the context in which Mirambika functions without authority.

The Managing Committee

The managing committee comprises of sixteen members (see Fig.3.4). The Chairman, Manager and Educational Consultant all three are from the Aurobindo Society. There are four representatives from the Delhi Administration and Principals of three schools, namely, of Mother's International, Mirambika and Gyan Bharati School. The other six are: one teacher representative and one representative of teacher training wing (Mirambika), two members from the Aurobindo Ashram and two representatives from amongst the parents.

Managing Committee	• Consultative
Chief Coordinator	• Administrative
	• Academic
Core Group Coordinators	• Decision making across groups
Group Coordinators	• Decision making day-to-day in groups
B.Ed. Trainees	• Inservice training work
Volunteers	• Non-decision making
	• Gives feedback to take decisions.

Lines of Communication
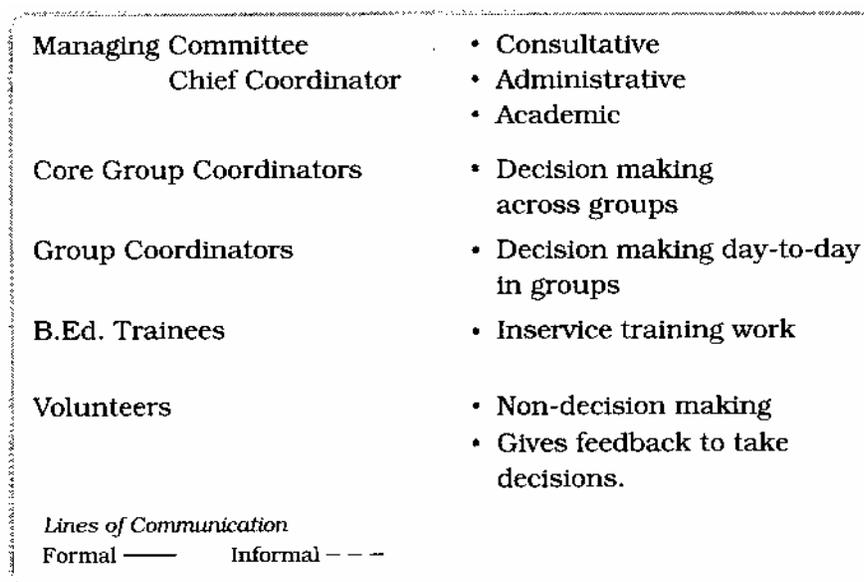Formal ⎯⎯ Informal – – –

Fig. 3.3: *Decision taking body in the school – Its Role*

In terms of its function, the managing committee purely functions as consultative committee, no directions are given nor does it have a fixed meeting time in a year. According to an official source, the managing committee mainly takes decisions pertaining to school philosophy and meets whenever a situation so arises or the committee so desires. What clearly emerged from our talks with school members is that no directives are given by the members of the managing committee and decisions are usually taken jointly after discussion and consultation with its various members.

Managing Committee

AUROBINDO SOCIETY
* Chairman
* Manager
* Educational Consultant

DELHI ADMINISTRATION
* Four Represen- tatives

SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
* Mirambika
* M.I.S.
* Gyan Bharati

ASHRAM MEMBERS

TEACHER REPRESENTATIVE

TEACHER TRAINING REPRESENTATIVE

PARENT REPRESENTATIVE
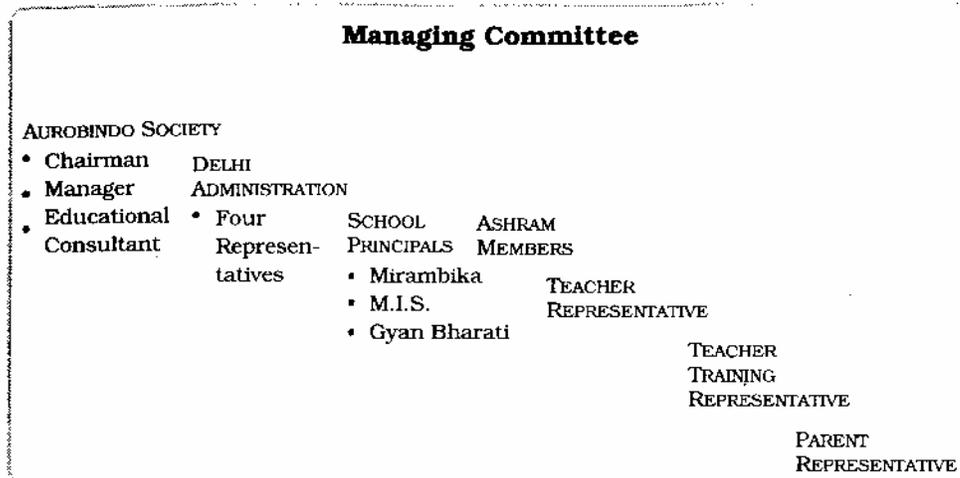
Fig. 3.4: Members of the Managing Committee

Day-to-Day Functioning

Day-to-day functioning of the school reveals that the working relationship between the members is located in an informal work organisation. The functionaries view their roles as directions from "the divine" and their commitment to the ideology enhances identification with the school goals. Hence, they carry out their responsibilities in a collective and collaborative manner. They get a sense of achievement and derive satisfaction from the roles they perform. This is quite evident in school since there are no peons to do office work which is normally shared amongst the members; no extra hands are employed to help the children with their personal needs, which the group teachers tend to; and no office bearers are appointed to look after the Principal's paper work, he himself works on the computer, along with some others. Hierarchy in work is not evident and, the school comprises of equal status workers who set their own work pace to meet the school goals.

The boundaries of roles and responsibilities of the functionaries as perceived by the school are not rigid. This is because the school is constantly adapting to changes and demands in the environment as a result of feedback received from time to time. The teachers are constantly reflecting on the need to adapt their work/tasks they undertake to the different needs of the children, situations, including the day-to-day changes in the physical organisation of their respective class groups.

It can be stated that the organisational dynamics in Mirambika are a result of the ideology of the school which allows increased decision-making powers to its teachers and students. In work, they function as equal status workers i.e. decisions are jointly taken by the teachers and the students in class.

The symbols of a special status, embodying authority are conspicuous by their absence. The Principal is not regarded as supreme authority on school related matters.

Teachers and children are seen quite often seeking his guidance and support. He makes himself available to the children whenever required. His office is a small space with little furniture, often used by younger children as a 'hiding' place. This may be taken as evidence of personal influence of an individual, irrespective of the role performed by him in the school. Evidence to this effect was the students' perception of the Principal as a 'pal', 'is great', 'knows everything', 'is a friend', to recollect a few. Clearly the Principal is not viewed as a 'supreme authority', deserving deference.

As expressed by a teacher: *"He is one of us, we don't see him differently. He discusses everything with us and if we do not want to do a particular activity he does not force us. In Mirambika we are free to decide with our children. But he has a vision which I tike hearing from him"*. The Principal's influence on school members i.e. teachers and students may be attributed to his knowledge, personal skill, charisma and power of persuasion. Contrarily in certain matters of the school, it was evident that some teachers had more power in the decisions taken. It was observed that the maximum control lies with the core group of teachers (including the chief coordinator and a few teachers) who take decisions regarding the whole school and are the 'Key functionaries' in school. The group coordinators are free to take decisions regarding their respective classes within the broad boundaries/parameters stated by the core-group. Thus in decision taking maximum power lies with the core group and the least with the volunteers. By this the teachers acquire status i.e. core group members are viewed as most significant ones taking important decisions like selection of students, organising teachers training, teacher selection and allocation of classes, matters concerning upgradation etc. Group coordinators take decisions with regard to their own groups though always in close contact with the members of the core group.

Chief Coordinator - Principal

Core Group of Teachers

Group Coordinators

B. Ed. Trainees

Hierarchy Volunteers

Hierarchy

Fig, 3.5: *Decision Taking Hierarchy in School*

As shown in Fig.3.5, decision taking is almost proportionate to the status one holds. The teachers in the core group have a greater degree of decision taking power than the group coordinators who in turn have more power than the B.Ed, trainees, followed by

volunteers. This differentiation also influences the control and power of the teacher on the children (discussed in detail later). In spite of such status, power or control lines influencing interactions in school, it was observed that the school functionaries (teachers across groups) did not differ in terms of commitment or responsibility towards their respective roles. The students and teachers sit together to discuss issues and problems which are resolved in their respective groups in consultation with their coordinators. The matters, rarely, go up to the chief-coordinator (Principal).

The unpredictability of the nature of task in school makes centralised monitoring difficult. Since intra as well as inter-group variations in the tasks, activities and work organisation exist; the school finds alternative ways to monitor performance and to inspire the members with a sense of purpose and commitment. Accordingly, the school functions within flexible work groups having open patterns of communication and coordination amongst themselves by mutual adjustment.

Teachers in Mirambika make attempts to carry out their responsibilities within the stated boundaries of an ideal teacher of Sri Aurobindo. The school ideology provides a structure for teachers with regard to their roles i.e. consultative, freedom in learning and co-operative learning. It may be stated that, the school functions within flexible work groups that have open patterns of communication and which coordinate the work by mutual adjustment. An observation to this effect was made during the stay in the school.

Group : *Receptivity (Class V)*

Activity : Project - *'Seasons'*

Older children are required to go in small groups to the younger children and get the survey proforma filled. This survey proforma has been developed by the older children. It has drawings showing different seasons and the younger children are required to write what they would like to do in a particular season. Children visit the younger classes and one child of the older group tells the teacher the purpose of their visit and on being granted permission to proceed, he/she explains the purpose and activity to the younger children. The younger children have queries like, 'Do we have to write only?' Or 'Can we draw also?' 'Can I write one word?' 'I want to use coloured pencil...' Answers are provided to each query. The children of the older group were later seen helping the younger (orange) children in spellings, at times giving examples, clarifying doubts, etc. The older group teachers stand aside and watch quietly. The younger group teachers take this interruption calmly helping children when required. They seem least disturbed by the intrusion and resume work after the children's excitement has subsided.

In Mirambika the participants may be seen united by their shared engagement in a project or activity undertaken in school, and may be viewed as the resource of the school. Burns and Stalker (1961) commented that in many of the innovative organisations capacities and resources are "stored" in individuals, and not in organisational structures. It is apparent that Mirambika is sustained by a flexible organisational structure resting on a collective capacity for continual and conscious attention to make collaborative efforts grounded in shared ideological values. As Thapan (1991) states, "the ideology creates an ethos in which living together necessitates cooperation between participants" (p.48).

To sum up it may be said that the over shadowing of the transcendental goals on the local order is evident in the school processes. The main factor, perhaps, is the grade upto which the school functions i.e. primary (upto grade V). The reality factor seems to operate at a lower range (almost negligible) because the school neither feels threatened from an Internal evaluation body nor an external sanctioning body whose approval is necessary for its survival. Absence of external examination provides the freedom and space to organise the various pedagogic processes in line with the ideological goals. The major influences of the 'local order' on school processes are in terms of values the ideology emphasises, and of those the community (parents and children) bring to the school. The external pressures relate to issues of homework, sex-education, discipline, teacher qualification and upgradation. Since the school is being upgraded it may become more susceptible to external pressures in terms of board examinations, syllabi, textbooks and trained teachers.

4

TEACHING LEARNING APPROACH

The school ideology also fosters a certain kind of structure in the classroom for organisation of the instructional processes. The organisational practice, as discussed earlier, highlights the schools' effort at creating a work environment which is informal and flexible and is a result of delegating increased decision making powers to the teachers and children. It is the ideological setting which influences pedagogic processes and differentiates Mirambika from other schools in Delhi, thus lending it a special character. Project oriented teaching in Mirambika finds its origin and base in the school ideology which stresses on education according to the child's needs and capacities and aims to provide an environment conducive to such learning. Project teaching is based on the school's philosophy that learning at primary levels should not be subject specific but an integrated, multi-disciplinary approach needs to be followed within an evolutionary curriculum, which develops according to the needs of the children.

Kerry and Eggleston (1988) state that: "the terms topic, project, theme, integrated work are interchangeable labels which describe the approach to teaching-learning and includes all those areas of the curriculum which are explored in a thematic way. Project work exhibits a particular attitude towards the nature of knowledge or epistemology. It is based on the assumption that knowledge at primary level cannot be compartmentalised into separate subjects. Gunning,

Gunning and Wilson (1981) summed the ethos of the philosophy underlying project work as- "one of the most prolific sources of such information lies within the child's own day-to-day experience. Everyday the child is involved in a vast range of experiences at first hand. These contacts and experiences can be used very effectively by the teacher to provide the child with developing insight into a great range of ideas since they provide very 'concrete' pegs on which to hang important concepts,".

In Mirambika, project work implies an approach to teaching-learning which deals with theme-related topics and cuts across all subjects i.e. science, social science, mathematics, languages, arts etc. The teacher's role is to guide children, individually or in groups towards the process of inquiry in order to develop certain skills and mental faculties. The

children are engaged in project work during the mornings and the afternoons are for "training" in English, Hindi and Mathematics. Training can be said to be synonymous with teaching in a conventional way, where a specific subject is taught in a specific time period.

The younger children in Mirambika receive most of their education within the framework of projects. The older children spend approximately half their school time on projects and the rest on training. Twice in a week they are engaged in clubs which involves participation in extra-curricular activities of their choice and interest. The distinguishing characteristic of project and training work is generalisibility and specificity respectively. The essence of teaching-learning transaction in 'projects' lies in fostering general functional behaviour. Knowledge transacted in projects becomes generalisable by using tools like questioning and querying. Training', on the other hand, deals with specific subject-matter and can be said to generate specific functional behaviour.

A detailed account of how teaching-learning takes place in school i.e. "project" work and "training", will help to elucidate the organisation and transaction of teaching-learning in class while highlighting the salient features of each. The observation of the classroom processes although non-participant, were intensive in nature, spread over a period of eight months in school, which helped to capture the pedagogic ethos in school.

PROJECTS – THE HUB OF CURRICULUM TRANSACTIONS

In accordance with Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, the projects in Mirambika form the base of providing Free-Progress Education which is defined by the Mother as: "Education guided by the soul and not by preconceived ideas". The founder Principal of Mirambika has described projects as "little ships on which our children explore themselves and the beautiful world around them". Teachers expressed that 'academics in the conventional way are not the focus, Mirambika mainly aims at all-round development of personality i.e. the vital, mental, physical, psychic, and the spiritual and projects are the best way to achieve our goals'. This learning aim of the school influences the curriculum, related activities as well as goals of the participants. Evaluations too focus on holistic development of the learner and on fostering self-understanding, giving positive feedback and creating self-awareness. Therefore the learners are encouraged to reflect on the learning process through self-observation, writing diary, peer appraisal, discussions, etc.

A detailed description of the project - 'Environment' is presented to highlight the nature of the subject matter taught, effect of physical environment, teacher commitment, the implicit as well as explicit values inculcated and messages transmitted.

The Project - "Environment"

Project Environment was primarily carried out on the decision taken by the chief-coordinator (Principal). The whole school was involved in the project as it was felt that such a topic was the need of the hour and that children need to get acquainted with issues related to environment.

The first stage in planning includes writing down the Aims, Resources, Activities and Evaluation on pre-printed "Planning Sheets". Aims contain the main ideas behind the

project; the goals which the teachers and students want to achieve. The broad goals of the project were: quietening the 'vital[1] and opening of the 'psychic'. The group goals varied keeping in view their respective learning needs. Planning sheet for group (appended) provides a glimpse of the goals. The initial planning was done by the 'diyas' and after discussing with the children specific activities along with the resources were planned. It was observed during the planning meetings that the teachers expressed their opinions freely and were open and receptive to others' views.

It was decided by the teachers that different corners related to different subject areas would be set up. The school children were divided into four levels keeping in view their age, knowledge and the focus on content to be covered at a particular level. At each level different subject corners including the arts were set up to focus on activities related to the specific subject content. The corners conceived included areas like social sciences, sciences, languages, mathematics and alternate models. Some corners had further sub-divisions, while art was incorporated in all activities, it was also conceptualised as a separate corner, thus attempting to fulfil the vital aim of the project.

Children had to spend one week in each subject corner to choose the area of their interest. The movement of children across groups was also worked in detail. The planning shows (Fig.4.1) the arrangement of different corners and their intricate linkages.

The first week of the project was the transition period where the children did activities related to their immediate environment. The children after experimenting in different corners made the final choice with regard to working in an area of interest. This is indicative of the school's aim to make the child interested in her/his learning which should proceed from near to far and is also in accordance with the transcendental goal of the school.
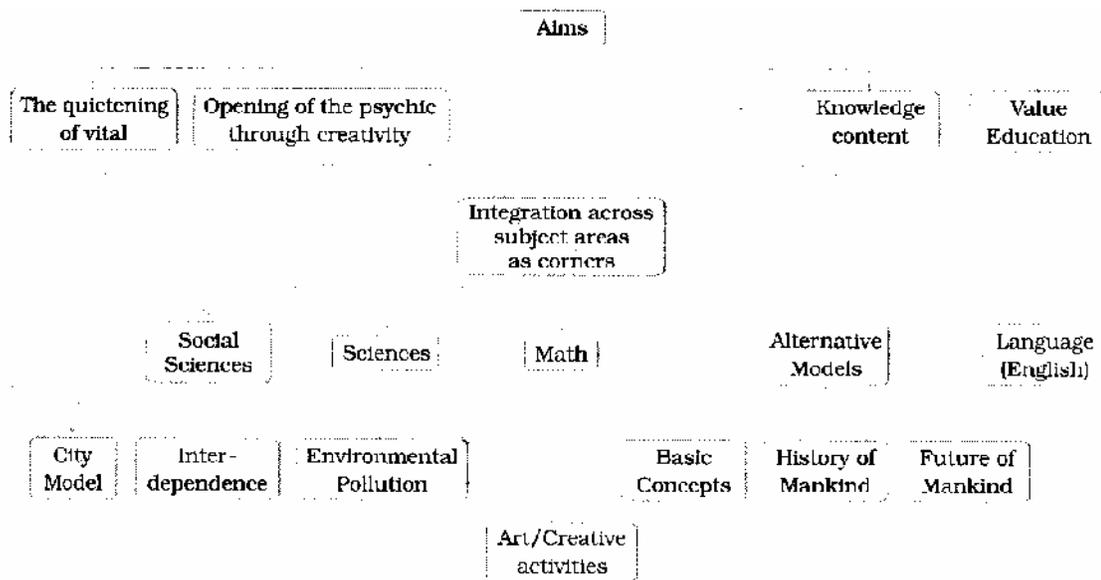

Fig. 4.1: Project Environment – Salient Features

Learning as stated in the school goals, is multi-level, evidence of this was found in the different subject corners designed to cater to children of different groups, i.e. in terms of

ability, age, knowledge and content transacted. For this the school was divided into four levels i.e. Level I consisting of Red, Blue and Green Groups (3-4-5 years of age), Level II, Yellow and Orange Group (6-7 years), Level HI, Progress (8 year), and Level IV, Humility and Receptivity (9-10 years of age).

Level I group designed their own activities which consisted of constructing a hill, planting and watering plants, putting things in order in their cupboards, racks etc. Level II, III and *TV* were further sub-divided into three smaller groups.

The activities related to the different subjects were carried out in different corners designed for the purpose. These activities varied across different age levels. Some of these are:

• *Social Science Corner:* This was sub-divided into three units: Environmental pollution, air, water, noise pollution (II-III Level) - Experiments were done on noise air/water 'thought/mind pollution'. Interdependence and plant and animal life, integrated experiments on photo synthesis, food webs, etc.

• *Science Corner:* To a large extent activities of the science corner overlapped with social sciences: Concepts'/consequences of pollution were discussed in social science and experiments were done in science. Younger children did experiments like burning of paper, clothes, wood, etc. Experiments on noise and water pollution were also carried out.

• *Mathematics Corner:* Attempt was made to integrate mathematics with the science corner. Concepts were related to real-life activities e.g. finding the length of leaves, the circumference of trees, calculating the 'mean', and to plot a bar diagram.

• *Alternate Models: This* corner dealt with the question of environment in a more wider-linear-historical perspective. Talks and discussions were held on the basic concepts to understand global implications of pollution. The aspects covered were ozone layer, humidity, etc., traced man's relation/dependency to his environment in the past, contemporary issues like Narmada Valley Project, and guided the children to envisage what future they desire for themselves issues like : "what is real development' were discussed. Children designed vehicles for the future on paper using sun or solar energy'. 'City Model for Future' was a working model of an ideal city in terms of power usage (Solar Energy) planned by Level IV Children.

• *Language Corner:* Focussed on creative writing issues like: "My Aspiration" or "How I use my eyes" etc.

• *Art and Craft Corner:* Resource Persons from Bal Bhawan were invited and children learnt painting of used flowers, stick painting, making book marker, etc.

The culminating activity of the project took the form of 'fairs' organised by younger groups, and exhibitions, quizzes and science experiments carried out by the older children for the younger children.

The activities presented throws light on the 'content' of the project, but what essentially is missing are the 'processes' the children undergo, which are pre-dominantly a function of school ideology and culture which will be taken up later.

Thus, project work is a way of planning and organising teaching material (Plowden, 1967), where spontaneity is an essential feature influencing the content of the lesson. which then becomes evolutionary, as one cannot decide whether the topic will "take off"

from the very point it ended the previous day. This calls for a lot of flexibility in the organisation of project work.

The school makes provision for such learning by computer compilation of themes undertaken in the previous years, specific activities and resources used for ready reference of the teachers. Detailed syllabus planning is not done in school but each group coordinator works out the aims, activities and evaluation within the broad framework of the project undertaken. For example, planning in school relates to goals (annual, trimester, project and day), specific skills (communication, listening and concentration) and developing mental faculties (judgment, observation, memory and reasoning). It is evident that project work in school is the result of a combination of factors occurring as a result of school philosophy and ideology.

Some aspects of the teaching method need special mention as they impinge on project teaching. Rules of work are planned out in consultation with the children and work as foundations for discipline. Preparation of work-sheets, information sheets, recording sheets and evaluation sheets is done in advance by the teachers. Teachers work together to create a peaceful conducive environment of work and make provision for individual attention to children having difficulties. Organisation of work takes place in small groups which are formed in accordance to their learning needs and also keeping in view the group dynamics. An environment of co-operative learning by sharing and complete involvement of children in constructing reality i.e. answers elicited from the children, is created. Children are given full responsibility and freedom in planning activities, making observations, personally experiencing and using resources in the library. Creative use of space is a common feature with children as they are free to work in the grounds, lobby, library, laboratory etc.

These observations indicate the need of the teachers to deal with open-endedness, spontaneity, organisational flexibility, to be generalists not specialists and to adopt a teaching style which can be stated as 'informal'. To pin-point a teaching style would probably be difficult but the ethos of the project is 'enquiry based learning' and therefore, a range of teacher behaviours were witnessed.

The project environment also throws light on the intentions of the approach. These may be summarised as: catering to Individual abilities, increasing the relevance of curriculum, developing ability to participate in groups, encouraging curiosity, originality and creative expression and to teach the use of reference materials and develop research skills. This may be seen in line with Sri Aurobindo's philosophy which stresses on inter-disciplinary nature of learning and a learning in accordance with the child's interest.

'TRAINING' WORK

Training in school is synonymous to teaching in a conventional set-up. Formal teaching in subject areas like English, Hindi and Mathematics is provided three times a week by subject specialists (part-time teachers). The difference between project and training is the number of teachers, time allotted, type of teacher (volunteer vs. school co-ordinators), commitment to ideology, nature of work, and the effective meaning they hold for the participants. Training in school is indicative of the presence of social reality, parental concern, higher education, future plans and seeks to fulfil the demands of the

conventional schooling system which are slowly gaining significance in the school. Realisation to this effect especially comes in view of upgradation and certification for higher classes.

Training starts with the top four groups, i.e. Yellow, Progress, Humility and Receptivity (7+ years onwards) and is imparted on Monday, Tuesday and Thursdays in the afternoon. The volunteers are mainly subject specialists and form a heterogeneous group i.e. retired people, professionals in jobs, foreign GAP students, parents or people interested in teaching. Their commitment to work is apparent but commitment to school philosophy remains ambiguous. This was evident in the formal talk with volunteers as they seemed unable to explain the school's perspective on certain teaching-learning matters and their view on the school ideology. Volunteer's involvement varies from teaching specifically a particular subject to being involved in the project work. Their roles and responsibilities thus bring a change in their status as viewed by the children. Books corresponding to the age level in the group are brought by volunteer teachers. Children are free to consult any of them.

The subjective meaning attached to training by the children makes it a mundane, dull activity and if given a choice they would rather not have it. The response of children from the four senior most classes in school indicates that about 46% of them expressed the activity to be dull, boring, not enjoyable, or just okay. Expression of appreciation varied from 'good', 'all right', 'nice' to no response. The nature of work varies in terms of being an individualistic activity with more written work and sometimes home-work, single teacher, and relatively less participatory than project work. Combination of all these factors makes training not a very popular activity.

The nature of a particular activity influences the interactions e.g., affective meaning given to project work or training work by the participants shapes the form of interaction. Though both the activities exist for pedagogic purpose and take place in classroom like settings yet the major difference lies with respect to the process of gaining facts. Each of these situations has a distinct character in terms of the approach followed, strategies used, set of rules and procedures adopted to achieve their goals. The three major activities implied in project work are interdisciplinary, collaborative, and participatory. Whereas training is subject-specific and individualistic, there is teachers' dominance over transaction. Clubs are biweekly and children have complete freedom of choosing any activity of their liking i.e. drama, dance, gardening, calligraphy or music. The nature of the activity varies from being individualistic to collaborative. The teacher is at the periphery providing assistance only when required. Analysis of responses of 52 students' to project and training work showed that project work was preferred to training and the number of students showing dislike for training was three times more than for projects. Some of the reactions of the children in their own words are as under:

'I don't like training too much because they are not very interesting.'

'I like Wednesdays and Fridays because we have clubs'.

Topic *(Project) time is nice. In topic time I like doing drawing, reading and doing dramas'.*

Training helps my knowledge'.

'When its topic time, I like it very much, and have a lot of fun also'.

'I feel the best when it's Friday because I take a club and there are no training'.
'Mostly the trainings are very boring'.

In spite of the two distinct types of teaching-learning approaches being practiced in school, a common thread in classroom transaction is observed. Certain distinguishing characteristics of teaching-learning can be enumerated as under:

• Teachers' planning of activities, worksheets especially for each topic in advance.

• Involving children in making rules to apply on themselves helps in fostering responsible behaviour. For example establishing rules for use of science, sports, library, and music equipment.

• Integrating role-play, consolidation of information through quizzes, dramas and play way activities in work.

• Questioning as a strategy to elicit information, recapitulation of previously done activities as well as for assimilation.

• Designing activities to encourage independent observation and reasoning.

• Delegating responsibility.

• Complete freedom for self-expression.

• Peer-sharing as base for learning.

• Learning directly from experience i.e. activity oriented teaching learning.

• Self-evaluation for feed-back on work done.

So far, an examination of the teaching processes in Mirambika has revealed the pedagogic culture in the school. However, the context of pedagogy i.e. the classroom, its physical organisation, structure and the voices of the teachers and students provide a view of what goes on in the classroom.

CLASSROOMS – THE CONTEXT OF TEACHING

The classroom is a place where pedagogic interactions take place and apart from the transaction of content it is the physical organisation that has an effect on the interactions. Thapan (1991} views classroom as a 'situated activity system' and states that, "teachers and pupils are seen performing 'situated roles' and their performance is dependent on the setting and on one another". Classrooms in Mirambika have a distinct physical structure and their organisation has something unique which fosters "openness" in learning, which forms the classroom climate. Apart from the process of teaching and learning the major processes going on in the class is the interaction, the spoken messages as well as the silent language which also determine the atmosphere of the classroom.

Classroom life is shaped and constrained by the norms, values and traditions of the school. Lightfoot (1979) describes the classroom as a social system which has its own structural arrangements, cultural idioms, and functional purposes. This sets apart the classroom culture of a school and the children constantly pick up what comes across including the unspoken. Thus the "messages transmitted" during the process of transaction of the content becomes a crucial feature of all learning. Also the interaction of

children with teachers in the course of a day depends on: the type of teacher i.e. volunteer, group coordinator, trainee, the nature of work i.e. (project vs. training) and the setting i.e. classroom, grounds, dining hall, meditation hall etc. Intergroup variation in children's interaction with teachers is evident. While the younger children i.e. those upto (6-7 years) of age do not react differently, children of older groups (7-10 years) showed clear demarcating lines among teachers, i.e. the group coordinators or full time teachers being considered higher in status than volunteers and trainee teachers, therefore children give more weightage to their instructions i.e. "listen to them". This in turn affects the student's behaviour towards the teacher and also the quality of interaction.

In this context an account of classroom interactions is provided as an attempt to build up the school culture through ideas, thoughts, feelings and artefacts. In order to gain objectivity and comprehensiveness an attempt was made to gather the perceptions of classroom participants by integrating data from different sources, observations of teachers and children, conversation and interviews with teachers and school coordinators.

Classroom Topography

The physical organisation of the classroom bestows a structure on activities carried out. It is therefore significant to know that the classrooms or the workspaces of children in Mirambika are designed keeping in mind the needs of different groups. The three younger groups (classes) have large areas of work, low tables and durries for sitting. The younger children's classrooms have an annexe which their teacher explained, 'is used by children for sleeping in or for those children requiring special attention or for attending to a crying child away from the curious eyes of the peers'. The round sunken area in the corner of the room is used for activities like singing, story-telling, and playing with children. Making children sit in this area helps us to be close to the children, keep them in one place without actually saying anything to them. 'Diyas' were seen sitting in the sunken area narrating stories and reciting poems, children often sitting on diyas' laps or climbing on their backs. The groups or areas of work for older groups have tables and chairs arranged in a circular manner to facilitate interaction among each other for group discussion. Since the children do not carry books home, each one has an individual cupboard (for keeping books, copies, pen, pencil, etc.). Common cupboards are used by the 'Diyas' (teachers) for keeping dictionaries, other reference materials (maps, globe), books, stationery, colours, chalk, duster etc. In all the groups there are spaces for photographs of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Low walls separate the areas of work for different groups. This gives an impression of a large group space with different groups working in different areas. Large glass windows is a notable feature of the school which create an impression of unobstructed space, at the same time give the building the benefit of natural light and breeze.

The openness and flexibility in the structural and physical organisation of the classroom along with the school ideology provides the teacher the freedom of organising and presenting material. The following description provides a view of how the teachers and students function within such arrangements:

• *Location "Neem Grove":* Receptivity group (10 years). Children and 'diyas' carry low tables and small mats to the open grounds which they arrange in two semi-circles. Each group has 4-5 children and one *'diya'*. Movable display boards mark the boundaries

of work areas, on which charts and write-ups are displayed. The two groups are working on the project "Egypt", with one group interested in drawing the map and the other working on making a pyramid, few sticking pictures on chart paper while others are seen participating in a quiz, related to the theme.

The relationship of *'diyas'* with children is conveyed in the given field note.

- *Location Sunken Area:* Blue Group (4+ years). Children are sitting in the round sunken area along with one of the 'diyas'. They are listening to a story with the *'diya'* dramatising, enacting some instances while some children are sitting on her lap, one on her shoulders and she seems equally comfortable with them. A solitary young artist is seen sitting in a corner, colouring intently, least distracted by the class activity. The second *'diya'* is cleaning the cupboards and joins in the group's laughter at times. It is evident that physical space in Mirambika has its own distinctive character which gains importance in the light of what it provides i.e. opportunities and experiences. The students' views regarding their school found expression in the sentence completion schedule given to them. The personal meaning the school environment had for them was expressed in words like wonderful, peaceful, calm and quiet, different, superb, beautiful, best in the world. Some children have given reasons for their liking and related it to trees, surroundings, building, open fields, cool place, etc. In the children's own words:

"I like the building of Mirambika, because it is very open and there are so many places to hide, when you play hide and seek".
(Humility Group, 9 years)

"I like the building of Mirambika but not in winters because the chilly air and fog come in the group".
(Humility Group, 9 years)

To be in Mirambika and the building, I like the playground and the trees, flowers, grass, plants, leaves, fresh air ... duck and fish pond".
(Progress Group, 8 years).

Child and Active Learner

Special aspects of teaching need special mention as they impinge upon project teaching. Rules of work are planned out in consultation with the children; organisation of work takes place in small groups, which are formed in accordance to the learners' needs and also keeping in view the group goals. *Diyas* work together to create a peaceful conducive environment of work, learning by sharing, and complete involvement of children in constructing reality i.e. eliciting answers.

Episode 1

Diya: When you go to the library and want to consult a book how do you look up a book?

(Children have a look at the chapters).

Diya: That's right what if it is a big fat book and you have to get information on 'Universe'?

Child (1): See 'Contents' of the book.

Diya: Yes, that's right, what is it?

Child (2): A list of chapters is given at the beginning of the book — that is the contents.

Diya: Good, what more does it contain?

(After some rime the teacher again says is there anything else given or not?)

Child (3): Nothing else is given.

Diya: (Picks up a book and shows)

It also has a list of tables.

Children: In some books more information is given.

Child: Do we have a list of pictures in the contents?

Diya: Yes! That's right we have illustrations and figures also.

Now tell me what will you do if you have to find information on 'orbit'?

Child: If I see the chapter on 'Life' or 'Earth' I will get the information. Diya: Yes! You mean look at the most appropriate chapter.

Diya: Okay! That's one way. Don't you think it will take a lot of time to search for information in this manner?

Children: [Agreeing that it will take lot of time] Diya: Okay! Now let's make small groups of 4-5 students in each *[Gives each group a book).*

(Children are seen examining the books)

Diya: What is an 'index'? Where is it?

Child: At the back of the book.

Diya: That's right! What does it contain?

Child: Words are given and nos. ___ is it page no...

        Yes Diya page nos. are given.

Diya: Choose a word and see the page no.

Children: 'Orbit' is given on page 8, 41, 126...

'DIYA' - **A FACILITATOR**

Certain qualities that maybe said are teacher's characteristic ways of behaving with children: patience, giving freedom to express their ideas and opinions, providing opportunities to search for information, and to be basically loving and considerate.

Episode 2

Group: Progress

During class assignment termed 'self-evaluation' the teacher instructed the group to revise their answers on completion of the activity. As each child finished the work and took it to the teacher they were reminded to strike out words which have been spelled wrongly and then correct them. A boy in the class was not interested in corrections and so quietly gave his answer sheet to the teacher.

Diya: *(Observes 3-4 words which have been struck off, calls the boy and asks)* How do you know these are wrongly spelt.

Child: I know Diya.

Diya: O.K. Then write the correct form.

Child: I don't know. *(Seems disinterested)*

Diya: Why don't you look up in the dictionary? *(The child neither seems interested nor wants to make an effort).*

Diya: Bring the dictionary and I will help you. *(Coaxes him* to *look up the words in the* dictionary *kept in. the class cupboard)*

Child: (After spending some time and without consulting the dictionary gives the answer sheet back to the teacher) "I have seen the dictionary and whatever I could find I have written".

Diya: The teacher looks at the answer sheet carefully and remarks, "You'll have to look it up again". *(The teacher now stands by the child's side and helps him to look up the words. He makes the child recall wherein they had undertaken the activity and were taught the basics of looking up in the dictionary and gives examples).*

Child: Bhaiya! I have got the spellings of 'science' also. *(has got interested now and starts looking up the words he needs).*

(Makes the spelling corrections in his answer sheet).

Diya: Smilingly! See it is only because you made the effort to find the words; you were able to know their spellings.

(Rest of the children are working individually and the 'diyas' provide help when they are called).

The *'Diyas'* view their role to be of a facilitator, a co-constructor of children's learning experiences, and building on students' strengths. Children are given full responsibility and freedom in making observations, personality experiencing and using resources in the library, creative use of space is a common feature with children as they are free to work in the open grounds, lobby, library, laboratory etc. The *'Diyas'* expressed that, *'It is important to know what the child knows and start from that point, build up on the strength of the child. No point saying to the child. "You don't even know this".*

Another teacher expressed, 7 don't *like to think in terms of shaping children in a pre-existing mould. I am trying to help the child develop into a complete* human being".

Child-Centred Teaching

A "child-centred" orientation on the part of 'diyas[1] is also reflected in behaviours such as: asking questions, interest in and responsiveness to children's individual needs, great willingness to give children latitude in responding, and more tolerance and approval of their behaviour. All through the observations made, children are encouraged to express their personal ideas and opinions. This makes children 'independent learners in the sense that they search for information/knowledge on their own' as was expressed by a Diya. This suggests a fundamental shift in the teacher's thinking and in strategies they apply to children's learning.

Episode 3

Diya: We have been doing a project on environment. Let us talk about types of environmental pollution. Can you tell me what causes pollution?

Child (1): Smoke in the air is pollution.

Diya: (Writes this on the board) Do you know other things, which cause pollution.

Child (2): Smoke from buses, cars, and scooters. Diya; Yes, you are right there are many sources of smoke which cause air pollution.

Child (2): 'Diya', also smoke from factories and cigarette smoking.

Diya: Good, are there other kinds of pollution?

Child (3): Water pollution, when we throw garbage in water it causes many diseases. Diya: That is very good! Who else is affected by water pollution?

Child: Animals in water— fish, whale, — *(the other children add on}.*

Child: Diya, even plants in water are affected.

Child: Sometimes animals die and become less in number *(A discussion on dinosaurs followed and how they became extinct).*

Child (2): For this we have to protect animals from hunters.

Diya: What else can we do to help the animals?

Child: The animals can be protected in a Zoo or such places.

Diya: You are used to a particular environment, how you would feel if your home is shifted elsewhere?

(A discussion follows).

Child (2): I think the animals should live where they are used to.

Child (3): We should not pollute their environments and let them live in their own places.

(The discussion continued to show the interdependence of man, animal, and plants).

Episode 4

Venue: Neem Groove Group: Progress (8 years)

The teacher reads out a passage titled "Actions speak louder than words". A discussion takes place on what different actions signify to different people. Teacher asks the children to give some examples.

Diya: What are the things your friends do that disturb you?

Child: Loud talking, saying bad words, arguing, and teasing.

Diya: When do these activities disturb you?

Children: During topic work, training, and in play time.

Diya: Think of some more ways...

Child (1): I don't like when people make faces.

Child *(2):* Sometimes people raise their hand to mean 'slap you'.

Diya: Can we convey by not speaking?

Children: Yes... by smiling, frowning, kicking... *(A lot of discussion took place; children gave examples of their own experiences}.*

Diya: Now you know that without speaking people can communicate.

Episode 5

Venue: Classroom Group: Progress (8 years)

During the formal training in the afternoon two boys X and Y were disorderly in the mathematics session. They had wanted to join the English group and on not being able to do so were generally disinterested. They continue sitting in the class, making noise.

Diya: Why are you not interested to do this work?

X child: I'm bored, that's why.

Diya: Smiles! Asks them to go and play and continues doing her work.

(The children after sometime resume work.)

Children usually take interest in their work especially projects, but show distaste towards written work. The teachers invent a variety of motivating techniques like, preparing observation sheets, asking them to write their observations and giving them 'badges' for the designation of 'Mirambika Researchers'. Making children present their work in class and share what they have done is another technique which helps to improve their expression. For example, children maintain a personal account of what they did at home and is called 'Friday Sharing'. Some excerpts from the children's diary, shared by them in class are as follows.

Episode 6

Venue: Class sitting in a circle

Group: Orange (7 years)

1st Child: I have covered my book.

2nd Child: What is your book on?

1st Child: Music. I have learnt 3 songs... *(She sings and demonstrates).*

(When she finishes, everyone claps.)

Next child: I have written a story called 'The dragon and the forest'. He reads it aloud. *(The book has a picture on its cover and reading matter is illustrated in places. While reading the story, he shows the children the relevant pictures.)*

(Everyone listens and applauds after he finishes the story.)

Next child: Shows a model made up of potato, dhania (coriander), carrots and turnip in the shape of a face. He says - its name is Harry... *(I have not thought further... next week may be I will tell you). (Everyone claps.)*

Next child: I have made a Porsche. A Porsche is a car. *(He reads out the description of the car and shows a paper model of the car. Explains the engine, safety frame etc.)*

The discernment and development of uniqueness in children is highly valued by the *'Diyas'*. Their view of children is "each child has her/his personality which needs to be developed and our role is to bring out what they have".

Negotiations at Work

The exchange or negotiations is the commodity, teachers and children often use to maintain a working relationship. Negotiations according to Woods (1983) "enable interaction to proceed in a manner agreeable to both sets of participants, so as to achieve their goals and maximise their interests". The older group children were involved in negotiations to a much greater extent as compared to younger groups and are aware of (almost) equal power existing between the teachers and children. This is perhaps the result of the full freedom they get to express their opinions and the absence of teacher authority. As Thapan (1991) states, "If pupils are encouraged to express their opinions freely they become aware of this bargaining power". The following observations show how children negotiate during work.

Episode 7

(The teacher gives them worksheets to work independently}.

Children: 'Diya' can we work in pairs?

(The teacher wants them to work on their own and is not willing - a discussion follows).

Diya: Do you want to work in small groups?

Children: Please we want to work together (points to her friend}.

Diya: But why convince me.

Children: We are a free world. We have a right to choose our partners. *(Children of this particular group had done a project on 'rights of children').*

Diya: I too have same rights - don't I? Children: No, you don't - laughingly. We want to work in pairs they insist.

Diya: O.K. work in pairs. Who are going to be the partners? *(The children decide among themselves and the teacher agrees).*

Since children in the school are encouraged to freely express their opinions they are often not satisfied with the teachers. In some instances, it was observed that teacher's lack of replies of the understanding of the situation resulted in children making the situation chaotic with scoffing, ridiculing, mimicking the teachers. This, however, was a specific group feature and not a general school trend. Observations to this effect were made in one particular group.

Informal communication lines exist between the teachers and children. 'Power' or 'control' does not lie with the teacher and negotiations help to maximise student's effort. Attempts are made to provide opportunities to children to increase their sense of obligation, self-reflection that helps in maintaining a good working relationship.

Teacher: A Learner

The teacher (Diya) is not viewed as positional authority that 'knows the best' or is the only one who makes relevant and correct remarks, hence wiser and stronger. The given example illustrates the view of teacher as a learner in Mirambika.

During self-evaluation of the work done, a 'diya' writes questions on the board.

Episode 8

Diya (1) writes: Which experiment did not you understand at all and why?

One girl Bhaiya, it should be "you did not'.

Diya (1): O.K. you sit down *(ignores what she has said).*

Child again: Bhaiya,' wrong language is written', and again points at the mistake.

Diya (2): Talks to the teacher who is writing the question - and then corrects it. *(The lady teacher looks perturbed but says nothing).*

(The other children continue writing without reacting)

Diyas are often heard using the phrase, *"I am also learning, no one knows everything",* in order to make children initiate some action to seek information or facts on their own. This is clearly in accordance to official version of Mirambika as a learning centre for all children as well as teachers. No sharp boundaries between the one who 'knows' and 'knows not' are maintained.

An analysis of interactions encountered during our participant observation focuses on informal communication lines between the teachers and students. 'Power' or 'control' does not lie with the teacher and negotiations help to maximise student's effort. Though sometimes the teacher overdid the concessions and with the increasing demands of the children, it was felt as if the children had taken over the class/lesson.

Disciplining Strategies

Interviews and informal talk with *Diyas* reveal that Mirambika does not relate teacher success to securing quiet and orderliness in their classroom, but is related to personal (self) and situational control i.e. being *'centred'*. We too observed that *'neither corporal punishment nor verbal aggression by teachers perform any role in school interactions'*. The teachers expressed that the *focus in Mirambika* is on developing *"inner discipline" in students the control of emotions and actions.* Alternatives to punishments are attempts made to develop inner discipline. Some controlling strategies evolved by the *'Diyas'* for the younger groups include: calling *peace - symbolic gesture of hands, to quieten children down; asking children* to *become 'Statue'; symbolic gestures indicating that noisy rat inside the child is thrown out; putting on music to make children dance and spend their extra energy; playing tug-of-war with the trees in the grounds; or talking softly to get the attention of children which in turn makes them lower their noise level.* In older groups the teachers use different strategies. The teachers expressed, *"each child is given five sticks, each time the child speaks unnecessarily, one stick is taken away. Once the child has exhausted all the sticks - she/he is not allowed to participate or ask questions".* Children are also encouraged to form their own rules, and are then asked to adhere to them. Assigning responsibility to the children seemed to be a popular disciplining strategy used in Mirambika; this also helps to make children become aware of their actions. Informal talk with children reiterates the school view of developing inner discipline. They expressed, *"if you are given freedom, you don't misuse it but in a strict environment you feel like breaking the rules".*

"The Principal had a talk with some 6-7 children from the senior groups after hearing about use of offensive language by a student in class. Tells them that by their misbehaviour they are harming themselves and Mirambika. The children express "he is always using" such words and desired that the Principal take a tough stance. He is not willing and children put forth their arguments, in defence. The boy in question is bewildered and explains his point saying, "Boys I play with also use the same language but no one checks them". He however shows his willingness to make efforts at not using undesirable language. The class is adamant, "he has earlier made false promises" -no excuse to be given now. The Principal asks the children to decide amongst them as to how best they could find solution to the problem. He reminds them 'we all make mistakes' you may also be at fault sometime. Together they fix a date and time to discuss *the solutions and opinions of the children".*

These attempts are derived from the school's philosophy, which restrains teachers from encouraging conformity to a set of rules.

To sum up it can be said that such kind of interactions set up an atmosphere of freedom and informality in which lies the classroom ethos. Observation also throws light on frequent opportunities offered to students to 'reconstruct knowledge for themselves rather than receive it from the teacher'. The teacher's dominant position is retained by eliciting information from children, recapitulation of previous work, asking questions, assigning work and defining parameters of evaluation. The school philosophy makes provisions for teachers and 'happenings' in the class as they feel "We all make mistakes and it's never too late to learn". There is also evidence in our observations that state: teachers are constantly in the process of "self-reflection" which Wade and Yarbrough

(1996) state is a step towards professional growth. It can be concluded that, interactions in class given in this section throw light on curriculum not stated, not taught but is definitely an influential aspect of learning in school. As Mead (1974) states: "The hidden curriculum is taught by school, not by any teacher. However enlightened the staff, however progressive the curriculum - something is coming across to the pupils which may never be spoken in the English lesson or prayed about in assembly. They are picking up an approach to living, and attitude in learning".

MIRAMBIKA LESSONS AND MLL (MINIMUM LEVELS OF LEARNING)

Analysis of the student's work in languages (English, Hindi) and Mathematics was made in relation to the Minimum Levels of Learning set for Classes IV and V (groups Humility and Receptivity correspond to these classes). The sources of data analysis were the written work of children and the observations made during our stay in the school. The focus of the analysis is to see the correspondence between the stated MLL's (for a specific class) and the attempts made by the school towards their attainment. Achievement levels in relation to the MLL could not be determined as the school did not permit administration of tests. Data analysis reported here suffers from the constraints of limited time-period, covering only eight months of the academic year and selection of student's copies for analysis of work done was based on availability i.e. children who were willing to share their work.

Analysis of language work of Classes W and V reveals that in both English and Hindi attempts are made by the school to help the students learn the four basic skills namely, listening, comprehension, reading comprehension, speaking, and writing. Transaction of language competencies takes place by integrating art, music and drama in the daily activities and making use of quizzes, story writing, writing of poems, group-discussion, writing patriotic songs, short stories and preparing content materials for the school magazine to develop the intended competencies.

The school does not prescribe any books. It was observed that for English language a variety of books mostly by foreign authors were loaned from the school library and were being used by the students. In Hindi language classes, students were seen making use of the NCERT books prescribed for the particular class and at times even those meant for one class higher. Attainment of competencies in Mathematics for Class IV-V also revealed a similar pattern. The analysis shows that major competencies at both class levels have been covered but, at times, evidence of sub-competencies under *a* major competency was not observable. For instance, in Class V in case of decimals, evidence of conversion of binary number to decimal was available but evidence of other sub-competencies, related to addition, subtraction; multiplication and division were not there. However, at both levels (Classes IV & V) certain concepts besides those mentioned in the MLL have also been attempted, e.g. writing figures in different languages (Greek, Chinese, Egyptian), the concept of quarter, decilion, qumdecibon, etc.

To conclude, it can be said that the competencies stated in the MLL are content specific whereas Mirambika focuses on an activity based learning which varies by being thematic and experience-based. It is quite natural that since the prescribed syllabus, which forms the basis of delineation of intended competencies, is not adhered to in the school learning, omission of some competencies which emerge from the activity based

flexible curriculum transactions are developed as a collateral learning, apart from those stated in the MLL. Of course, school learning does cover almost all competencies in the area of Language and Mathematics stated for Class IV and V. Some of the special features that emerged out of the analysis are as follows:

• Within-group differences exist among the students observed, but not confirmed empirically.

• Small size of the class makes provisions for students learning at different levels e.g. in 'Receptivity' group children are doing Mathematics of Class V and VI, while Algebra which is not taught in Class V usually, was introduced in the group.

• Higher level concepts in Mathematics e.g. Algebra and in English language the sonnets from Shakespeare are also introduced.

• Attainment of MLLs in this school differs mainly in terms of the processes of attaining concepts.

5

SCHOOL CULTURE –RITUALS AND CELEBRATIONS

The set of beliefs, values, traditions, ways of thinking and behaving in a school reflects a sub-culture of its own. This results in the development of school's own norms, jargon, action tasks and means of expression which according to Jackson (1968) is the 'hidden curriculum'. Thapan (1991) views school culture in terms of rituals and ceremonies involving children and teachers, athletic events, collective representations and school assemblies. Learning which takes place while participating in these activities is presumed to be based on the norms and values of the school. Therefore, the children learn what is 'caught' not what is taught. Their attitudes towards learning, their role in school, values of right and wrong and sense of responsibility, are all shaped by the culture of the school, as it affects what children learn and the ways in which they learn. The ingredients of any school's culture are the curriculum (content and the processes), interactions among school personnel, ideology and values that pervade the school setting.
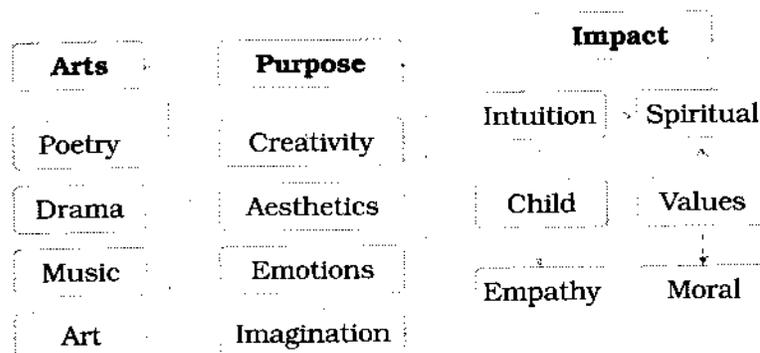
ROLE or 'ARTS'

Fig. 5.1: *Role of Arts in Education*

The integral role of 'arts' (e.g., music, dance, drama, poetry etc.), in the school curriculum has been stressed by various Indian thinkers and philosophers for the education of the 'whole child'. 'Arts' was visualised as the medium to stimulate the spiritual. Intellectual and physical faculties of children. Gandhiji's *Buniyadi Talim* (1962) laid emphasis on music, art and craft to be a significant part of the educational curriculum. Tagore emphasised the use of 'languages' — lines and colours, sound and movement, in the education of the child. According to him, the arts, including music, poetry and painting are a medium of expression and necessary for complete education. Aurobindo and the Mother too recognised the value of creative activities in education. Sri Aurobindo thought of music, art and poetry as agents for education of the soul. In his words, "Art Is a function of the soul rather than of the mind or imagination'. According to the Mother (1962) for education to be complete it should include the five aspects i.e. the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic, and the spiritual. According to her "the first and lowest use of art is purely aesthetic, the second is intellectual or educative and the highest is spiritual". While discussing the comparative value of art, music and poetry in education, the Mother (1962) observed that, "Art stills the emotions and teaches the delight of a restrained and limited satisfaction.. Poetry causes the emotions and harmonises them with each other". Experiences in arts are also seen as pathways to the 'cognition of being' and excellent ways of moving towards discovering of identity (Maslow, 1962). According to Croce (1995), the main function of arts is to produce the phenomenon of "psychological induction" (p.400). Work of art and responses to them have moral significance and value and that aesthetic experience is integral to our nature as rational beings (Read, 1961).

The purpose of various 'arts', music, poetry, drama help in the expression of the child's creativity, emotion, and provide for imagination and aesthetic experience. These help in the development of empathy, sensitivity, relating to others, identifying with people, thus the gains are in terms of larger human values. The educative force of the 'arts* was stressed by Sri Aurobindo, and in his words "Art is a living harmony and beauty that must be expressed in all the movements of existence" (Call Beyond, 1996).

Mirambika attempts to help the child attain her/his 'unique set' by integrating music, art, poetry and drama in the school curriculum. The various art activities, organisation of weekly 'clubs', culmination of their efforts into a series of cultural programmes are attempts made to fulfil the ideological goals of the school. The social environment of the school stresses the role of the cultural environment which is created by extra-curricular activities and cultural programmes. These in turn help to develop the values, beliefs and ideas which are determined totally by the school culture, as depicted in Fig. 5.2.

School

Philosophy   Mirambika   Goals

Social Envt.

Cultural Envt.

Cultural Programmes

Needs   Values   Beliefs

School

Child

Child   Teacher
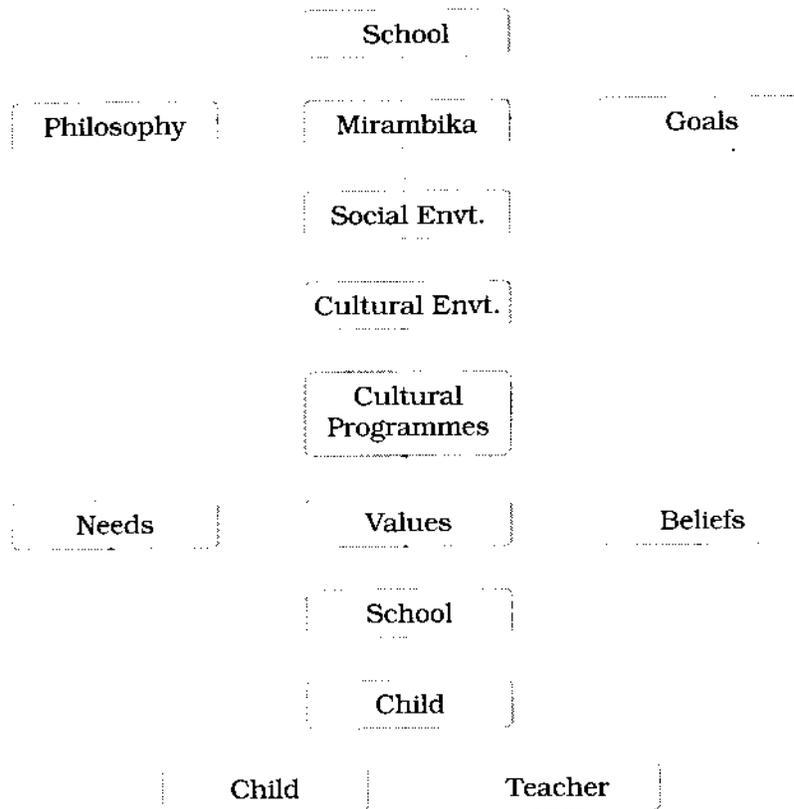
Fig. 5.2: *Dimensions of School Culture*

Keeping this framework in mind detailed account of the cultural activities in Mirambika is given with a view to construct the cultural reality as perceived, organised, selected, and represented by the participants. Taking the view of school as a social and cultural institution, it is assumed that the cultural salience in Mirambika is affected by the cultural 'bric-a-brac' brought by the teachers and children, that 'shapes' alters, modifies, sensitises the beliefs and values of the participants. In line with the above view, Grammage (1982), points that people perceive the things they see in relation to their usefulness, their traditional and ritual meanings. Activities in Mirambika vary from 'rituals' like 'meditation' to special celebrations like "thanksgiving". These activities represent elements of school ethos which may not have been made explicit in the curriculum but form perceptible evidence of the 'hidden curriculum'. The subjective meaning these activities have for the children has an impact on the school processes. A panoramic view of the cultural activities in Mirambika is presented along with some specific details to illuminate the purposes, structural arrangements and cultural Idioms.

RITUALS AND CELEBRATIONS

The celebrations and rituals may be distinguished in terms of the affective meaning they hold for the participants (Thapan, 1991). Celebrations in Mirambika are those activities which have a special meaning for the participants and thus acquire a significant

place in the school organisation. They can be seen as an expression of the school's values, which form an important element in the school. Mahasamadhi day, cultural days, sports day and the 'thanksgiving^ day along with the periodic events like inauguration of the gymnasium are the notable celebrations in Mirambika.

On the other end are rituals which are 'routine', activities like the meditation, weekly evaluation, clubs or collective lunch which are embedded in the^ operative goals but are grounded in the transcendental order. Both the rituals and celebrations are collective expression of school's beliefs and values. Though the rituals are more predictable in nature and form part of the daily activities, the celebrations are elaborate, occasionally overshadowing the routine activities in the school. The two activities are discussed in relation to their importance for the participants. It is of significance to know, "the subjective meaning the activities acquire for the participants" (Thapan, 1991).

Rituals in Mirambika

"Rituals' i.e. routine activities like meditation, lunch, evaluation and clubs gain significance because of the special meaning attached to them by the participants. The routine activities in Mirambika play an important role in meeting the ideological and operative goals of the school. The affective meaning attached to these activities gives them a distinguishable character. Few of these activities, as we observed them and as they were perceived by the participants through informal talks during our stay in Mirambika, are described here.

'Meditation'; may be as a replacement to the morning assembly which signifies the start of the day in school. Meditation in the mornings according to official sources helps to "connect the inner (self) with outer (school) and set pace for the day". The importance of the activity lies in its function i.e. start of the day's work and completion of the day's work. 'Meditation[1] can be seen as a symbolic expression and affirmation of values the school wishes to express. Meditation is clearly located in the transcendental order aiming at self-reflection, which is in accordance with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's views on meditation. It is the path of self-knowledge,   self-mastery and inner realisation. In his own words Sri Aurobindo states; "In the mind's silence, the transcendent acts and the hushed heart hears the unuttered word (Savitri, p.315). Corsini (1994) commenting on eastern philosophy emphasises, meditation to be one of the primary practices to shift away from the active, linear mode and towards the receptive and process oriented mode (p.452). "It constitutes a deliberate attempt to separate oneself for a short period from the flow of daily life, and to "turn off" the active mode of normal consciousness in order to enter the complimentary mode of "darkness and receptivity" (Ornstein, 1972:107).

'Meditation' is a daily event lasting for about 10 minutes, accompanied with the playing of music, the children with their 'diyas' sit on durries on the floor with eyes closed and arms folded. Sometimes, the messages of the Mother are also played. The music is played at fixed time both morning and evening to initiate the activity and gains significance for the participants as is evident in the observations. According to the children the music calms, and relaxes the person, as it is soothing, nice and peaceful. The setting for meditation is not fixed, like other aspects of school organisation. Flexibility in the choice of place was observed. The nature of the activity varied within group. For some it was a collaborative activity where all sat together and performed the act. In other

instances, individualistic performance gained significance where it was observed that children sat in one corner with eyes closed without involvement with the rest of the group. At times the older groups were instructed by their instructor on strategies for concentration and 'asanas'. According to one of the official sources the school aims to 'develop inner discipline" amongst children through meditation, which is also in accordance with the school philosophy. Intra-group difference in performing the act was observed; these vary with the group coordinator. At times 'diyas' of younger groups sang bhajans, sat with eyes closed (children may or may not follow) sometimes they were asked to draw, sing softly and for restless children they devised walking meditation, wherein children walked around the room with their eyes closed. The school sees the ritual as an attempt to help children 'look inwards' which helps to evaluate and control one's feelings of anger and jealousy. According to one of the official sources, by meditating the school aims to "develop inner discipline" in the children, which is also in accordance with the school philosophy.

Observations indicate that children show behaviours ranging from being restless, giggling, using signals to communicate, talking amongst themselves to sitting absolutely still with eyes open or closed in a group. Some sat completely cut off from others or stood still, when music for meditation was played. The coordinating team many a time showed distress on not seeing all the children sitting during those ten minutes, but still did not instruct them into doing so. At one time the older children were also given the option to attend or leave. The school authorities felt 'imposing[1] does not help, an inner realisation has to take place. This view of the school is taken from Sri Aurobindo's educational thought which stresses on freedom in choice of activity. An attempt was later made by the school to integrate the concept of meditation in their 'environment project'. Pollution was linked to the inner (mind) and outer (environmental) pollution. Answers to that caused mind pollution', ranged from jealousy, anger, hatred and abuse, for which the children were asked to suggest strategies. 'Meditation' was then emphasised as one such attempt to 'throw out bad thoughts'. This view coincides with the school ideology to providing education by making learning meaningful.

The purpose of 'meditation' as stated by the school coordinators is to provide 'vital education' i.e., control of emotions, impulses and desires which also helps to link the 'psychic' and 'spiritual' education. The latter i.e. (spiritual education) the school feels, though, is a lifelong process, yet by "creating awareness of it in the child a small beginning is made". The responses of children from the four senior most groups (age 6-10 yrs) indicated that more than half of them gave expression to their feelings about 'meditation[1] in terms of boring, useless, don't like to sit like statues, and feel sleepy. Some other children expressed that after meditation:

<div align="center">

I feel peaceful.

I feel my mind becomes cool.

I feel quiet and concentrated.

</div>

Some explanations by the 'diyas' to younger children were such: "When we are quiet we can do better whether it is mathematics or topic work".

Most of the reactions of the children were evoked because the instructor wanted full concentration on the *asanas,* breathing, posture and tried to impose strict discipline during those ten minutes. As expressed by him meditation is "an act of disciplining the mind", concentration, at peace ... adherence to outer discipline. The children probably because of their age were not clear about the purpose of this activity, though during the eight months of my association many attempts were seen to be made by the school in this direction. Whereas, in the younger groups (3-6 years of ages) children were asked to do anything with concentration i.e. reading, writing, drawing, singing, sitting quietly during the time music was played. Dissatisfaction with the ritual is more evident in higher groups, perhaps because the essence of the act is not clear or explanations provided are not convincing. The ritual gains special significance when enacted during special occasions like cultural programmes, sports day, or during the initiation and culmination of any event in school.

Lunch is one of the rituals that forms a component of configuration of school culture, and takes place at a fixed time everyday as routine activity. This routine activity acquires particular significance because of cooperative efforts made by the school, besides symbolising the school as a community. All students (above 7 years of age) participate voluntarily in turns to undertake serving duties during lunch. This is indicative of the school's effort to develop a sense of responsibility, duty, self-help, dignity of work, which was evident in the co-operative efforts made by the participants. The values are cultivated through the activities undertaken, rather than Imbibed from the rituals. The personal meaning it holds for children helps them to affirm the school's efforts towards cultivating values like self-restraint, patience and co-operation, which are located in the transcendental order.

Regular evaluation is another ritual, which has gained prominence and significance. These are located in the weekly self-evaluation programmes, which comprise individual or group activity. This is a routine activity aimed at assessment of individual performance with a view to help children to know what has been learnt and what needs to be done. This is clearly evident in the efforts made by the school in line with the philosophy, which stresses on evaluation for self-improvement and personal development rather than for comparison. Self-referenced assessments in the school are not related to grading, ranking, certification or upward mobility of classes. Joint collaborative effort during evaluation is indicative of the school's view which stresses undesirability of comparisons and competition among students in any of the school processes including assessment. Evaluation is made for developmental purpose and regular records are maintained which are used for modifying teaching-learning practices. Evaluations are descriptive assessments providing a comprehensive profile of the child. According to a teacher "evaluation indicates the true progress made by the learner on all aspects - physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual. Evaluations aim at fostering self-understanding, giving positive feedback and creating self-awareness". Therefore the children are encouraged to record, observe, and reflect while undertaking different activities.

The evaluation of work done by the children is seen from the perspective of helping the learner grow, know her/ his strength or weaknesses, aspirations, making them aware of the inherent values that she/he carries, their learning processes and not just to label or rank them. According to the school, evaluation is in-built in the curriculum and is a process that is in harmony with the "principles of true teaching" and in consonance with

the holistic development and progress of the learner. Evaluations therefore are diagnostic, participatory and individualised in nature, fostering self-understanding, giving positive feedback and creating self-awareness. The focus on two areas: physical environment (creative usage of spaces for learning) and psychological environment (the learner himself and the learning process).

Biweekly 'Club' activity is another notable ritual which is undertaken on a regular basis. Of these, calligraphy, music, art (stick painting), mehndi, drama, paper cutting and folding are the popular ones. Children choose an activity of their own liking and work on it either individual or in groups. Hence, the nature of activity varies from being individual to collaborative. Significance of the activity is enhanced because of the personal meaning it has for the participants. Majority of the students find their clubs enjoyable and find the club days i.e. Wednesday and Friday to be the 'most enjoyable' or 'best in school'. Children, on completion of an activity then teach it to younger children or their peers. A cancellation of clubs to accommodate other learning activities is not liked by the children and they were often heard saying 'but we have clubs today'. These club activities are seen in consonance with the school's ideology "to allow space to experiment" for development and growth of the children.

Celebrations in Mirambika

The organisation of the 'cultural programmes' and the annual sports day are significant celebrations in school. A series of cultural programmes starting with informal cultural programme is followed by Christmas celebrations, and finally the Thanks Giving Day. The main aim of these was informal presentation of the arts-music, dance, drama in which the children had been engaged in the preceding months.

A descriptive account of the celebrations highlights the salient features of the cultural programmes, that is, the elaborate planning by the children with *'diya's,* the execution and lastly the independence given to the children individually as well as in groups to take their own decisions. Elaborate discussions crystallise the groups' view points, after each child gives her/his opinion on what she/he would like to present. The activities vary within the group as well as across the groups. The students are then sub-divided into smaller groups keeping in mind the similarities in choice. In more particular instance, the group (oldest group) did not want any 'diya' to help them, and were allowed to plan on their own. On the whole it was observed that the diyas were not the 'decision makers' but only helped in detailing the activities. Individual variations in the style of functioning were seen, with some diyas being more directive than the others.

The importance attached to these programmes is evident as the school allots special time slots to each group for practicing their items in the 'foyer' - which incidentally was also the 'stage' for the programme. Though the programmes were informal presentations for which no formal invitations were sent to the parents (some came on their own), the under-current of excitement was palpable. An atmosphere of gaiety and festivity enveloped the school. The programme was divided into two sessions morning and afternoon stretching from 9.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. The presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the foyer signifies the "presence of the divine", as explained by the school officials. After the ceremonial lighting of the lamp, aggarbattis marked the start of the day's programme followed by meditation music and veena recital by the teacher trainees.

The children seemed excited and restless for the programme to begin and paid little heed to the meditation music being played (which is a symbol of initiation into activity).

The junior groups (Red, Blue, Green i.e. 3, 4 and 5 years age group) presented songs and dances they had been engaged in during the previous months. The presentations were in English, Hindi and even Bengali, the focus of which was not on 'performing' but on helping young children overcome their shyness. This was evident in the fact that the group 'diyas' sang, danced and guided children on stage during the presentation of their respective items. In general, an informal atmosphere prevailed on stage and no demarcating line between children 'performing' and teachers anxiously watching from back stage was visible. These may be seen as the attempts made in accordance with the school ideology which emphasises free expression through education of the child. This is also evident in the process the children underwent while making attempts at expressing themselves. A song was composed by a group (Yellow) for which they were taken to the open school grounds and were asked to observe the leaves, the stem, the flowers, their colours and the sky after which the children wrote a song:

<div align="center">

There was a tree

With many leaves

And its name

Was Neem

He had a friend

Called Mr. Hibiscus

With many flowers

Pink and red.

(Yellow Group 6 - years)

</div>

This was presented by the group in the cultural programme accompanied by self-composed music played on instruments like tabla, xylophone, guitar etc. fashioned by the children themselves. It may be said that there are no traditional assumptions prevailing in the school that only a limited number of the children are "musical" (White, 1992), as is evident, the process and participation in cultural programmes is open to all in school.

The senior group presented items ranging from small skits, dramas, songs, magic show to gymnastics. The themes also varied from episodes of Sri Krishna's childhood, tales of Raja Harishchandra to contemporary materialistic values taken from western movies.

Thematically the presentations fall under two categories, namely; items based on the work the group was engaged in and those which arise out of group discussion. Participation of *'diyas'* was noteworthy with each and every one participating in the activity of their choice. However, it was observed that right from planning to presentation the 'power structure' was equal between the children and the diyas - wherein one gave way to the other in matters like dress, dialogues. Ironically, the senior group children were seen making fun {mimicry} of the item presented wholly by the 'diyas' (based on 'Rosas'). The 'diyas' as well as the chief-coordinator at that moment were mute observers to the scene of indiscipline though later the matter was taken up for serious discussion in the weekly meetings as well as with the children. They were made to realise

their mistakes by making them evaluate the situation and by self-reflecting on the happening. This view of discipline is in accordance with Aurobindo's views on creating an environment for the child which fosters inner discipline.

Informality and Flexibility in Organisation

Some distinctive features of 'celebrations' in Mirambika can be summarised as having informality in stage appearance, invitation, organisation, and performance. There were no formal announcements, children came on stage in a pre-decided sequence, 'diyas' had self-assigned roles and responsibilities, and a flexible schedule accommodating those children who wanted to present solo items -probably a reaction to the atmosphere which helped them overcome their initial inhibitions. As expressed by the school, cultural programmes are the "alive culture" of Mirambika and a part of the total learning experience of the child. Informal talks with 'diyas' revealed that the purpose of interim functions (series of cultural programmes) is to give each and every child a chance to express themselves in the activity of their choice, (evident from the fact that the whole school participated) and to make them confident by the year end when 'thanks giving celebrations' take place which are formal in nature. It was stated by the coordinator that organising cultural programme only once aims at making the children 'perform' and when the time of performance comes, the attitudes change and a sense of competition comes in, which is not in accordance with the school aim of cooperative learning. Thus, these celebrations may be seen as attempts made by the school to bring out 'unique' (hidden) potential in each child using 'arts' as a media for self-expression.

Evaluation of the cultural activities took place on Saturday (which is the day for evaluating the progress of their respective groups, planning for the week ahead, discussion on matters related to school, sharing of happenings and special observations by the coordinators if any). One such meeting focussed largely on evaluation of the cultural programme. The criteria for evaluation were set down as: stage performance (voice, sound, dialogue, acting, music, props and duration), coordination, expression, quality of content, relevance, discipline, audience response and fidelity to the aim or clarity. Intense informal discussions revealed the gaps as: general lack of self-discipline, dialogues pitched at higher level than their age group and influence of western materialistic values especially in the older children. Ambivalence in the views of the school and students was evident in presenting 'arts' as a part of cultural heritage or portraying the 'elitist' western culture.

The discussion was an open expression of 'diya's' feelings, criticism of items or behaviour of children. The school members it seems are constantly reflecting on their mistakes and are quite 'open' to comments, suggestions from fellow teachers. It is significant to note that no hierarchy is maintained among teachers in Mirambika. Since the communication lines are strong between the 'diyas', a number of things are shared during the week, at lunch time or in the Ashram in the evenings before they actually come for the ritual weekly meetings. As a result it seems that the school as one complete unit is constantly in the process of reflecting on its gaps and making attempts for improvement.

Evidence to this aspect of the school was observed in the next cultural programme which was put up on the occasion of Christmas celebration before the school closed down

for its winter break. Preparations for Christmas celebration by the groups took place in the form of cleaning, decorating and reorganising their respective spaces and learning carols and songs. This culminated in a visit by Santa Clans -carrying a golden light symbolising love. Sweets and balloons were distributed by Santa to which the children reciprocated by giving 'cards' (self-made) as gifts.

Flexibility as mentioned earlier is the key factor of school organisations which is evident in many school 'acts'. Special mention needs to be made on such act of 'emergency calling' of Santa Claus. The school authorities had earlier decided not to have Santa Claus distribute gifts so as to make children realise that his message is not purely exchange of materialistic gifts but also inner peace and love. The schedule however, had to be changed as the younger children were distressed at not having Santa Claus.

The collective celebrations took place in the form of games, exhibitions (display of paintings, models which were made as a part of their project work). Presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at the site of celebrations was enhanced by reading their messages to the children. The *'diyas'* in their respective groups too read the messages and elaborate explanations were given. These attempts however varied across groups and were distinctive in nature depending on each group *'diya'*. These may be viewed as deliberate attempts made by the school to create awareness in children regarding the school ideology. According to official sources these attempts at least help the children to start thinking along the lines the school expects them to. As further explained by the school, 'the process is initiated, though realisation may come much later'.

The final celebrations take place in the form of Thanksgiving Day' which coincides with the date of arrival of the Mother in India.

Thanksgiving' celebrations are termed as formal by the school officials. The processes that the children undergo the distinctive features of planning, organisation and execution of this formal celebration remains the same as of earlier cultural programmes. Though the end-product varies with respect to being more organised, having fancy costumes, special invitees, formal stage, dialogue delivery, to mention a few. Like other cultural programmes the celebration took place over two days. On the first day the younger groups presented their items in the school premises and an exhibition of their work was also put up. The presentations were marked by informality, as the children were not pressurised into performing any numbers, though a formal stage show was put up by the older groups on 29th March, which is the day the Mother arrived in India in 1914. Apart from this, the celebration gains significance as it marks the end of the academic year and perhaps as an alternate to year-end examinations.

The art and cultural activities in Mirambika find their full and final expression in the Thanksgiving' which according to school sources is conceptualised "as an opportunity for children to thank all those who had helped in their progress throughout the year". This celebration is seen as an expression of the ideological and operative goals of the school by the participants. Its importance for children in relation to the school's ideology needs further exploration though the occasion assumes importance because of its very nature that creates an atmosphere of festivity and makes it a lively event. At the same time it may be viewed as a symbolic expression of collective participation in school. The participants hold these celebrations in high regard and have significant meaning for them.

As expressed by one of the school coordinators, "these activities help children to give expression to the creative abilities, opening of the 'psychic' and at the same time providing opportunities to work on the relationships among themselves and their 'diyas'".

The basic elements though remained the same for the final celebrations; the under-currents of excitement could be felt as children viewed it as an important celebration which brought about seriousness in their acts. The importance of the 'celebration' is also evident from the fact that the chief-coordinator involved himself actively at all stages i.e. planning, process and execution. Keeping in mind the gaps of earlier cultural programmes the 'diyas' worked out the structure of the celebrations, rescheduling the day's work, formation of teams for decoration and opening and closing ceremonies. The school officials expressed their opinion that a 'structured free progress' would be more beneficial since the children are very young and outer discipline would help build up in them an inner discipline. Hence for the older children two groups items were decided by the 'diyas' and later on their opinion was taken for certain modifications.

As mentioned earlier flexibility in organisation is an important aspect of school functions. As the events at hand gain importance the school makes provisions for restructuring their day to day activities. One such attempt was when children did their 'formal' training in English, Hindi and Mathematics in the mornings and in the afternoons the children rehearsed for their cultural events. It is worth noting that the volunteers who come to take training sessions also make themselves available once the school reschedules the time-table. This can be seen as an expression of "teacher - commitment" to the values and goals of the school. The significance of these celebrations for the *'diyas' is* evident from the fact that they selected the cultural items for the two senior most groups and gave directions for their performance unlike the previous cultural days. Freedom was given to the children in detailing of the items, but this also differed from group to group.

The items varied from song, drama, devotional songs, and instrumental music to Scottish dance. Items ranged from a Bengali play by Tagore *Tosher Desh',* a play on the Mother - Virtues', enacting the poem 'Daffodils', to that of a Tibetan dance and other items related to their work done during the year. It is difficult to distinguish the presentations in terms of a particular language. Though English dominates the celebrations, there were items in Hindi, Bengali and Oriya too.

The opening and closing ceremonies had an element of transcendence with children performing to the tune of affirmation of the school's values which lie in the ideological goals. The closing ceremony was an expression of integration of topic work in the cultural activities of the school. A colourful dance was presented by the groups representing the five elements in the world. This may be taken as an ultimate expression of collective participation by the school and re- affirmation of the school's values and goals to integrate the 'arts' across the various subjects. Events and occasions like *'Maha Samadhi Day'* and *'Inauguration of the gym'* also contribute to an overall configuration of the school culture. Both the events differ in terms of their nature and the significance they have for the participants. The Mother's Maha Samadhi Day was visualised by the school officials as the day of silence. The school however was closed for the day keeping in mind the young children, as it would be difficult for them to observe silence. In contrast Sri Aurobindo's Maha Samadhi Day was perceived as a day of gratitude by the

school. The children lit aggarbattis in front of the photographs of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and offered flowers. They however were not clear about why they were performing the 'act[1]. The Mirambika children along with the M.I.S. children assembled at the Samadhi, which was bedecked with flowers. Tributes were paid through recitations from the 'Savitri'. 'The Golden Light' and other writings of Sri Aurobindo and Sanskrit hymns (presentations were made by Mother's International School only). During the homage, children belonging to Mirambika were seen playing games, whispering, being restless - Inspite of being reprimanded by their 'diyas'. Disinterest in the activity was apparent.

Perhaps the significance of the activity was either not known or not understood in its proper perspective. According to one of the *'diyas',* participation of children in such events helps to get them sensitised to the messages of Sri Aurobindo. These are evidences of conscious efforts made by the school to create awareness of the ideology on which it is based.

Celebration in Mirambika gain importance because of the fact that it takes place on days like the Mother's birthday and arrival in India. One such celebration was the inauguration of the gymnasium which coincided with the Mother's birthday. The event gains significance with the participation of the children, *'diyas',* and people from the Ashram. Message of the Mother in her own handwriting is read by the chief coordinator, the tennis racquet brought specially from Pondicherry for the occasion lends the occasion a special character. Inauguration of the gym was a preliminary step to the sports day, with children making posters, writing poems and paragraphs to be displayed in the gymnasium hall. Children were seen paying obeisance to the racquet imitating their *'diyas'.* This is a reaffirmation of the view of some *'diyas'* regarding their role as 'service to the divine'. The nature of performing the activity also throws light on what the school views as significant and confirmation of the chief coordinator's role to impart ideology.

The Sports day is also an occasion for fulfilment of school goals i.e. promoting co-operative endeavour. The event gains significance for the *'diyas'* and children as they start the planning, detailing of the events and practicing for the sports day collectively. The school operates in accordance with the ideology, by making provision for discourse on the 'ideal child', developing codes of sportsmanship and making children participate in these discussions. At the same time the children were asked to give their expressions on 'sports' by writing poems, drawing pictures etc. The sports day mainly aimed at having fun, providing physical discipline, encouraging those who do not open up spontaneously and also presenting the achievements of the school. This aspect is derived from Aurobindo's view on physical education which stresses that perfection of the body is the ultimate aim of physical culture. Reflecting on the previous gaps, the school grouped children according to their height and planned activities according to their interests. The items were mostly collaborative and participatory, and there is no evidence of differentiation between the children on matters of gender or age.

It is worth mentioning that the school made innovative attempts at events and games, which were not organised to create competition among children. The younger groups (Red, Blue and Green) had separate games whereas the rest of the groups were divided into five major groups namely, Beauty, Agility, Flexibility, Adaptability and Perfection. The event is significant in terms of the affective meaning it has for the participants. The

school cancelled its formal training for a week and children along with their 'diyas', enthusiastically practiced in their respective groups. In accordance with school ideology the focus was on children participating and completing the activity. No child was disqualified but was encouraged to finish instead. In the words of the Mother "One should not play only in order to win, one must play for the sake of playing, to learn how to play, to progress in games and in order that play may become the expression of one's inner consciousness at its highest".

Except for 'gymnastics *presentation'* which was done by a selected few students, the whole school, *('diyas'* and children) participated in the sports day celebration. This may be viewed as a reflection on school aims which emphasise 'Mirambika as a leaning centre for all: children as well as teachers'. The grand finale was a significant departure from the conventional practice, as each and every child was awarded for her/his performance and the absence of a 'victory stand' symbolised the school's stand on deliberately avoiding ranking or grading of any kind. Sports day celebration may be seen as evidence of harmony between school ideology and sports in school. The rituals and celebrations in school are based on the ideological and operative goals of the school. Activities may be located in one or both orders, for example, evaluation in school. The resulting combination of rituals and celebrations is the culture of the school. This culture thus reaffirms the values and beliefs on which Mirambika is established.

To conclude it can be said that the rituals and celebrations gain significance because of the nature of enacting the various activities rather than the types. The cooperative work ethics forms the basis of these and becomes an integral part of the school culture. The various activities in the context of social milieu of the institution have a positive impact on the development of personal-social qualities in children. These qualities are not taught or cultivated in a planned and deliberate way but are inherited, imbibed and assimilated from the culture of the school which indeed is the resultant outcome of such rituals and celebrations.

6

MIRAMBIKA TEACHERS – THE 'DIYAS'

In understanding the real world of the school, voices of its participants, particularly the teachers and pupils gain significance. Especially in view of the contributions made by the teachers to the teaching-learning process, by virtue of having their own identities and views which affect the classroom interactions. If the teacher is thought of as a key initiator and determiner of all that happens in the classrooms, it becomes all the more important to gain an understanding of their roles and perceptions which ultimately gives shape to children's learning. As Thapan, states, the views and identities of the teacher or student result in construction of a particular culture or 'little worlds' (1991:74). To explore the world of the teacher in Mirambika as it exists, encapsulated within the larger world, is the focus of the present section.

What is the teacher culture made up of? What are their values, beliefs, priorities and constraints in school? What are their views with regard to the ideology, transactional strategies, their roles as teachers, and activities taking place in school? How are these related to their personal and professional experiences? How self-critical and reflective are

the teachers? Each of these concerns is described in the preceding section, as perceived by the teachers in Mirambika.

The term *'diyas',* as the school teachers are called in Mirambika, is coined from the words *'didi'* (elder sister) and *'bhaiya'* (elder brother). As explained by a teacher: 'it *symbolises beckoning the light, the one who kindles the light in children'.* There were 56 teachers during the period of research. The teachers may be grouped as 14 full-time (20-48 yrs.) those residing in the Ashram, 20 B.Ed, trainees (20-30 yrs.) students pursuing their B. Ed, through summer course affiliated to Indore University and are undergoing practice teaching in Mirambika, and 22 volunteers (21-60 yrs.) these are parents, grandparents, or young people with an urge to do something different and innovative in the field of education. All the three groups together comprise the 'Diyas'. Teacher's perceptions were gathered through informal talk, semi-structured and long interviews. In all a total of 48 teachers provided data on various school aspects and helped to provide an understanding of the school.

RECRUITMENT OF TEACHERS AT THE SCHOOL

There are no fixed avenues through which teachers are recruited to Mirambika. Since the school does not make any orderly or systematic attempts at inviting applications from people, the teachers have gained entry via varied media. An advertisement had appeared in a newspaper and a magazine long time back (1981) which provided means of entry to a few teachers. The second source is that after joining the vocational training courses in the Ashram the students become interested in Mirambika and seek guidance for entry. A few came on exploration visit to Mirambika and "stayed on". A few others came via Pondicherry Ashram after having heard of Mirambika and its unique approach to teaching-learning. Majority of the teachers however have links with the Aurobindo society or its integral schools by virtue of having family members, friends, relatives as followers of Sri Aurobindo and are serving in one of its organisations. All these serve as linkages and entry to Mirambika. Lastly, personal attempts have been made by a few because they had heard of the school, or were recommended by a friend. All have, however, one thing in common that, they came and they stayed because "they fell in love with the place". The teachers have had some sort of link with Sri Aurobindo's teaching.

Informal applications were sent by the prospective teachers to the Manager of the school, after which they were called to attend a 10 days camp. This provides opportunity to interact with other teachers and members of the school. The prospective teachers are observed for responsibility, attitude towards work, teaching, accepting challenges, endurance etc. and informal talks reveal their views on teaching, career, Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and other school related aspects. On joining, all the teachers are required to fill a questionnaire which has information on the family background and educational qualifications, extra curricular interests, teaching experience, aim in life and previous occupation.

An analysis of the teachers' profile (particularly full time and B.Ed, trainees) reveals that knowledge and commitment to ideology is one of the qualities sought in a teacher. The responses of teachers to their aim in life varied from "working for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo", "to be the perfect instrument of the Divine Mother", "teaching is my *Sadhana",* "to do divine work", "to be an ideal teacher", "to become perfect", "to be an

educationist", and "to make my life worthy to live". These teachers may be seen as committed to school ideology. Teachers' stated interests varied from yoga exercises, listening to music, craft work, gardening, Rabindra Sangeet, batik, reading stories to children, tailoring, going through the Oxford dictionary and knowing about the divine. Teaching experience and minimum qualification however, do not seem to be the criteria for recruitment of teachers.

Teachers it seems join Mirambika either to work for the Ideals of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother or because of the popularly acquired image of an innovative school and which they would like to "see for themselves" or are "interested" to know more about. The former responses are of full-time teachers and have henceforth stayed on all these years whereas the latter are of the volunteers who leave/join throughout the year. Volunteers are strongly motivated people who join because of their love for children and interest in teaching. Since the volunteers are not paid, it is only the genuine people who voluntarily come to teach.

Background

A comprehensive profile of the teachers and their perceptions of the school activities help to illuminate the teacher culture in Mirambika. Analysis of questionnaires shows that the teachers in Mirambika vary with regard to their perception and commitment to school ideology and this also affects their understanding of the school activities.

The age range of full-time teachers is 20-48 years, eight between 28-30 years, two between 20-27 years, one each between 31-35 years and 36-48 years. Five teachers are from Orissa, three belong to West Bengal, and are also from Bombay, Tibet and Bangalore. All with an exception of four teachers have gained entry through Aurobindo centres in different states. All of them reside in the Ashram inside the school campus and are therefore, at times referred to as "ashramites" {by parents and volunteer teachers). Educational qualifications of the teachers are thus: nine are graduates with four of them holding B.Ed, degree, three are post-graduates one of whom has a B.Ed., one is an MBA and one has a Diploma in Automobile Engineering. The teaching experience varies vastly. Two teachers have 15 and 26 years of experience respectively, other two have taught at Aurobindo schools, three with 3-4 years of experience approximately.

Information was not available for seven teachers belonging to this category.

The age range of trainees varies between 20-30 years. Except for four trainees who joined through personal efforts and contacts, the remaining fourteen gained entry either through the Pondicherry Ashram, integral schools or after joining the vocational training courses in the Ashram premises at New Delhi. Six each are from Bihar and Orissa while two each from Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Of these 14 are graduates and three post-graduates. Information on one was not available. Majority of the trainees had teaching experience either in the form of taking private tuition to teaching in a traditional school. Seven of the trainees had orientation to Aurobindo's philosophy before joining Mirambika while eleven had no idea about Sri Aurobindo's ideals of education.

The volunteers range from 21 to 60 years of age. Majority of them belong to Delhi and are graduates, of which nine have teaching experience. Some have been involved in the

school for the past ten years while others have spent only eight - ten months in Mirambika. Only two know about the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. The rest had no idea.

School Structure

According to full-time teachers, the teaching-learning system of Mirambika is flexible, provides freedom to work which makes the child an independent learner. Restrictions from outside are not imposed on the children, the child is made aware of a sense of responsibility and time which in turn creates an "inner discipline". Each teacher develops her/his own strategies which keep changing according to the context. One teacher however admitted that sometimes teachers lose their "cool" too. Inability to handle situations or children could probably be the result of inexperience in teaching. Work in school they felt, is undertaken on basic trust and a feeling of team work and competition with peers find no place. According to the teachers Mirambika is a "mini-world" which provides wide horizons to the child to choose her/his learning activities? Impartial, free and informal exchange of information establishes healthy personal bonds between *'diyas'* and children. This according to the teachers makes Mirambika a learning centre for both *'diyas'* as well as children. It was also expressed that Mirambika has a flexible calendar of activities, which does not put any time constraints on learning and is to a large extent need-based. In accordance with the school goals teachers felt that children not having a "uniform" highlights the uniqueness of each child. One teacher expressed that "positive uniformity of thoughts and actions" is more important, while another felt that "uniformity at inner grounds" should be focussed upon.

The trainees expressed that Mirambika in itself symbolises freedom. They, however feel that it is a difficult teaching system as nothing is forced on the student. According to them Mirambika is a training centre for teachers as well as children. It gives the teachers freedom to implement new strategies since constraints of time and syllabus do not operate.

Regarding their training (B.Ed, teaching practice) they feel what they are undergoing has limited applicability; hence they feel that they might have to experience difficulty in applying to other schools. This dilemma existed clearly amongst the second year students whereas the new entrant's i.e. first year students were not clear on its applicability.

Non-rigidity of the school extends to uniform as well as disciplining techniques. Like the full-time teachers, trainees too were of the view that inner discipline matters and expressed that discipline can be maintained through explanation. Having no uniform, according to a few trainees, destroys traditional mindset. They all, like full-time teachers, felt the need to stress 'inner' uniformity or stability of the mind.

Volunteers too were of the view that Mirambika is a learning centre for teachers as well as children. Flexibility of curriculum helps the child to express freedom in learning, since there is no pressure of syllabus, test and time. Independence of thought, expression and decision, they felt was the result of opportunity for experimentation provided by the school. They expressed concern regarding having salaried teachers and more so to provide personal attention to train teachers to the school philosophy and Sri Aurobindo's ideals. They felt Mirambika is an alternative to existing education system in India and provides a stress-free environment of learning.

Meditation

According to the full-time teachers this ritual finds significant place in the school day which is reflected while talking to the teachers. The teachers felt that meditation helps to connect the home and school, a transition time which helps to relax one's mind and plan ahead. Some felt that it helps to concentrate and focus on important matters and at times children relate to soft, soothing music. At times children are asked to focus on a particular thing during meditation, but are not forced to do so. They also felt that the effect of meditation cannot be quantified, some expressed that "immediate gains may not be evident, however long term gains will surely be there". They also expressed that the school is making a small beginning, by helping them reflect on themselves through meditation.

Trainees expressed their opinion that meditation helps the child to link home to school and vice-versa. They believed that meditation is a means to achieving inner discipline. Our observation also revealed that this group of trainees took the ritual very seriously and was often seen sitting with eyes closed during the time of music for meditation was played. Volunteers were not clear about this ritual, though they felt that it is nice to see children concentrating or 'making an effort to sit in silence[1]. They however believed that this effort of the school will definitely help children in some way.

Teaching Strategies

Full-time teachers felt that specific teaching-learning strategies are not worked out in advance by the teachers instead are decided depending on the work done. This they expressed comes naturally to the teachers since the strategies are need based. Basically play-way method is used to introduce new concepts to the children. The teachers focus on giving illustrative examples, developing skills of reasoning, experimenting, observing and creativity. They feel presentation of the work done helps children become independent learners, responsible for their work. The teachers felt that children want practical knowledge and "they do not want to go for bookish knowledge". Project work, it was expressed, helps to integrate drama, craftwork, music and play, and aids in achieving this goal.

According to one of the trainees, questioning, explaining, and illustrating with examples helps children in understanding of concepts. They too, like full-time teachers, feel that exchange of information takes place between the teacher and the children. They feel reasoning helps to clarify concepts. The trainees are also supported by other teachers through regular meetings to discuss the problems in class.

The volunteers view teaching-learning in the school as an effort .to inculcate moral and ethical values through Joyful activities. They feel that the school gives the teachers ample time and opportunity to allow each child optimum space, time and context to develop her/his interests and personality. Volunteers expressed their belief that no hard and fast rules are followed or definite strategies practiced. Teaching proceeds through experimentation and takes shape according to a child's needs and desires. A child is encouraged to reason out, raise questions and 'discover knowledge for herself/himself was the view expressed by one volunteer. Volunteers however were sceptical regarding

the boundaries of discipline as defined by the school, they felt these to be subjective and felt the need for more defined boundaries. Especially for senior groups like Humility, the volunteers were of the view that by having a prescribed 'uniform' will enforce some form of discipline. The volunteers felt - 'we have yet to learn the tactics' of maintaining discipline. Explaining to children the desirable and undesirable consequences of behaviour, however, helps at times. Most of the time children make their own rules and enforce them but at times the volunteers admitted enforcing rules softly or resorting to mild scolding helps.

Parent-Teacher-Child Interactions

Teachers and children view themselves as learners in Mirambika which fosters closeness in relationships as well in informal sharing of views. Teachers feel that means of addressing i.e. *'diya',* itself strengthens the teacher-taught bond and makes the environment homely. This makes them receptive to the faults/mistakes pointed out by the children. Since the two i.e. the teachers and children are from different backgrounds and their exposure is also of a different kind, happening of the kind sometimes occur.

Among themselves all the teachers share an informal and healthy relationship, sometimes accompanied by friendly fights for punctuality. Sometimes clashes take place because of lack of clarity, but are resolved through discussions and talks. One of them, however, felt that ego clashes take place because *'diyas'* are from different backgrounds and each has a different motivation to work. But everyone feels her/ his aspiration to be of a higher kind.

Teachers view their relationship with parents as "wonderful" and open and feel that parents' involvement in the child's work at school or at home is substantial. Some, however, felt that at times parents are "critical" of teachers in school. They however share the parental concern for frequent shift in teachers because of a large number of volunteer teachers in school.

The trainees expressed their relationship with fellow teachers as being 'beautiful', 'nice[1] and 'good', combined with healthy arguments. They felt Mirambika is like a family. However, a few felt that differences of opinions are more frequent between the didis and bhaiyas who have stayed in Mirambika for longer duration. Trainees feel that their relationship with the children is friendly and emotional. The bond is very strong' they added. They feel that frequent changes in teachers affect the child. Some also felt that children at times misuse the freedom given to them; lack of knowledge of one's culture and materialistic values are certain concerns expressed by them. Some trainees felt that because of time constraint interaction with children is limited.

Most of the trainees feel that parents contribute a lot in school activities like projects, plays, model making etc. The interaction with parents is 'trust-based', 'good', 'open' feel some, while others expressed that support of parents in school societies and interactions is not limited only to PTA meetings as in other conventional schools.

Volunteers view other teachers in Mirambika as 'warm' human beings primarily concerned with human values. They also felt that interaction between the volunteer teachers and other teachers in school was not much. They felt that the 'diyas' staying in the Ashram were close to each other. They are like a 'close-knit family[1]. The volunteers,

according to them, share a cordial but, mixed relationship of 'sweet and sour' with the other teachers in Mirambika.

The relationship with children however is viewed as being warm, open and 'having good rapport'. Children are relaxed with the teachers. This may be due to the small student-teacher ratio according to some of the volunteers.

A teacher considers students as 'my children' and not as students in the school, said one volunteer. Teachers and children share a personal bond which is sacred to them, felt the volunteer teachers.

The teachers and parents interact often as the school and the classrooms are open for the parents. No fixed timings or days govern interaction with parents. According to the volunteers, the school often takes the initiative of contacting parents to work out collaborative strategies for handling any specific problem the child may be having. Certain others felt that parents do not give much attention to children's work and their interaction is also limited.

Future Plans

Some of the full-time teachers have plans to leave Mirambika, either because of family problems or for higher learning but as stated by them they would continue to work for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. One teacher expressed that she would like to implement Free Progress System of education in a college, another wants to be a "perfect instrument of the Divine in Mirambika" and "I want to make my life worthy of living", is a reply by one teacher. It seems for these teachers ideology was the key factor for joining Mirambika and remains so for future too.

The trainees aspire for higher degrees and studies like M.Phil, and Ph.D. or to compete for civil services. Others aim to be good teachers or work for a social cause, be an 'ideal learner', or 'keep on learning till the end of life', expressed some.

Most of the volunteers wanted to continue working for a 'good cause', 'help people in need' or 'do social service' of any kind. Some also expressed their wish to work with children. Others wanted to be associated with the philosophical side of the Aurobindo Ashram. In their aspirations for future, "sewa" (service to mankind) was a common factor that emerged from talks with volunteers.

To conclude, it may be said that data on perceptions of teachers throw light on the Mirambika teachers as reflective 'learners' in school, open to exchange of information with the children. The three groups of teacher's i.e. full-time, trainees and volunteers had similar views regarding the approach to teaching, and flexibility of curriculum was viewed as a strength which helps them meet the needs of the children. Volunteers however differed in their opinion on discipline and uniform and wanted some structure to enforce discipline among students. Teaching strategies varied across individual teachers but were need-based. Volunteers though, were a bit more structured than their other counterparts and blamed it on lack of guidance' by senior teachers in school. We may say that the philosophical orientation or lack of it across the different groups of teachers probably results in their viewing the schools' goal of inner discipline differently.

The role perceived by the school, helps to define the functions of the teacher. The specific ideology on which Mirambika is based; stresses on the teacher's role in helping the child attain his maximum potential through guided teaching. Sri Aurobindo also emphasises the responsibility of the teacher to provide holistic education i.e. physical, mental, psychic, vital and spiritual and be a learner in the process. The aim of education according to Aurobindo is self-perfection, towards which each child should progress at his own pace in accordance with her/ his capacities, and the teacher would help by being an initiator, a guide to child's learning. Dichotomy in school's expectations from teachers and their perceptions is evident in the trainees' views of pursuing personal goals gaining more significance and finding training in Mirambika to be of limited applicability while relating it to the outside world. Despite lack of philosophical orientation or ideological commitment the volunteers and other teachers believed in the basics of the approach used in Mirambika. They have a common goal — of service to the mankind, some with firm ideological commitments and service to the divine and Sri Aurobindo while others believing in the goals of the school to provide a child-centred education in accordance with the child's needs whereas a few taking the role as 'sewa' (social service) to mankind.

Though, the school's ideological goals provide guidelines for action, factors like teacher potential and commitment to ideology influences the role performance of teachers in Mirambika. Teachers' performance is also influenced by the allocation of responsibilities by the school. Interest of the teacher however is kept in mind while assigning a particular group (class) or subject (during training time). Although all teachers in various groups are involved in different stages of project work (except for some volunteers who come for specific subject teaching) the projects by and large are conceived, carried out and evaluated by those who are 'seniors' in terms of number of years in Mirambika. It is evident that the teacher's perception of different elements in school - is shaped by the school ideology and role expectations. These in turn shape the teachers* commitment and sense of responsibility while carrying out their work. It is also felt that a particular teacher's status in school to some extent is the result of her/his position i.e. full-time, as trainee or volunteer.

All teachers, however, perform multiple roles; they are front office helpers, physical instructors, music teachers... as well as a person who looks after the physical needs of the children. This holds true especially in the absence of helpers for younger children, where teachers perform the role of helping them with their soiled clothes. The picture which emerges of the teachers in Mirambika is of a multifaceted worker.

External pressures in the form of parental concern for competitive examination at times pressurise teachers and authorities in school towards alternatives to help children perform well later in life. The teacher, thus, sometimes faces the dilemma of contradictory role performance. This is currently being resolved to some extent by attempts to upgrade the school. Certain issues which are of concern to the school take the shape of school pressures for teachers. For instance, they are expected to stop parents from academically pressurising the child at home by providing tuitions. Another expectation from teachers is to attempt a change in the materialistic, western values of the children and to implement successfully the ideological basis of educational philosophy in Mirambika. The ideological and local order is beginning to place opposing demands on

teachers. The teachers in Mirambika are vacillating between being 'guiding force' to 'creators of excellence'.

<div align="center">

7

PARENTS - PROFILES AHD PERSPECTIVES

</div>

Parents' voices as participants of Mirambika are of significance like those of the teachers and the students. It is because parents comprise a significant group of participants in the various school activities by way of their contributions, involvement, pressures and opinions. The perspectives the parents hold, result in their forming specific identities in relation to their environment, which interacts with the social identity of the school. This results in a school culture which may be taken as a part of parent culture as well as teacher culture (Thapan, 1991). In order to gain an understanding of the children studying in Mirambika and thereafter of those who on completion of their studies have joined Mother's International School, the perceptions and expectations of the Mirambika parents throws light on the dream they pursued and the hopes and fears they have developed for the future.

Parents in Mirambika have varied backgrounds, educational qualifications, values and norms that get reflected in their interaction with the school and the child, which in turn governs the child's attitude towards school work and other related issues like subject-choice grading, competition or orientation towards careers. Parents' culture is, therefore, a kind of special entity in itself, distinct and dominant, that influences the child's social world in Mirambika, the system of imparting knowledge, the role of ideology, teacher qualifications etc. Therefore, parents' understanding of what the school is, offers a meaningful perspective in understanding the school and its processes. Here we examine the school phenomena from the parents' perspectives, without imposing our pre-conceptions. An attempt is made to depict the world of parents and seek answers to questions like the following: Why did they choose Mirambika for the education of their child? What are its strengths and weaknesses? How do they view the school philosophy? Does the school impart what it propagates? What is their view of the parent-teacher meetings? What problems do the students face after joining Mother's International School?

Data pertaining to parents' perceptions was obtained through interviews. Attempt was made to interview both parents of every child. However, in some cases it was not possible and in some cases their views were obtained from their family profile, and through questionnaire sent to their homes and also during informal interactions during parent meetings. Information thus collected ranged from parent's age, occupation, income, number of children, views on school ideology, strategies of teaching, teachers' evaluation and future plans for upgrading Mirambika. A representative sample of 104 (out of 127) whose children were in Mirambika and 21 out of the total 28 parents in Mother's International School constituted the sample for the parent interviews. An analysis of the data presents a view of the Mirambika parents, their thoughts, reactions and perceptions on the working of the school.

Parents' Background - A View

In all 125 parents of children who are either studying in Mirambika or have shifted to Mother's International School (after completing their studies in Mirambika) comprised the sample for developing family profiles. Out of the total sample available the data shows that, 103 parents are working couples but information on 11 mothers could not be obtained. The largest category belongs to fathers in service i.e. 86 working in government or private sector jobs or as professionals like doctors, engineers and teachers. These are followed by 21 who are in business ranging from garment dealers and furnishers to private practitioners in medicine. Nine of them are freelancers like painters, journalists, writers and sculptors. Some of these freelancer parents possess a professional degree or had attained academic excellence (like being an XLRI topper, or MBA from Massachusetts Institute of Technology), but instead chose to pursue a career of their interest, howsoever remotely it may have been linked to their qualification. Of the women in service, 74 comprised the highest category of working mothers followed by housewives, 22 in number, 12 freelancers and 6 business entrepreneurs.

The minimum educational qualification of the parents is graduation. Out of these 12 are divorced or separated couples and one is a widow. The monthly income of these parents varies from five thousand rupees per month to two lakh rupees a month. Data do not reveal occupational information about 9 fathers who are NRIs or have business outside India. A majority of the parents are also members of some or the other organisation. Data showed 8 parents as members of social organisations, 10 of academic, 5 of religious, 8 of cultural organisations, while some were regularly or occasionally participating in different organisations. Only 7 parents were not members of any organisation and 31 did not provide the requisite information.

Nuclear families are 92, i.e. almost one-third and 33 families are living in a joint set-up. Data were not available for two families. Majority of the nuclear families however, have a link with their older generation and the children meet them quite frequently, in some cases every day since the grandparents stay with the children till their parents return from work.

Thirty one are single child families, ninety have two children and four are three children families. This shows that one fourth student population in Mirambika is that of a single child. Of the total, ninety three children are first born. One third of the children have separate place to study and sleep while the rest share it with their siblings or parents. Eighty per cent of these children use the school transport for commuting. In all only 18 students get pocket money (10 get under Rs. 50 and 8 get under Rs. 400 per month) and the remaining 88 do not get any allowance from their parents. Data reveals information on facilities available at home which range from television to internet. Except for two families each one has a T.V at home. The time spent on watching T.V. varies from half an hour to one and a half hours daily. About fifty per cent have computers while some have e-mail, internet and CD's on their computers.

To summarise, it may be said that the background of the children showed a wide variety of parents to a large extent belonging to urban society in Delhi. It may seem that the school is patronised by 'off-be at-parents' (as expressed by a parent) - a break away group from the conventional world of education, occupation, caste, marriage. They however, form a homogenous group in terms of their views towards - pocket money, transportation and time spent on T.V. The parents background in the context of their

behaviour and aspirations influences attitudes, goals and behaviours of the students in school. For example, the pupil's background may influence her/his attitude towards school work or her/his desire to be a good human being or achieving academic excellence or having a lackadaisical attitude. This becomes evident while examining the parents views on children's academic achievement and various other school related aspects.

Mirambika as a Choice of School

Mirambika, as the parent's choice of school relates primarily to it being a non-conforming school, with no uniform, no structured / prescribed syllabus, no time-tabled day, or the burden of home work. Dissatisfaction with the existing system of education with its examinations, rigid class structure, over-burdening by books and schedules led them to choose it as a school for their child. As expressed by the parents they wanted a school "which would help 'him' (the child) celebrate his childhood', 'facilitate overall development' and 'is like a second home rather than a business centre like most of the schools of today'. For most of the parents it was love at first sight, whether they came to know of its existence from a friend, or through an advertisement or an article in a magazine (the school has not made any uniform attempts to publicise its existence). A few parents had the privilege of viewing a video-cassette of 'Child's day in Mirambika', while for some others the total ambience of the school was in itself a motivation to send their child to Mirambika. However, a few parents had some link with the Aurobindo Ashram as devotees or through relatives in Pondicherry which provided a frame to place their child in Mirambika. It was also discovered during the course of interviewing that the parents had a different outlook towards life, schooling and success. Disillusionment of the parents with their own schooling in a traditional set-up, emerged as the key factor in selecting Mirambika, since they did not want the child to experience what they had gone through.

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS or MIRAMBIKA

The school environment seems to be an important consideration for parents to send their children to Mirambika. Open surroundings and lush green environment according to the parents is evidence of the school's openness to the learning experiences provided to the child. They feel that the school believes in socialising the child by providing freedom to express his ideas. Far away from structured regime, time constraints and regimentation of a conventional school, they expressed that in Mirambika each child is seen as a separate entity, with her/his own set of needs and capacities and therefore organises activities that centre around the child. According to them Mirambika focuses on overall development of the children which lays the foundation for them to develop self-confidence and self-reliance.

Majority of the interviews with parents revealed a lack of their understanding and apathy towards commitment to the school's ideology. It was only after getting their child admitted that they became aware of the ideology but were not sure whether the ideology formed the basis of various activities in the school. However, they felt that traces of it are found in certain ceremonial and ritualistic occasions like meditation, Mahasamadhi day etc. This view perhaps is due to their lack of clarity of the school ideology. In fact there is

enough evidence of influence of school ideology in various school processes like evaluation, organisation of sports, cultural programmes, nature of learning activities and in some other aspects of the social life of the school.

Project Work - The Hub of Teaching-Learning

The key factors that emerge as most significant in children's learning during parent interviews are the role of 'Diyas' (teachers) and the teaching-learning approach used i.e. project work. This approach helps the children to 'explore themselves'; 'learn freely whatever interests them'; 'relate to whatever is taught'; 'become self-motivated, confident' and 'provides clarity of the subject matter'. These are some of the parents* observations. Teaching-learning in Mirambika does not take place within the constraints of time or prescribed syllabus. Children gain practical knowledge as they are encouraged to get first hand information by exploring their immediate environment before related books are consulted. Learning this way, the parents feel is permanently imprinted in their minds. One or two parents did differ and felt that teaching-learning in Mirambika makes the child confident but does not equip him with adequate skills and knowledge necessary for the world outside. The discrepancy between parents' expectations (which are reality oriented) and school inputs become evident in these instances. They feel that the project approach is an antithesis of the traditional way of teaching through books where the subject matter is learnt by cramming and opined that the conventional system is an 'aggressive system of education'. Whereas learning through projects they feel, helps the children to express their ideas freely, without burdening them with home work and class work. Evaluation in school, according to the parents, are factual descriptions of the child's work and do not aim at comparative picture of the child with his peers. Instrumental rewards of school work are not evident. No grades or merit certificates are awarded which is in line with the school ideology that does not give any place to comparison or competition in the learning process. Parents by and large felt that learning of this kind helps in overall development of the child and in the process certain values are automatically imbibed.

The voices of the parents, however, become discontented with the uncertainty of shifting children to a conventional set-up, with traditionally oriented board examinations and a competitive world looming large. It is apparent that the parents share these concerns among themselves, the degree may, however, vary from one group of parents to another. These contrasting view-points arise due to shifting of children from Mirambika to Mother's International School which as expressed by the parents 'is like exposing the children to two extremely different approaches to learning'. *As* one parent puts it, Mirambika should provide some formal training to the children to compete with the world outside, or should be upgraded to avoid this shift from a co-operative to competitive learning environment.

Parents' Image of Teachers

Teachers emerge as key facilitators of children's learning. As is evident from the parents' view the Mirambika teachers, do not impose, but guide children which is in accordance with the school's ideological view of the teacher as a learner. The

nomenclature of 'Diya' is in itself an evidence of the school's view of teacher as a 'didi (elder sister) or 'bhaiya' (elder brother) to the children. This leads to informal, harmonious, democratic two-way communication in the student-teacher relationship which shapes the interactions between the two. Parents' view teachers as friends of children, sensitive to their needs, affectionate, sincere, committed to work, open to suggestions which helps to develop a strong bond between the teacher and the taught. Teaching-learning is a two-way process according to the parents and the teachers assist children in an activity, rather than taking over the situation and making it a one-way process; it is not teaching by preaching, as expressed by one parent.

It is significant that almost all the parents acknowledge the 'teacher' as a significant contributor to their children's learning, with an exception of two parents who felt that since majority of the teachers stay in the Ashram they behave like "sanyasis" and in turn expect children to behave so. These are reactions to children being told not to eat ice-creams or take cold drinks, have less salt or eat vegetarian food etc. A few parents were of the view that some teachers are too 'immature' and behave like children. They also resent excessive concern of some teachers with ideology and teachings of Sri Aurobindo.

Parents' dissatisfaction with teachers however is also related to a large number of unqualified teachers and high turnover of volunteers, trainee teachers and other teachers. They expressed that frequent change in teachers creates a loss for the child because of emotional bonding. Since teachers are not salaried staff in Mirambika but are paid only a nominal fellowship, 'teacher' selection is made keeping in mind his or her ideological commitment. The remaining staff strength is completed by taking in volunteers to do the teaching. Some of them are over qualified as teachers but come to Mirambika for their love of children and teaching. This probably results in high turnover of teachers because of frequent change in volunteers throughout the year. There is consensus to a large extent among parents to stress the need for paying appropriate salaries to teachers, and for selecting of qualified and experienced teachers. In contrast, a few parents feel that the children themselves are able to fit in the competitive world by learning what she/he wants in a supportive, caring and unpressurised environment provided by the present kind of teachers in Mirambika. Ambivalence and divergence in parents' viewpoints on teachers gets reflected in their talk. On the one hand, they feel that the present teachers are the 'guiding force', 'resource' in school and the mantle of a child's learning is laid on their shoulders. On the other hand, they demand qualified experienced teachers which is a clear indication of their concern to the external reality of competition and probably the existence of board examinations. This incompatibility of views suggests parents to be oscillating between their 'dream' of a school which is a surrogate second home and the pressure of social demands and the reality of a competitive world. Parents seem to be in search of the 'best of the both worlds' - teachers' commitment to work and ideology as well as having professional skills of imparting the three R's.

Parent-Teacher Meet

Parents' view of the parent-teacher meetings is that of a collective forum to help in the functioning of the school. There is consensus among parents in appreciating these meetings and of thinking of these as an intimate forum for appraising each and every child. These meets serve as a harbour to anchor various views of its participants, mainly

the parents and the teachers. It is a meeting ground for brainstorming sessions on issues related to the child's progress, problems in general (bus, food, etc.), specific group related problems interactions with the child, present concerns in school to future issues like accreditation, upgradation of syllabi, teacher qualification, place of Free Progress principles of education in the future scenario, to name a few.

It was observed that the parents happen to take the lead in these matters, often bringing issues to the forum and providing suggestions. Parents as a group are cohesive, informal, vocal, and participatory and have involvement (by choice) in all spheres of activities of the child in school. It was learnt that parents also meet apart from school meetings which helps to clarify issues before they can be discussed with the school authorities. It was observed that the school participants (teachers), at times are spectators to the exchange taking place in the FT meetings which at times are completely taken over by the parent group. The wide disparity between these two groups i.e. parents and teachers with regard to language proficiency, awareness of current issues and social class/status is also clearly evident in these meetings. Parents have expressed concern on Mirambika becoming an 'elitist' school and suggested that students from lower socio-economic group be admitted by awarding scholarships.

Why not have salaried staff? What is the need to identify a Mirambika type parent during selection of children to school? What do you *teach children about sex education;* are some of the parental concerns. There is constant pressure on the school for stable leadership, equipping children with requisite academic skills (linked to qualified teachers), upgrading of the school (to avoid trauma of shift to a traditional learning system), identifying 'qualified' teachers and effect of high teacher turnover on the child. The school in turn expects parents not to pressurise children with tuitions, to bring about a change in the westernised, materialistic values of children and to develop their interest in the educational philosophy of Mirambika.

Parent's perceptions are conflicting on issues related to what should be included in sex education. Majority however, have consensus on having salaried, qualified teachers. Apathy towards spiritual aspects of educational philosophy is perhaps due to their narrow perspective of the aspect and simply linking to 'sage like' living, about which they feel averse. Though parents form culturally diverse group they stand united in their attempts to provide schooling "with a difference" to their children, and are motivated enough to strengthen and provide support to school activities at various stages.

Parents' disillusionment and discontentment is strengthened as they seem critical of the conventional school set up all the more after having experienced the shift of their children from Mirambika to Mother's International School. Parents of children who have joined Mother's International School after Mirambika feel the shift is like two extremes from co-operation to competition, natural to rigid structured learning, knowledge to marks oriented culture where the child is in constant fear of evaluation which ultimately results in evaluating one's own self with those of her or his peers. The constant striving for more marks makes the child more and more dependent on the teachers and reinforces rote memorisation of the subject matter without at times understanding it.

The parents blamed the education system which they felt is 'linear' in nature. Subjects are taught without any relation to one another, the one-shot assessment of the children fails to capture the real calibre and intellect of the child. As one mother stated, the system

is trying to manufacture beautiful puppets out of the children,' devoid of feelings, emotions, spontaneity, learning .... The schools go on with their ritualistic, stagnant approach to teaching and learning thereby making students suffer from the fear of being left out of the rat race of competitive examinations and entry into the institutions of professional excellence. The parents seem disillusioned with their 'dream', and reality is something they cannot identify with.

8

THE MIRAMBIKA CHILD

A follow up study of students who on completion of their studies in Mirambika joined Mother's International School was undertaken to (i) discern the psycho-social characteristics and (ii) examine the individual achievement as compared to average class achievement. The first section presents the perceptions of parents, teachers and the children to know what the Mirambika child is like? Certain specific styles of functioning, behaviour and other characteristics have emerged after analysing the interviews. These throw light on the strengths of the children, which may be attributed to their experience at Mirambika. Certain difficulties faced by these children in a traditional school set-up have also emerged which may be attributed to lack of exposure to those aspects which do not find place in Mirambika's approach to teaching-learning. The second section deals with questions like: How do children from Mirambika perform in different academic subjects when they join Mother's International School? What is their relative standing in the class? How do they adjust to the changed learning environment? A view of the academic performance of Mirambika children in a traditional school setup has emerged.

I. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MIRAMBIKA CHILD

Children who after completing studies in Mirambika have shifted to Mother's International School, currently studying in Classes VI-XII constituted the sample for the follow-up study. The perceptions of teachers, parents and children are examined in terms of school generated experiences in order to understand what memories they have of Mirambika. Perceptions of students, their parents and teachers regarding students' attitudes towards school work, experiences of schooling in Mirambika, outlook towards life, expectations from Mother's International School, future goals, all these together contributed towards delineating certain characteristics or behaviour patterns typical of Mirambika children.

The role of school experiences hi shaping the personal-social development of children cannot be overlooked. There is also evidence to suggest that children's attitude to school, their behaviour in school and their self-image are largely influenced by their experiences while in school (Kerry and Eggleston, 1996). Popenoe (1971) observed that "Schools act as filtering mechanisms directing children into certain roles and occupations that will be of great importance for the rest of their lives". The experience of schooling therefore, is much more than what is actually taught. Besides facts, concepts and skills certain ways of behaving with peers, teachers or figures of authority are also learnt. The role of ideology in shaping this learning cannot be denied.

The participants during informal talks and interviews revealed that their view of the Mirambika child was shared to a large extent. They were, however, ambivalent on certain aspects like discipline: some agreeing that the children are very expressive and bold, some others felt they were 'arrogant' while a few were of the opinion that they had a 'superiority complex*. By and large analysis revealed certain modes of behaviour which are diagrammatically presented in Fig. 8.1.

These images of students, their parents and teacher have evolved from observing them in different settings i.e. in school and class, during play, co-curricular activities, exams or at home with peers, relations, and siblings which together contribute towards building a comprehensive profile of Mirambika children.
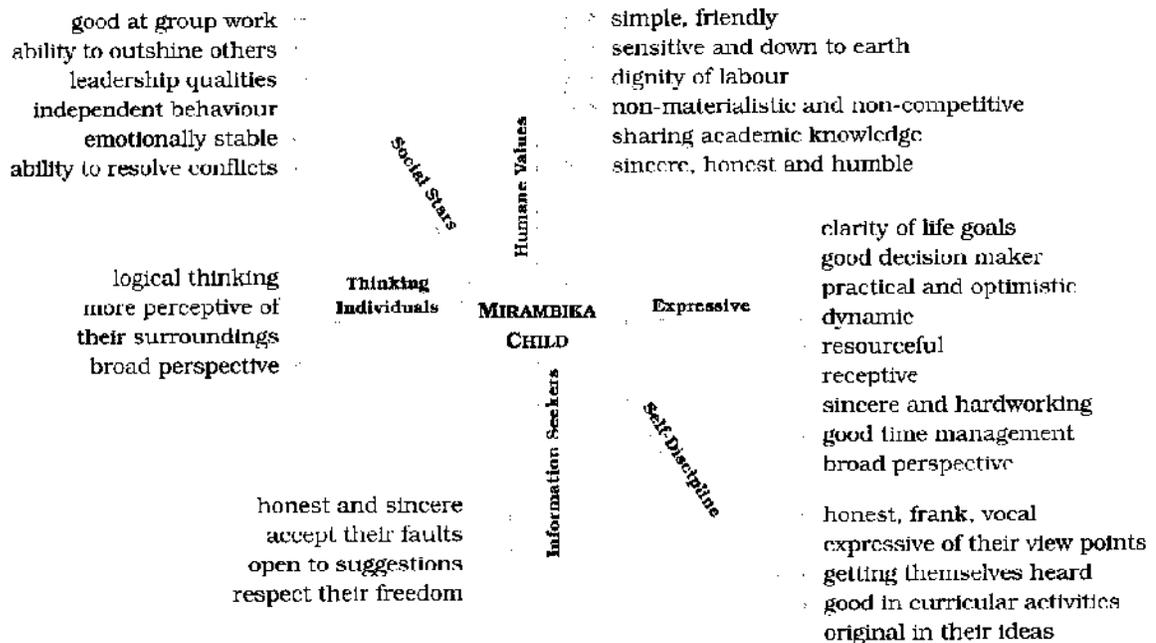
Fig. 8.1: *Characteristics of a Mirambika Child*

Data was generated through interviews and informal talks with the parents and teachers of 28 students - 15 boys and 13 girls studying in Mother's International School. In all 20 parents and 19 class teachers of Classes VI to XII helped to build the profile of these children. Analysis of data is presented in the form of categories emerged or modes of behaviour. Each of these is presented separately as the voices of children, parents and teachers in Table 8.1.

Confident Learner

Mirambika children are perceived as being Very confident'. It is felt that the Mirambika system of learning 'encourages the child to come forward and do whatever she/he likes without the fear of being compared with her/his peer group. Confidence in the children makes them clear about their life goals i.e. their likes and dislikes and thus

they can take their own decisions. This view emerged from interviews with parents. Parents also felt that the children "accept responsibility for making good or bad decisions", this is because the school has provided enough space to the child to experiment and learn from one's mistakes. This was further strengthened by the view that clarity of their goals and ability to take decisions makes them practical and optimistic. They were also called 'adventurous and 'dynamic' by their parents and teachers.

Teachers said that the Mirambika children are 'very resourceful in the right manner', and being responsible makes them complete the assigned work quickly. It was felt by the teacher that this is because in Mirambika the teacher functions as a facilitator and does not provide readymade solutions to their queries. This makes children independent learners in the sense that they search for information on their own. Some teachers further expressed that; if you want any work done you should tell a Mirambika child and It will be done. Teachers felt that these children have "broad perspectives" and are 'aware of what is happening* (receptive), which leads them to the right source to complete the assigned job/work. Some teachers revealed that after coming to Mother's International School, the children put extra efforts to come upto the standard of the class. During informal talks with teachers they were quite often referred to as 'sincere' and 'hardworking'.

Table 8.1: Student Characteristics as Perceived by Parents, Teachers and Students themselves

S.No.	Perceived attributes of student characteristics	Parents N = 19	Teachers N = 19	Child N = 28
1.	Confident	10	16	6
2.	Truthful	2		1
3.	Wider perspective	2		6
4.	Disciplined			3
5.	Friendly/Lively/Interactive	2	2	8
6.	Optimistic/Want to enjoy	3		4
7.	Logical	1		3
8.	Sincere	1		2
9.	Independent	2	3	2
10.	Self-Respect	1		2
11.	Kindness			1
12	Respects others	3		3
13.	Make themselves heard			1
14.	Fearless			1
15.	Expressive/articulate	1	6	
16.	Frank		3	
17.	Non-Competitive, ambitious but not jealous	3	3	3
18.	Responsible	2	2	5
19.	Honest	5		
20.	Good time management	1		5
21.	Not materialistic	5		
22.	Sense of Superiority		3	
23.	Outspoken		1	
24.	Boss over others			
25.	Clear about life's goals	3		1
26.	Thinking individual	2		1
27.	Not good in Writing skills and Hindi and Sanskrit	2	5	1
28.	Resourceful		5	
29.	Dynamic		2	
30.	Creative		1	

Time-management emerged as another asset of the children. According to some teachers, the children are clear about their life-goals and 'prioritise their work'. Certain teachers however, had contradictory opinions and expressed that the Mirambika children are "over-confident about themselves", "do whatever they feel is right", "do not listen to the teachers" and "create disturbance in the class". This view of the teacher may have arisen due to non-conformist behaviour of the children in the light of traditional classroom expectations of the teacher. This was also expressed by the student themselves.

Expressive

According to the parents and teachers, being honest, frank and expressive are some other typical behaviours of the Mirambika child. As expressed by parents the freedom given to the child in class allows them to put forward their views without being 'ridiculed' or 'laughed at[1]. This helps them to become vocal and expressive of their viewpoints. As voiced by a parent, "because children are given the freedom to say what they want to, it instils in them the confidence to put forth their opinions without fear". One student went on to say that, "we Mirambika kids cannot tolerate anything wrong". However a few teachers did not appreciate their being frank and expressive and considered it to be a sign of indiscipline and rude behaviour. As one teacher expressed, 'they don't have respect for their teachers, and they say whatever they feel like'.

Teachers also feel that being expressive; the Mirambika child has an 'upper-hand' over Mother's International School children and do very well in curricular activities like debates and declamations. An English teacher -commented that, 'their style of writing is very original' and language is not bookish She further added that, "they always come up with very original ideas which at times we also cannot think of".

Self-disciplined

Parents and teachers felt that honesty is valued by Mirambika children, and they will not 'fib' or lie, and felt that the children accept their faults and are open to suggestions. Teachers too expressed that children are honest and sincere with their teachers as they 'don't hide anything from them'. Children also viewed themselves as 'very disciplined', which was further strengthened by their saying you will never find a Mirambika child ever bunking classes'.The children expressed that Mirambika children are more disciplined than other school children because of the freedom they have got in Mirambika. It was clearly stated by some children that 'if you are given freedom you don't misuse it, but in a strict environments one feels like breaking the rules'.

Information Seekers

Apart from being independent and responsible learners, their style of learning may be termed as 'information seekers'. Teachers feel that the children are 'really very enthusiastic about learning and gaining knowledge'; this urge makes them refer to books, materials and other resources. Parents feel that for their children 'learning is an enjoyable process as they have developed strong craving for knowledge'. Children give Mirambika the credit for helping them develop an interest in studies. Majority of the children expressed that 'they don't study to pass exams but because they want to gain knowledge'. They further expressed that they have the potential to learn which may be attributed to project approach to teaching-learning in Mirambika. This, they felt, helps them to look at things from different angles and develop a wider perspective by relating one subject to another. The view that Mirambika children start consulting encyclopaedias at a very young age was shared by both parents and teachers. They further added that at that age other children don't even know its purpose.

Parents and teachers felt that since the children were not burdened with traditional examination system In Mirambika learning was an enjoyable experience. Since getting marks is not their goal the students try to have clarity on every concept before moving

ahead, they further added. Parents felt that being in Mirambika the children get experiences of relating studies to real life situations like visit to Safdarjung airport while doing a project on aeroplanes or visit to an embassy while doing a project on Egyptian culture. Parents credited all these experiences to Mirambika and stated, 'had they been in any other school it would not have been possible, because of the binding of the prescribed syllabus.

Social Stars

Teachers opined that Mirambika children are good at group work as they know how to share and compile information. It was also expressed by the teachers that these children have the 'ability to outshine others' and have leadership qualities. Children's perceptions too substantiate this view as expressed by them, 'if any child has any problem they approach the Mirambika children to solve it'. According to the teachers Mirambika provides opportunities to each child to come forward which encourages independent behaviour in seeking solution to problems and issues. It was also expressed by the teachers that children from Mirambika are more emotionally stable than their counterparts as they get into fights less often, have the ability to resolve conflicts in class, see other's perspectives and analyse their actions and behaviours.

Thinking Individuals

The parents and teachers view Mirambika children as individuals who try to find reasons for whatever they are doing and then put in their best efforts. According to the teachers nobody can force Mirambika children to do anything, the purpose and logic of performing the task should first be clear to the child. Children too feel that lack of teacher dependence forces them to find reasons or solutions to problems on their own which strengthens thinking in a logical manner. The experiences of relating themes to different subject areas also helps the children in this direction. The ability of the children to be receptive and logical, leads to them being called 'thinking individuals' by their teachers and parents. Teachers in Mother's International School are sensitive to the needs of Mirambika children and were not in favour of their joining conventional schools. As one teacher commented 'it is like giving tight shoes to children and asking them to walk even if it hurts them'.

Humane Values

Parents and teachers felt that— certain traditional values have been imbibed by children in Mirambika. Parents said that Mirambika children are simple, friendly, sensitive, honest and down-to-earth persons. They have respect for all kinds of work for instance: clearing, sweeping, washing their utensils in Mirambika helped to develop dignity of labour in them. Parents feel that their children are not materialistic or competitive. Neither do they get mesmerised by superficial things in life. To 'show -off is not in their nature", commented a parent.

The children expressed that they believe in sharing and not 'hiding' academic/subject matter. Clarifying this, one child commented that in any other school it is normal to hide

or lie about one's preparation for exams or test performance, but Mirambika children come forward and help, explain and clarify the doubts of their fellow students. These students feel that 'Mirambikans are not jealous of others' achievements. Instead they try to improve their own performance'.

Teachers feel that Mirambika children are sincere, honest and humble but a few teachers felt that they seemed influenced to a large extent by western culture. This, they said, is evident in the way they dress, talk and behave. Some other teachers were of the opinion that these children have a sense of superiority and do not want to conform to class norms. This, they feel, is the result of 'too much freedom and independence which has made the children indisciplined and rude'.

Teachers were also critical of certain other aspects related to Mirambika children. Majority of the teachers expressed the view that family plays an important role in the personality make-up of the child. They expressed that parents who put their children in unconventional schools like Mirambika are themselves unconventional, adventurous and ready to experiment. One teacher added that their parents' style of dressing and their own life-style are all indicative of being unconventional. This was also expressed by a parent, who said, "We chose Mirambika because it is like us. It is our family environment which gives freedom and encourages independent behaviour in the child".

Certain set ways of behaving (non-conformity to conformity), it was felt by the teachers leads to problems in adjustment. The bottle-necks to adjustment in Mother's International School is the traditional teaching-learning set-up and the examination pattern. Because of their friendliness, confidence and responsible attitude and with the help of their peers and teachers they learn to adjust within the first year of shifting. Students and parents were of the view that a child needs to be mentally prepared for the change and then she/he will not face any adjustment problems.

Therefore perceptions of the students, teachers and parents helped to create a comprehensive picture of the child from Mirambika. Parental talks revealed that Mirambika's approach to teaching-learning was the key element in making them independent, responsible and curious learners. Though few others felt that the major * contributors to their children's learning were the parents themselves and the freedom and opportunities provided at home. Some felt that this would have anyway resulted in the child being what they are in whichever school they studied. These reactions may be seen as indifference towards the educational implications of ideology of Mirambika or evidence of existence of 'superior' culture among parents. Traces of this were also evident in the voices of the children. Teachers from Mother's International School however had contradictory views regarding the influence of Mirambika's system of teaching-learning on the child in terms of behaviours, characteristics and outlook towards life or success. They find the children confident, independent, and responsible towards their work, having ability to gather information or being resourceful. Some teachers felt that this makes the children feel 'superior to their peer group that sometimes gets manifested in rude behaviour'. In contrast, parents felt that the children are simple, friendly, down-to-earth persons 'having no 'airs'. One possible reason for teachers perceiving them so, could possibly be due to the non-conforming attitude of the children towards classroom norms of maintaining 'silence', being passive recipients of knowledge transmitted, considering teacher as supreme figure of authority vis-a-vis being vocal,

expressive and active participant in the teaching-learning process and considering the teacher a friend. These contradictions may be the result of the different orientation of teachers towards the schooling process. The traditionalists seek 'conformity' to class norms and value it as approved behaviour whereas progressivists value independent thought providing enough space and time in class to experiment. It was also observed that, the school lays great emphasis on 'being what one is', full freedom of individual expression in writing, clothes, hair style, speech etc. there is no defined 'proper behaviour'. Students are not drilled in how to move in school, sit in chairs, and raise hands to speak to teachers to name a few.

The contribution of Mirambika in the making of what the children are today is further substantiated by student's views on, what memories they have of Mirambika? Analysis of students responses are presented in Table 8.2. It provides an overview of student's reactions to school. These voices of children are evidence of what Mirambika has given them. Their answers revealed that the schools' efforts are viewed as making them 'thinking individuals', confident, accepting responsibility of action and inculcating values like dignity of labour, sharing, cooperation and being receptive to others. These perceptions of children may be seen as fulfilment of the ideological goals of Mirambika.

Table 8.2: Student's responses to-

What memories do you have of Mirambika?

. S.No.	Responses	Number	
		Boys	Girls
1.	Like a home	1	2
2.	Project work/topic work was great	4	7
3.	Very warm like a family	1	1
4.	A dream school, I am lucky that I am/was a part of it.		1
5.	No tests was the best part		
6.	Miss morning sports	2	
7.	We were given more personal attention	1	
8.	So many memories that I can write a book on it- like a home, friendly diyas (we used to hug them)		1
9.	No restrictions	3	1
10.	I never used to cry while going to Mirambika	1	
11.	Combined games for boys and girls	1	2
12.	My friends, my teachers	3	2
13.	Lots of happy memories: free to do whatever we wanted to do, played a lot but		1

	at same time learned too, environment		
	was learning type		
14.	Our film 'Friendly Alien' got award	1	1
15.	It was great fun. We studied also but it was		1
	never a burden		
16.	No sections in Mirambika	1	
17.	Outings were fun	1	1
18.	Lots of trees, open classrooms, brown cake	1	1
19.	Trip to Kulu was fun	1	
20.	Building was great	1	
21.	Lots of fun and play	4	1

II. ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

This section focuses on academic achievement of children and provides empirical evidences about the performance of children from Mirambika. A total of 28 children (from Mirambika) 15 boys and 13 girls were studying in Mother's International School during 1996-97, from Classes VI to XII (Class VI, 2 students; Class VII. 7 students; Class VIII, 4 students; Class IX, 6 students; Class X, 3 students; Class XI, 5 students and Class XII, 1 student). Achievement of these students during the current year of study as well as of the previous years in different subjects was examined by making a thorough study of their report cards.

Report cards of the students provided a comprehensive picture of their achievement scores in each subject in the two terminal examinations i.e. first semester (Oct-Nov) and final examination (March). Besides the achievement scores, their attendance, their teachers' remarks on performance in each subject, participation in co-curricular activities, general behaviour and personality traits are some other aspects mentioned in the report cards. Performance in all the subjects is shown in terms of marks as well as grades, except for computer science, work experience and physical education in which only grades are awarded.

The grading system used in the school (see Table 8.3) provides a relative standing of each child in their class. The board results of Classes X and XII, however, provide a comparative picture of Mirambika children vis-à-vis their peers in Mother's International School. It may also be taken as an indication of their academic standing.

Grading Methodology

In Classes VI to VIII, grading is done on a nine point letter scale for which students of a particular class (across all sections) is rank ordered and graded using the criteria indicated in Table 8.3.

Table 8.3: Grading Methodology

Grade	Range of Marks

A- 1	Top 1 /8th of the passed candidates in the class.
A-2	Next 1 /8th of the passed candidates in the class.
B-l	Next l/8th of the passed candidates in the class.
B-2	Next l/8th of the passed candidates in the class.
C-l	Next l/8th of the passed candidates in the class.
C-2	Next l/8th of the passed candidates in the class
D-l	Next 1 /8th of the passed candidates in the class.
D-2	Next l/8th of the passed candidates in the class.
E	Failed candidates in the class.

The students from Class IX to Class XII are assessed on the basis of first term (25 marks), annual examination (50 marks) and internal assessment (25 marks) which comprises of class tests, home assignments and project work. Aggregate percentage of marks is taken as the final score. The grading for Class IX onwards is done on the basis of percentage of marks using the criteria shown in Table 8.4.

Table 8.4: Grading for Classes IX to XH

Grade	Range of Marks
A	75 & above
B	60-74
C	50-59
D	40-49
E	30-39
F	20-29
G	Below 20

The report cards for these classes indicate subject-wise marks, position in class, attendance, participation in co-curricular activities, rating on some personality aspects including a general remarks column. Analysis of students academic achievement is presented as (I) Class-wise analysis; and (II) Subject wise analysis (see Table 8.5 to 8.11 Appendix B).

I. CLASS-WISE ANALYSIS

Each student's academic profile for the current year of study (1996-97) and of previous years is provided. Based on the grades obtained during the final examination, an attempt in made to draw a comprehensive class-wise profile of the students i.e. VI to XII at the same time highlighting the individual's performance across different classes. In

each class individual profile as well as group profile (i.e. Mirambika students as a group) is presented.

Students Performance in Class VI to Class XII

Class VI had only two students from Mirambika studying in Class VI and were also repeating the class (of the two one is a dyslexic). Table 8.5 shows their performance in different subjects during the two years of study. It clearly shows that both the students performed poorly and were unable to get minimum pass percentage i.e. 40%. Their performance was below average as compared to the class and showed exceptionally poor performance in Maths, Hindi and Sanskrit. Improvement is evident in the grades of one child i.e. in English and Hindi (C2) the second child however failed in Hindi but showed improvement in marks i.e. from 14/100 to 58/100. In Sanskrit these children got B2 (81%) and C2 (66.5%) grade. As evident the performance of these students is satisfactory.

Class VII comprised of seven students from Mirambika. All of these students joined Mother's International School in Class VI.

Table 8.6 shows the performance of these students in Classes VI and VII. It can be observed that except for two students, whose performance is below average, the remaining five students did exceptionally well in all the subjects. In languages Hindi and Sanskrit, this group's performance was good as evident in their grades between Al to B2.

Out of the seven students, the performance of four in English was between grades Al to B2 while the remaining three performed below average i.e. grades Cl to D2. In Hindi, one student was unable to secure the minimum pass marks and failed in the subject. Of the remaining six students, performance of three was average while the other three showed below average performance.

In Mathematics, all the students performed well, but on comparing their grades with the class, their performance is average. For example, the student who got grade C2 had secured 72% marks and the student who got grade B2 secured 81% marks. It is however, worth noting that due to high mean score of the class in Mathematics, grades received by these students reflect merely an average performance. One student failed in Mathematics, which according to the subject teacher, was due to his very weak basic knowledge of the subject.

In Social Studies, four students fall in the upper grade range (Al to B2), while one student got grade D2 (43.31%) and the remaining two students got grades C1 and C2. However, it is seen that the student awarded C1 grade secured 70.3% while the student with C2 grade got 62.56% marks. It is because the maximum marks scored by the top I/8th of the passed students (i.e. students with Al grade) was 93% which makes students with 70% marks fall in grade C category.

In General Science, performance of four students out of seven is above average, while that of the remaining three is below average. Two students got A2 grade, they secured 82% and 81.34% marks respectively, while the remaining five students got grades Bl, B2, C1, C2 and D2 respectively. The student who got D2 grade secured 52% marks.

In Sanskrit, one student got Al grade, two got A2 grade, two got C2 grade and one student got E grade [failed) and the remaining one student got Dl grade. Inspite of Sanskrit being considered as the weak point of all Mirambika students, (since they haven't studied the subject in Mirambika) three students got A grade i.e. (86% to 92%).

Analysis of Class VII results indicate that as a group these students have performed well. However the varied performance across different subjects may be the result of varying interests and efforts made.

In Class VIII four students were from Mirambika. All of them joined Mother's International School in Class VI. The academic records in Class VI shown in Table 8.7 clearly depict that except for one student, performance of these students' falls in the grades range B1 to D1 in all the subjects. One student's performance is below average in all the subjects and two students failed in Hindi. According to their class teacher, all of these four students were weak in their written work and also in their basics of subjects like Hindi, Maths and Sanskrit. Students who failed in Hindi were given grace marks to promote them to next higher class. Table 8.6 shows the results in Class VII. As seen performance in Hindi, Maths and Sanskrit is between grades C1 to D2 and two students failed in Hindi and Sanskrit. All these students were promoted to the next higher class.

Academic records of Class VIII students shows that in English, one student got A2 grade (70.83%), two of them got C1 grade (55.94%) and the remaining one got C2 grade (55.08%). According to the subject teachers, Mirambika students are very good in spoken English but they face problems while expressing in the written form. In Hindi, all the four students had grades between Dl and E grades. The language teachers (English and Hindi) feel that the basics of language of children from Mirambika are very weak, which is the main cause of their unsatisfactory performance.

In Mathematics, two out of four students got D2 grade while the remaining two students got C2 and Dl respectively. Subject teachers attribute their performance to weak foundation in the subject. In Social Studies, out of four students, three students got Dl grade indicating unsatisfactory performance in the subject while one student got A2 grade (87%). In General Science, performance of this group of students is not very good as only one student had got A2 grade, while the other three students show below average performance. One of them failed while the other two got D1 and D2 grades respectively. In Sanskrit, performance is again below average as two out of the four students got C2 and D2 grades respectively while the remaining two failed in the subject. These results again support the view that Sanskrit is the weak point of Mirambika students. The academic performance of only one student in Class VIII is appreciable while that of other three students needs improvement.

Class IX had six students who came from Mirambika and joined Mother's International School in Class VII. Out of the six students, academic record of one student was not available for Class VII while academic record of two students was not available for Class VIII. Table 8.8 gives the overall performance of these students in Classes VII and VIII. As evident from the table, in Class VII the performance of both the students was above average while the remaining three students were below average across different subject areas. The students' performance in English is in the grade range Al to B2 and in Maths A1 to C1. All these five students passed VII class and moved to the next higher Class i.e. VIII.

Data for Class VIII was available only of four students out of the six. As shown in the table performance In Hindi and Sanskrit falls in the grade range C2 to D. In General Science only one student got B1 grade the remaining students grades varied between C1 to D2. The performance in English is better than in the other subjects i.e. Al to C1 grades. In Maths the performance varied from A2 to D2 grades.

Class IX onwards the grading system is different from those of lower Classes i.e. VI to VIII. Grades are awarded according to the aggregate percentage as shown in Table 8.4. Table 8.9 provides a comprehensive profile of students from Class IX to XII. Their performance during the current year of study (1997} as well as of previous years (1994 onwards) is shown. The pre-board and board results for Class X and XII are also depicted.

Class X had three students during the academic session 1996-97. Of the three, two students joined Mother's International School in Class VIII and one student in Class VII. Table 8.10 gives a picture of the students' performance In Classes VII and VIII. Data for the rest of the students was not available. The table reveals that they have performed well in English, General Science and Mathematics as compared to Hindi, Sanskrit and Social Studies.

Table 8.9 shows the percentage range of these students in Class IX. Only one student falls in the range of 60% -70%, while the remaining two fall in the percentage range of 40% - 50% and 50% - 60% respectively. All the three students were promoted to Class X by the teachers and were told to perform well in Class X.

Pre-board results show that out of three students only one student got 71% marks while the other two got 42% and 56% respectively. Their performance in the Class X Board examination showed marked Improvement as compared to the pre-board results. Two students fall in the percentage range of 70% - 80% while the remaining student secured 81% in Class X Board examination.

Class XI had five students, three in science stream one in commerce and another one in humanities. All the five students came from Mirambika after having completed Class IX. As it is evident from Table 8.9 the overall performance of four students in Class IX is above average and falls in the percentage range 70% to 90%, while the remaining one student scored an average of 50%. Considering Class X board examination results we can observe from the same table, that one student falls in the range of 60% - 70%, one in 70% - 80% range while the other three students got aggregate percentage between 80% and 90%. In Class XI, out of the five student's one student's record was not available. Out of four, the student from the commerce stream secured 48.16%; three students from the science stream performed very well as they secured 88.90%, 76.50% and 67.61% respectively. Apparently, the students from the science stream did very well academically. In co-curricular activities also all these students have performed especially well in sports, cultural activities like debates. Two of these students have been given "All Rounder of the Year" award by the school in Class X as well as in Class XI.

According to the Principal (M.I.S.) and the class teachers this particular batch was the best until now. This is because these students joined M.I.S. in Class VIII (other batches joined Mother's International School in Class VII and were mentally prepared and academically oriented to the change they were going to face after leaving Mirambika. These students were specially prepared in Mirambika with regard to written work, taking

tests, preparing for exams. For one full year they were taught in the traditional school manner in addition to Mirambika style of teaching. This probably contributed to their academic adjustment and success after joining a conventional school set up.

In Class XII there was only one student who had joined Mother's International School in Class V after studying in Mirambika. Records for Classes V to VIII of this child were not available. Academic performance from Class IX-XII as shown in Table 8.9 shows that he secured 71.19% in his final examination and stood 22nd in a class of 34 students. In Class XI, this student secured 72% in board examination. In Class XI he opted for the science stream and he secured 56.06% and ranked 29th in a class of 43 students. He was promoted with a warning- as his performance in Physics and Chemistry was not upto the mark.

Class XII pre-board examination shows some improvement from his previous class performance (61.7%) and ranked 28th position in a class of 39 students. In Class XII board examination, he secured 78% marks. According to the class teacher he is an exceptionally good sportsman and participates in zonal athletics and basket-ball tournaments. Which speaks of his performance in co-curricular areas.

The academic profiles of 28 students from Mirambika studying in Classes VI to XII reflect their ability to adjust to new learning at Mother's International School. Their grades are indicative of the efforts made especially in subjects like Sanskrit and Hindi.

II. SUBJECT-WISE ANALYSIS

A brief subject-wise analysis of students studying in Classes VI to VIII is presented in Table 8.11 (Appendix B) to gain an understanding of the performance of these students across different subjects. It provides grades obtained in English, Hindi, Maths, Social Studies, General Science and Sanskrit. Data of a total 13 students across different classes i.e. two in Class VI, seven in Class VII and four in Class VIII is shown. The table provides a picture of each individual performance (grade-wise) and also of the group as a whole in subjects like English, Hindi, Mathematics, Social Studies, General Science and Sanskrit.

The table clearly shows that students of these classes have performed very well in English. Out of a total of 13 students, performance of five students is within the range of Al to B2 grades, while one student got grade E and failed. Performance of four students is average as they got grade C1 and remaining five students' performance is not satisfactory as they got grades C1 to D2. The Mirambika student's performance in Hindi shows that out of 13 students, performance of only three is above average as they got grades between A2 to B1. Performance of the remaining 10 students in Hindi is not satisfactory as eight got grades within the range of C2 to D2 and the remaining two students got grade E i.e. they were unable to secure minimum pass marks. In Sanskrit, out of 13, only four students were able to get grades within Al to B2 and nine students performed unsatisfactorily out of which three students were unable to secure minimum pass marks.

It is evident that the performance of majority of the students, in the subject does not seem satisfactory. A few students managed to secure grades Al to B1 though none failed in the subject. In social studies, out of 13 students, six secured grades within Al to C1, while the remaining students secured grades C2 to D2 showing a below average

performance in the subject. Performance of seven students in general science falls in the grade range Al to C1. The performance of remaining six students was below average and one student got grade E i.e. failed. Thus, as a group, their performance in science is fairly good.

To sum up, it can be said that Mirambika students in Class VI to VIII did not perform satisfactorily in subjects like Hindi, Sanskrit (only 23% students got above average grades) and to some extent in Maths (as only 31% students got above average grades). Their performance is appreciable in subjects like English, Science and Social Studies i.e. 69%, 54% and 56% students respectively showed above average performance. According to the teacher, the main reason for unsatisfactory performance in subjects like Hindi and Sanskrit is that these subjects were not given due weightage compared to English during project work in Mirambika. Sanskrit was not taught as a subject in school. Besides this, the parents and teachers felt that the students were never "forced" to write in the class and choice of written work was left with the individual child because of which they lag behind in written work. However, there are few students who have performed exceptionally well in all the subjects and their written expression and ideas are also appreciated by the teachers. It was also expressed by the subject teachers that the students have weak basics of mathematics; some are unable to do basic arithmetic calculations and also make careless mistakes.

Results show that maximum students failed in subjects like Hindi followed by Sanskrit and one each in English and General Science. Though none failed in Mathematics and Social Studies, the maximum number of students having secured below average grades is in the subject Mathematics. As seen in terms of performance across different subjects, no clear pattern emerges, it is a heterogeneously performing group.

Summing Up

Data generated by examining the academic records of 28 students (studying in Classes VI to XII) who joined Mother's International School from Mirambika show different levels of performance in various classes and subjects. Academic profiles of these students provide us some information regarding academic behaviour typical of Mirambika children. Remarks of subject teachers as well as of class teachers were the sources of information regarding their progress and adjustment to the new teaching and learning strategies in Mother's International School.

It is evident that for majority of these students Hindi and Sanskrit proved to be their weak areas. According to subject teachers, their basics of the language are very "weak". This may be attributed to the Mirambika style of teaching where Hindi is not given much weightage in the project work as compared to the English language. Sanskrit however finds no place in the school curriculum. Individual differences exist among students in these subjects since some students have performed exceptionally well even in Hindi and Sanskrit. This may be attributed to their interest in the language or may be due to parental support or the tuitions they may be having at home, as was expressed by some parents during interviews with them.

Teachers were also critical of the students' written work and remarks like "written expression needs improvement", "cannot express concepts in writing" were often given

in report cards. Written work whether in English, Hindi or General Science, emerged as the problem area of the children. As remarked by teachers, "their verbal expression is wonderful, but when it conies to expressing in writing they face problems". This again can be ascribed to the style of teaching which does not encourage much written work since the choice is left with the student as a result of which some do well while others shirk from it. Teachers were also of the opinion that these children were not good at taking tests and did not know how to prepare for the examinations. This probably is due to absence of formal examinations in Mirambika and therefore the students are not used to taking periodical tests or formal year-end examinations.

The findings are suggestive of the strengths and weaknesses of the project work approach to teaching and learning as followed in Mirambika. If on one hand it strengthens the students by making them resourceful, initiative-taking, and responsible for their work and inculcates searching skills, reasoning power or experimentation in them, it however, leaves them with insufficient experience of written work, expressing in specified time and space or exposing them to test taking skills or study habits. Experiences of the kind would help them to enhance performance in competitive examinations. Multidisciplinary approach to teaching-learning seems advantageous in primary grades as it helps to link concepts across different subject areas. However, with increase in grade level the subject matter gets more specific and apart from comprehending the matter a student must learn skills to express her/his knowledge for the others to understand. In Mirambika, even during the specific subject training time i.e. teaching of English, Hindi, Maths, the students, in line with school ideological goals, are not forced to take up anything, and before assigning any work to the child her/his interest and level of performance is taken into consideration. This may be beneficial for some, especially those whose performance is average but it may lead the others to underestimate the importance of certain activities, which are also part of traditional school curriculum. Inclusion of specific written exercises at different age levels, as a part of project work may prove to be beneficial for all the students.

The results are also suggestive of the need for pre-preparation and orientation of Mirambika students to the traditional teaching-learning-evaluation system. As evident in a particular group when children were academically prepared for one full year before joining Mother's International School and were therefore mentally prepared for the shift, examinations, test taking and written work. Parents as well as teachers also felt that this gradual shift from Mirambika to Mother's International School helped students to adjust. Another possible reason is the advantage the child gains because of the difference in age and maturity level when she/he shifts from Mirambika after Class VIII as against Class V.

If success is measured in terms of marks obtained, then the Board results are a clear indication of their success and having adjusted to the conventional approach to teaching-learning. To be able to secure good marks in the Board examination is probably because of their overall approach to learning and tackling problems, which is also how they differ from children in a traditional school. To make an attempt at dovetailing of both the systems of education i.e. of free-progress education in Mirambika and of subject-specific traditional teaching in Mother's International School, thorough preparation at both ends for student's departure and reception might be helpful in better adjustment of the

children. This also enables the students to get the best of both the systems of learning thus helping in their overall development.

It may be said that the academic performance of Mirambika children is an indicator of the strengths of 'project work approach' to teaching over the 'traditional teaching-learning-evaluation system'. Though the probability of individual differences is always present there is a need for gradual shift/ preparation of students from one system to another.

9
CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This research aimed to examine the school Mirambika and its various activities in relation to its ideology and the actual school processes. The educational processes in Mirambika are based on the ideals of Free Progress Education. This lends the school a distinguishing character which gains prominence in view of the fact that students move to Mother's International School from Class VIII and enter a formal conventional system of education. The study focused on the role of ideology in shaping the various processes in school, the social milieu and the interactions amongst its participants. The other concern being the academic performance and adjustment of children after entering a totally different system of education to know how schooling in Mirambika with its ideological underpinnings helped children tackle real life situations and perform in the competitive world.

The school makes attempts at organising its various activities in line with Sri Aurobindo's principles of teaching. Attempts are also made by the school to create necessary conditions for the implementation of its ideological goals. Therefore, the organisation of the daily routine activities as well as certain special celebrations were examined to see the influence of ideology in creating a particular kind of work culture/ethos. The project-approach to teaching-learning followed in school, the specific strategies, self-disciplining techniques etc. throw light on the role of the teacher as facilitator and the quality of interactions among the students and the teachers.

The 'diyas' or teachers in school are categorised according to the functions performed, which is related to their recruitment in school and ideological commitment. In spite of wide disparity among the three types of *'diyas',* they all view themselves as 'learners' in school. The parent culture throws light on views, beliefs, ideals, and their outlook to life. Parents demand qualified and salaried staff and upgradation of the school so that the children can complete Class X in Mirambika which may be seen as an indication of parent's satisfaction with the school. Upgrading the school upto Class X would make Mirambika more open to parents/children from a wider socio-economic background as they may feel confident of sending their wards to study in the school. As aptly expressed by a teacher, "At present the uncertainty of getting admission for their children in other schools (after completing studies in Mirambika) makes it accessible to only those who are ready to take this challenge/responsibility/risk". She further elaborated, perhaps because of this limited access, Mirambika may have been viewed as an elite school by some. Teachers and parents' perspective at times are indicative of ambivalence in their expectations of each other. While talking of children's characteristic mode of behaviour,

though the influence of Free Progress Education is the key-factor, the influence of parental background cannot be overlooked.

This research has therefore reflected on the linkages between ideology, school processes and student outcomes. For example, the project approach to teaching-learning though guided by ideology gets strengthened by student's interest and involvement. On the other hand meditation, an ideologically governed activity finds its place as a ritual in school having little meaning for the children. These aspects of Mirambika helped to build an understanding of its various processes in relation to the meaning it has for its participants.

Some Reflections

During our short but purposeful association with the Mirambika family, we have lived through the social and learning milieu to get an insight into the reality of the educational endeavour being made in Mirambika. This being an ethnographic research, the objective was to study the school in its own setting, following its own philosophy and educational thought, practicing its special teaching-learning strategies within the framework of school goals. Taking cognizance of this configuration of school setting, teaching-learning practices and school culture, some personal reflections are given.

The philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is well entrenched in the portals of this school and permeates the academic and social climate of the school. Reverence for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's thought is tangible in day-to-day activities, cultural functions and celebrations. Evidence of this was seen in the various pedagogic processes. The ideological goals of Mirambika purport child-cantered view of education which serves as a pre-condition for espousing projects as a suitable method of teaching and learning.

Project approach to learning sends messages of being interdisciplinary, integrating arts in the curriculum and leading to collaborative learning. This is accomplished by providing an evolutionary syllabi emerging from the needs of students. Since projects are open-ended, flowing in the direction determined by the children's interest rather than pre-determined schema tend to develop in students the skills of planning, collecting, inquiring, investigating, abstracting and presenting the information. This makes the children independent, responsible and confident of their learning. We can say that project approach provides opportunities to equip students with the kind of study skills that make them functional- Use of projects opens up alternatives in which work can be organised, so that tasks are designed to fit each student's needs more closely while retaining a social context.

Though Mirambika's mode of assessment aims at providing a complete profile of the child, it is primarily the teacher's impressionistic judgment of the work done by the children. Evaluation is not related to grading, crediting or for upward mobility in school. Progress is purely measured against the student's own progress in work and not used for comparison, as the school believes in fostering cooperative learning and not competitive learning. Since the intention of project work, besides cognition, is social and attitudinal, it is felt that there is a need to re-look at achievement in terms of development of positive attitudes towards what is learnt, how it is learnt and the conditions in which it is learnt.

Evaluation needs to focus on students achievement regarding aspects like attitudes towards learning, acquiring practical skills, presenting information, making judgments and conceptual learning to name a few.

The teacher's role is more of a facilitator, a generalist rather than a specialist. Many abandon the role of an initiator and simply react to events as they unfold. Fewer constraints operate on teachers and their success is not measured in relation to contents covered but calls for situational and personal control. The teaching style can be labelled as informal, participative, democratic and illuminative. Though, the teacher's profile clearly shows a wide disparity among them in terms of qualifications, background, experience and expertise; what emerges is a strong consensus to work for (he 'Divine' and for children. It is the strength of their aspiration which makes all those teaching in school equal/at par irrespective of their background or qualification. Teacher turnover (volunteers leaving and joining) effects continuity of work in the groups, of which the school is aware and is constantly making efforts by holding regular in-house meetings to appraise the work done by children. Hence successful implementation of project approach needs employing teaching methods that are flexible and ensure continuity and progression.

Organisational dynamics in Mirambika are the result of absence of Principal as a figure of authority and delineating increased powers to all its members. This gives rise to equal power or status to people in school, which fosters work ethics of responsibility and commitment to work. The classroom climate can best be described as dominated by curious enquiries by students, teaching through questioning and eliciting answers. Democratic flexibility and participation of children in teaching-learning process range from content selection and mode of learning to selection of resources and their utilisation. To sum up, the study highlights the organisational dynamics in school, decentralised planning, emphasis on inculcating a sense of responsibility amongst students, child-cantered syllabi according to the needs and capacities of the child and the project approach to teaching-learning.

The present day challenges of the fast changing, interdependent world demands a paradigm shift in ways schools impart education, methods used by teachers for teaching and evaluation, the total nature and function of schooling. The success of innovative pattern of teaching-learning followed in Mirambika. has relevance for bringing about a change in our highly structured and time bound, evaluation oriented system.

The findings of the study are indicative of the strengths of the teaching-learning approach followed in Mirambika. The Board result shows that academically the students fare as well as those studying in conventional schools. Even more important is that these students have developed the skills to search for information, communicate effectively, take initiative, make their own decisions, resolve conflicts, find creative solutions and also have qualities to work co-operatively, take responsibility for a task or project, are confident, and hard-working. All these are crucial not only for the development of the students themselves, but also for the development and betterment of the society as a whole. To come out of the present educational impasse perhaps there is a need to look at experimental schools like Mirambika as providing crucial research inputs on educational practices to bringing about a change in schooling.

Schools therefore need to emphasise on those aspects of learning which would help children to self-observe and reflect; find ways to search for knowledge instead of memorising; develop self-confidence, personal integrity and individual personalities capable of helping and relating with others, evaluating one's own learning, being self-motivated, etc. (NCF, 2005). This demands a shift from content based curriculum to a curriculum which is process based. It would also require organising teaching-learning which is sensitive to the needs of the learner, methods to promote self-learning, problem solving, asking questions, and evaluations for personal development and co-operative effort. For success in implementation of any change in educational practices would also require concerted inputs in teacher education; to bring about a change in attitudes of teachers, teacher selection and teacher preparation to orient them towards newer pedagogical practices. Mirambika with its innovative approach to teaching and learning, questions the mainstream thinking about the purpose, function and nature of school.

Postscript

My visit to the school while celebrating 25 years of Mirambika in July 2006 gave me an opportunity to meet some of the old teachers, the new Principal and a few alumni. The school building is now complete (at the time of study it was under construction) which gives a feeling of a lot more happening in school. Now there are 35 teachers; 8 are full-time, 14 trainees and 13 volunteers. Of the total, 8 are trained teachers (i.e. hold a teacher training degree). This may suggest that the need to have qualified staff is gaining importance in the school along with commitment to fulfil the ideological goals. The present Principal has joined the school in 2000 yet the vision of the school has not changed. However, in particular the focus continues on making attempts to put into practice the approaches followed in Mirambika in other elementary schools as well. A small project has been initiated in collaboration with Jawaharlal Nehru University and Delhi University in July 2006, to try out the Free Progress Education approach in Municipal Corporation schools of Delhi. Further, the school is open to anyone who wants to be a teacher irrespective of having had the training for it or not. Those who wish to innovate, experiment in educational ideas or grow or refresh themselves are welcome as teachers. Efforts are being made to strengthen the Resource Centre to make it a source of materials made by children and 'diyas' to support for textbooks and provide pedagogical inputs.

Cherishing their learning experiences in Mirambika, the ex-students expressed that Mirambika was an ideal environment to grow up in. They were nostalgic about their school memories. To them, 'Mirambika is more than a school', which 'made a difference in their lives' and is a 'way of life', 'to consider it as a school is unfair'. Looking back they expressed that Mirambika gave them skills to observe, analyse and judge oneself - qualities that proved to be useful to know the world outside. They remember their teachers as those who nurtured them, encouraged them to be independent and made school a place of self-discovery. Teaching focussed on giving freedom in terms of choosing the projects, referencing, continuing projects beyond the time-frame which they felt made them become researchers - searching for knowledge as was aptly stated by one. Reflecting on Mirambika a few expressed that there was not much difference between what their parents felt and what the school believed in with regard to the child's learning

hence there was no 'home school dichotomy' it was more like a home away from home to them. Not wanting to leave Mirambika, 6-7 students stayed on till Class X and took their Board examination from the National Institute of Open Schooling.

Mirambika they remarked is a way of life, a source of values and morals which has remained with them even in a world "contrary" to Mirambika. They became more conscious about this aspect when they shifted to other schools, where as expressed by one, 'they stood out as individuals more for their values than for academic achievements'. They further elaborated, 'Mirambika shaped their personality while they were students', as they felt they still stand out from the crowd by being able to contribute meaningfully to whatever they do. This they said is only because of their initial experiences at Mirambika. It is quite apparent; Mirambika seems to have had a pervasive affect on the life of its students.

Each Principal puts her/his own stamp on the school. Concerted efforts to document data related to students are being made 'to educate oneself. Commitment to being a learner acquires legitimacy from ideology itself. The teachers feel that Mirambika has evolved under the guidance of different Heads during different periods. Beginning with 'perfection,' moving on to 'harmony', an exposure to the 'world outside' it has now attained 'stability'. Accordingly there is a shift in focus on various aspects of school functioning. As expressed by a senior teacher in the Initial stages when the school started a lot of focus was in use of waste materials while undertaking projects. In an attempt to expose the Mirambika teachers to what was happening outside there was a shift in the use of materials to those used in other schools. Presently the school has gone back to the use of waste materials while undertaking project work. The future effort is to aspire to revive the idea of Basic Education and provide hands-on experience to all in Mirambika, the teachers as well as students.

APPENDIX A

Fieldwork Experiences

The process of collecting data through observations in school can be divided into three stages - entry, data collection, and exit. To begin with, selection of and entry to the research setting is described. This is followed by a brief description of the methods used to collect data, and dealing with large amount of qualitative data.

SELECTION OF THE RESEARCH SITE

Based on the rationale that the net result of what children learn in a school is not only that what they are taught in classrooms but also what 'caught' is during the formal-informal interactions in and outside the classroom. Planned access and reputation for being innovative made 'Mirambika' the prospective site for the case study. Interviews with the school manager, Principal and other officials confirmed the selection of the site. The broad parameters decided for the present study were the influence of ideology on (i) school organisation, (ii) pedagogic processes arid (iii) norms and values transmitted by the school.

Gaining complete access to all the participants in the school was accomplished in six stages. Entry began with approaching the Managing Committee Members, the Principal, the school coordinators, the teachers, the students and the community (parents).

Entry I- The Managing Committee

Initial talks with the school were made when Prof. A.K. Sharma, Director, NCERTwas approached by Mrs. Indu Plllai the Principal, Mother's International School who showed interest in knowing the effect of innovative pattern of schooling in Mirambika on the total development of the children.

In the preliminary meetings with Mrs. Pillai, Tara didi (Member of the Managing Committee) and Partho (Principal, Mirambika), the broad parameters of the study were discussed, and it was mutually agreed that both the institutions were interested in the collaboration. However, it was decided that to begin with, the Principal be given a copy of the proposal for clarifications and to work out the details. A verbal agreement to carry out the proposed study was made and the operational details were left out which were to be finalised in consultation with the Principal of Mirambika.

Entry II- *The Principal*

After having worked out the operational details a meeting was fixed with the Principal. His major concern was that the study might interfere with the functioning of the school, especially due to the presence of the observer in the class. After he was assured that every effort would be made not to interfere in the classroom activities or intervene in other school processes, he agreed though a bit hesitatingly. No formal contract was made but a written approval for the study was received from the Principal with a special mention that no test will be administered to the children. There were verbal instructions asking the investigator/ observer not to disturb the teachers or children while in class; not to ask any questions from the children during or after the class except during lunch time. The Principal also desired that the progress of the work may be periodically shared with him at the convenience of both sides. The details of day-to-day functioning of the research team in school was to be decided after discussion with the team of school coordinators.

Entry III- The School Coordinators

After a brief introduction with one of the school coordinators, we were left alone to find our way and break ice with them. No straight questions were answered. Instead they suggested that we get a feel of the school for a couple of days by sitting in the class, observing, watching them during meditation, games etc. The coordinators held the opinion that one does not enter anyone's house till one gets to know the occupants and Mirambika to them was their home. Similarly detailing of the research team's schedule was done only after the researchers had got acquainted with the organisational structure of the school. No formal schedule was worked out except that the research team would be in the field till the end of the current academic year. Informal talks with the coordinators

helped in providing a framework to develop a working schedule for ourselves. Full freedom was given in planning our schedule. We were however cautioned not to talk to the teachers or the children during observation in class. Till now contact with teachers was mainly restricted to seeing them in the premises.

Entry IV- The Teachers

The first formal contact with the teachers was made during one of their weekly Saturday meetings. The Principal introduced us to the faculty and we were asked to talk about the proposed research work, its objectives and in brief what the research team intended to do. No questions were asked; teachers already seemed to be aware of the project. Since majority of the teachers reside on the Ashram premises, they have wider opportunities of sharing, discussing the school issues. Our early interactions with the faculty were limited to greetings while taking notes in the class. Our presence probably held an 'evaluative stance' which with time was erased and our acceptance as a member of the school was confirmed on many occasions. One possible reason for acceptance could be deliberate effort made by the investigators to go through the process of "acculturation". This helped to reduce the physical distance which eventually led to being accepted as one of them. While most of the teachers took to our presence as non-threatening, the rest appeared to be a bit self-conscious, with the exception of one or two who gave us a feeling of being "watched" - which made us all the more clear about our role in school i.e. of a researcher and not of an evaluator.

Many advantages flowed from this increased proximity and so were the problems arising out of the expectation of teachers and students regarding our involvement in their activities of the school. This problem was managed by consciously remaining on the periphery of any activity and maintaining a marginal position in the school. In general, clarity of our role followed by congruous in behaviour provided to be important ingredients of acceptance and rapport building in the school.

In general, contact with the teachers was not easy and warm in the initial stages. At times our presence was totally ignored as if 'viewed as a part of the furniture', rebuffed on making inquiring with the plea that since Mirambika is a learning for all, one must discover things for oneself. A special mention also needs to be made of the acceptance of the research team after having spent about one-third of the study time in school. Majority of the teachers started inquiring about the research progress, personal well-being in case of absence from school, and expecting the presence of investigators as normal in the school. Our presence was "taken for granted" in the school by then.

Entry V- *The Children*

Initial contact with children was through observation of their daily activities. Though we were silent observers and did not initiate conversation, informal talk did develop, however, when the children asked us if we were new teachers in school. Depending on the situation we answered their queries and at times made attempts to explain our presence objectively. To the majority of the children the research team members were new teachers, as they did not appear to understand what we were doing.

Total acceptance by the children was the key factor in making intensive observations and at the same time maintaining marginality in the classroom processes, as they always were too pre-occupied to bother about what we were doing. This positive relationship was maintained till the "family profile" questionnaire was sent to their parents. Slight tension and distrust prevailed for a short time as the children felt it was 'none of NCERTs business' to know about their personal life. Children eyed us differently but eventually forgot the incident.

Entry VI- The Parents

Informal contact with parents was established during the initial days in school. Some of them knew about our research work and were interested to know of our perceptions of the school activities. Formal contact with the parents was established when interviews were held with them. We were given sufficient time for our queries and they expressed their opinions openly. At times they narrated various incidents which helped to understand the school and its various processes and participants.

Gaining entry in the life of the participants was beneficial as it helped to maintain credible research role in the school. As the research progressed the research team was viewed, especially by the children as a part of the school. Various techniques/tools were used to collect data in school. The approach of the study i.e. case study and related qualitative techniques of data collection are described in brief.

STRATEGIES IN DATA COLLECTION

Since the school, Mirambika was a pre-selected case for the study, hence, the research work may be called intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995) of the school's organisation, culture and the teaching - learning processes. The emphasis is on completeness of the analysis, by taking into account every possible pertinent aspect of the case, i.e. detailed examination of one setting (Good and Scates, 1954). Put at its most basic, it consists of an observer sitting in a situation and describing the happenings as accurately, objectively and precisely as possible (Kerry and Eggleston, 1988:4). Collection of data through sustained contact with people in a setting where they normally spend their time helps to obtain the perspectives of the participants and illuminates the inner dynamics of the situation (Bodgan and Biklen, 1982:30).

Ethnographic approach to study the school was undertaken (though not in its completeness) which primarily is dependent on the researcher as an essential component of the research process. It requires the researcher to take an attitude of a student attempting to study the particular group or culture. "Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people" (Spradley, 1979:3). It involves observation, discussion and reflection. Agar (1986) describes ethnography as representing content and process and states, "Such work requires an intensive personal involvement, an abandonment of traditional scientific control, an improvisational style to meet situations not of the researchers making, and an ability to learn from a long series of mistakes" (p. 12). It is neither subjective nor objective, but is interpretative, mediating two worlds through a third.

Validity of the interpretation of the school phenomena are sought in triangulation. Triangulation is the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomena (Denzin, 1984). The effectiveness of triangulation rests on the premises that the weaknesses in each single method will be compensated by the counter-balancing strengths of another. According to Maanen (1979) triangulation helps to provide the researcher on a "feel" of the situation and further states that "this intuition and first hand knowledge dawn from the multiple vantage points is centrally reflected in the interpretative process". The present study employed "methods" triangulation as it used different methods for collection of data and for cross-validating the findings. The main methods employed were observation, interview and questionnaire.

The present case study relies on a number of research methods viz. participant observation and talk, unobstructive methods (documents, records, phenomenological material) questionnaires and interviews. Each of the data collection methods is described below.

Non-Participant Observation

The first hand account of the events in school was made by observing the various schools activities - formal as well as informal. Observations were recorded in personal diaries maintained by the researchers. They were recorded verbatim or as an accurate account of the happenings. A vivid description of the event observed was noted in order to recreate the scene at a later stage. The observations were precise in terms of date time, activity, the setting, participants, special observation or critical events. Anecdotes also helped to collect data of uncommon occurrences.

Sampling of observation in the present study was difficult because of the nature of the school activities in Mirambika. Nevertheless, one complete project - across groups and other projects were intensively observed over a period of eight months along with each group being observed for 'training' at least 10-times, i.e. approximately 20 hours. In addition to classroom observations, information was obtained from meetings, faculty meetings on Saturday and P.T.A. meetings.

Participant Observation

The present study focuses on how the activities and interactions in a school setting give meaning to certain behaviours or beliefs, how the inhabitants are influenced by assumptions that they take for granted, which reflect the unique culture of the organisation. Participant observation enables the researcher a direct access to these assumptions, hence is the method of choice. It helps to provide an understanding of the processes, events, relationships and the context of a social situation. The inhabitants are less likely to alter their behaviour due to the outsider's presence; the researcher was accommodated rather than 'reacted to' with the passage of time. Another advantage that accrued from this method is that the context can be observed as it unfolds in everyday life. The sequence arid connectedness of events that contribute to the meaning of a phenomenon can be identified.

Establishing rapport is an important aspect of being a participant observer. Our entry in Mirambika was linked to the school's issue of seeking accreditation from the Board of

Education and hence at times we were eyed suspiciously. Our initial explanations to some teachers and children regarding our presence in school helped to reduce misgivings. It was explained to them that we were primarily interested in knowing the school and understanding its various processes and our role was that of only a researcher attempting to seek answers to certain questions. Being unobtrusive and attentive listeners, following the ground rules laid for observations by the school officials and at times discussing areas of common interest and experiences with teachers gradually led to our participation in the school activities. One such activity was being a member of the selection team, in the selection of parents for admission to children in the new academic year. Selections were made on basis of informal talks which were held during our stay in school. The sources of data collection in this case were the informants and the key informants.

Informants are aides who help the researcher to learn and have the insider's view of a particular social or cultural set-up. They provide help to the researcher by editing, interpreting and supplying information. Spradley {1979} defined informants as "nature speakers", engaged by the participant's observers to "speak in their own language".

Every member of the school i.e. teachers, parents, children was taken as a potential informant. Selection of teachers was done on the basis of their stay in school i.e. of a longer duration and their belonging to different categories i.e. full-time, volunteers or trainees, in an attempt to comprehend reality as the informant perceived it. In case of parents it was their willingness and availability of time.

Certain informants were selected for detailed interviewing on the school background, organisation, process and future plans; they were - *the key informants*. Crabtree and Miller (1992) describe key informants as "informants thoroughly encultured and currently active within the culture to represent accurately that culture to the researcher". They possess special knowledge, status. or communication skills, are willing to share their knowledge and skills with the researcher and have access to perspectives or observations denied to the researcher (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). The key informant then becomes the research collaborator and provides the explanations - what, when, who, why and how (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973). They help to explain, modify and clarify the interpretations formulated by the researcher.

In the present study the school coordinators were selected as "key informants" keeping in view their access to information and status in this school.

Interviews

Interviewing was used as a source of qualitative data in order to build up an understanding of the school processes. The initial interviews with teachers were structured as they dealt specifically with educational background, origin, entry in school and belief in ideology. Each and every teacher at this stage was interviewed. These interviews were basically exploratory and helped in formulating questions for subsequent interviews.

The second phase of interviews were conducted with the parents and was essentially semi-structured in nature as the idea was to explore issues like : school philosophy, teaching- learning process, discipline, future plans etc. No pre-determined order or set of

questions guided the interviews. A verbatim transcription was the method of recording data which was later substituted by an interview log.

In the process of interviewing, the ethnographic technique i.e. descriptive open-ended questions, or what Spradley (1980) calls "descriptive" and "grand-tour" questions were made use of.

The 'ethnographic interviews' were conducted with the informants and key informants which focussed on descriptive questions and contrast questions. The former included questions like : what made you join the school? introductory but usually for taking the informant on a 'grand-tour' like narrating a story. Contrast questions provide understanding of the terms participants use and dealt with situations witnessed by the researcher and seek meaning from the informant in relation to school goals both ideological and actual school processes (operative}. Since one principle of ethnographic questions is to expand and enrich the researcher's understanding of what is being described, care was taken that the questions were asked concurrently and were put in context of the focus of the study. The primary aim of interviewing and asking different types of question helped to develop better understanding of the school culture.

Questionnaire

Two questionnaires were administered - one each to the teachers and parents. The parent's questionnaire was the "Family-Profile" which was sent through the school to the parents. The response rate of this questionnaire was very high with a total 120 parents answering out of 132. The teacher questionnaire intended to provide an in-depth view of the way the school was organised, strategies adopted for pedagogic interaction and personal views on the school processes. However this took very long and the return rate was very low with only ten out of 42 teachers answering the questionnaire.

Artefacts

Examinations of documents available to the researcher were only a few since the school officials expressed that they do not keep a written record of the meetings with the managing committee, boards, community etc. The school functions largely on verbal communication as media. The primary documentary sources were, school news letters, admission documents, teacher recruitments, communication with parents and work done by the children. The secondary sources were reports of students done by B.Ed, students on the school functioning. History of the school events however was narrated by some of the informants. Personal narrative also formed a source of data.

Analysis of Data

Analysis of the qualitative data collected in the form of observations and interviews was mainly treated to an extent of "making sense" out of the data. The essence of dealing with data was not to impose meaning on the data but letting the data speak for itself. Handling the data involved filling of verbatim transliteration of interviews with other details after the interviews. Grouping the data according to the emerging themes along with numbering the pages of the diaries on which observations were made helped in

"knowing" the data. The field notes of observations made and transcribed notes of informal conversations had details like date, time, location, event, etc. These were read, re-read and summarised. The broad themes like : 'meditation', 'evaluation', 'discipline', *'diyas',* 'project work', etc. helped to classify them. This lead to discovery of patterns, themes and categories as they emerged from the data. Emerging themes and ideas provided a summary picture of the focus of the study. The sets of data were dealt with one at a time in light of the literature in the field which helped to give meaning to observations.

This was followed by trying to make sense out of volumes of data and examining it from both the perspectives i.e. ideology and actual practice, resulting in recognising the patterns across different activities in school. Cross-validation through Triangulation (Denzin, 1978) among sources of data, observer and methods helped to "gauge the trustworthiness" of the interpretations. This involved comparing and contrasting the reflections on patterns and themes identified. The findings of the study were shared with Mirambika and Mother's International School which helped in establishing correspondence on different school aspects.

Data presented describes the context, the site, the participants involved during the entire data collection time period. Names are retained for confidentiality. Observations presented are specific to the focus of the study. The descriptions highlight those aspects which are particular to the setting studied. An analysis of the actions and events with respect to the ideological or operative goals is also woven in the description. The findings are presentation of the school processes in the form of a narrative report of the "investigations" made.

Tables

Table 8.5: Students Grades in Class VI

Subject/ Grades	95-96	96-97	95-96	96-97	95-96	96-97	95-96	96-97	95-96	96-97	95-96	96-97
	English		Hindi		Maths		S.Studies		G. Science		Sanskrit	
A1												
A2												
B1												
B2												1
C1										1		
C2		1		1		1		1				1
D1	1					1	1			1		
D2	1				1		1	1	2			
E		1	2	1	1							2

Table 8.6: Students Grades in Class VII

Subject/ Grades	English 6th 95-96	English 7th 96-97	Hindi 6th 95-96	Hindi 7th 96-97	Maths 6th 95-96	Maths 7th 96-97	S.Studies 6th 95-96	S.Studies 7th 96-97	G. Science 6th 95-96	G. Science 7th 96-97	Sanskrit 6th 95-96	Sanskrit 7th 96-97
A1	2	1	1		1	1	2	1	1		1	1
A2	2	2	1	2	1		1	1	1	2	2	2
B1	1			1		1	1		1	1		
B2	1	1	1		3	1	1	2	2	1		
C1		2	1				1		1	1	1	
C2					1	1	1			1	2	2
D1			1	2	1	1	1				1	1
D2		1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1		
E			1	1								1

Table 8.7: Students Grades in Class VIII

Subject/ Grades	English 6th	English 7th	English 8th	Hindi 6th	Hindi 7th	Hindi 8th	Maths 6th	Maths 7th	Maths 8th	S.Studies 6th	S.Studies 7th	S.Studies 8th	G. Science 6th	G. Science 7th	G. Science 8th	Sanskrit 6th	Sanskrit 7th	Sanskrit 8th
A1										1								
A2			1								1	1	1	1				
B1	1	1								1								1
B2	3	1							1	2	1							
C1	1	2	1					1					1			1		
C2	1	1	1	1			1			1			1	1	1			1
D1						2	2	1	1	1			3	1	1	1	1	
D2						2		2	2	1				1	1	2	2	1
E				2	1	2									1		1	2

Table 8.8: Students Grades in Class IX

95-96 96-97

Subjest/ Grades	English		Hindi		Maths		S.Studies		G. Science		Sanskrit	
	7th	8th	7th	8th	7th	8th	7th	8th	7th	8th	7th	8th
A1	1	2	1		1		1					
A2	2		1			1	1	1	1			1
B1		1	1	2	1		1			1	1	
B2	1				2	1		1				
C1		1			1	1				1		2
C2							1	1	2	1	2	
D1	1			1			1	1	2		2	1
D2				1		1				1		
E												

Table 8.9: Comparative Performance of Students (Classes IX-XII)

Total No. of Students = 15

Class	IX		X						XI								XII											
	IX		IX		Pre-Board		X Board		IX		Pre-Board		X Board		XI		IX		Pre-Board		X Board		XI		Pre-Board		XII Board	
No.	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post
1.	79.3	1/35	55.5	17/35	56	29/31	75.4		81.7	1/31	83.2	1/33	89		88.9	2/29	71.1	22/34	69.9	17/34	72		56	29/43	61.7	28/39	78	
2.	74	10/35	89.0	16/34	71.2	9/31	81.6		72.5	4/32	75	4/31	81		67.6	13/29												
3.	77.4	6/38	46.7	33/36	42.9	28/28	72.8		79.1	2/31	79.1	3/33	84		76.5	5/29												
4.	62.3	22/37							70.8	7/31	58	14/33	75		Medical Leave													
5.	59.9	24/37							50.7	23/32	53.8	25/31	68		48.1	34/46												
6.	42.8	33/38																										

Table 8.10: Students Grades in Class X

93-94 94-95

Subject/ Grades	English 7th	English 8th	Hindi 7th	Hindi 8th	Maths 7th	Maths 8th	S.Studies 7th	S.Studies 8th	G. Science 7th	G. Science 8th	Sanskrit 7th	Sanskrit 8th
A1	1											
A2		1					1		1	1		
B1					1	1					1	
B2						1				1		
C1				1				1				2
C2								1				
D1			1	1								
D2		1										
E												

Table 8.11: Subject-wise Performance in Classes VI to VIII
(Individual and Group)

S.No.	Classes/ Subject	VI				VII				VIII				
1.	English	C2	E	C1	A2	D2	C1	A2	A1	B2	A2	C2	C1	C1
2.	Hindi	C2	E	D1	A2	D1	E	A2	B1	D2	D1	E	E	D1
3.	Maths	C2	D1	C2	A1	D1	D2	B1	B2	C1	C2	D2	D1	D2
4.	S. St.	D2	C2	C1	A1	D2	C2	B2	A2	B2	A2	D1	D1	D1
5.	G. Sci	C1	D1	C1	A2	D2	C2	A2	B2	B1	A2	E	D2	D1
6.	Sanskrit	B2	C2	C2	A2	C2	D1	A1	A2	E	C2	E	E	D2