

YaRI: ‘Flowing’ towards a River-Centric School Culture

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The American environmentalist David Orr famously asserted that ‘all education is environmental education’. Movements such as nature study, climate change education, back-to-nature, environment education and the currently prevalent term education for sustainable development have been included in school education, in formal and informal ways from time to time. Even though policy and curriculum frameworks include such areas of study; schools tend to neglect evolving concrete pedagogies to integrate textual knowledge with the lived realities of a student's immediate environment. This renders the Yamuna River Initiative (YaRI) into not just an engagement with concepts of nature, sustainable development, and ecological justice but also an opportunity for deepening students' own understanding of the interconnections between the ecocentric and the technocentric modes of living that characterise contemporary urban lives.

YaRI has potential to transform education into a humanising recognition of the nature-culture continuum closest to children's lives- the Yamuna river that flows in their own cityscape. The multifaceted initiative includes a book, a teacher's handbook, and a wide range of teaching and learning activities. These are not one-time efforts but are designed to be integrated throughout the school's academic calendar. The small-sized aesthetically produced book is written in a language of literary delight, carries mesmerising photographs that tell several stories, and is coherently traces the journey of river Yamuna from its beginning. The teacher's handbook offers valuable pedagogical insights for classroom teaching-learning of broader YaRI themes of water conservation, ecological degradation and civic studies, among other pertinent river-centric concerns. It is replete with specific suggestions of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary classroom activities in a holistic Project-Based Learning Approach. Many of the projects have been on display in the school on various occasions reflecting sustained collaborative efforts of the school community in building a Yamuna Centric School Culture. YaRI's deep impact upon the students' was evident in the

selection of project topics such as testing Yamuna supplied water quality and the river's representation in Mughal miniature paintings. The topics were examined in intricate details while integrating Yamuna river into learning school subjects-Science and History. Interacting with the students as they explained their YaRI work evoked a feeling of the river by one's side in an experience of change, continuity and transience; all at the same time.

Growing up and going to school in Delhi children face a disavowal in which the realities of what is happening to the Yamuna are both seen and non-seen. YaRI provides knowledge for coping with this disavowal by distinguishing between knowing and not-knowing how to bond with river Yamuna, especially analysing her depredation in recent decades. From this knowledge will emerge pedagogy of hope that will perhaps heal the wounded river Yamuna. It is hoped that YaRI will inspire the young students in the times to come in these acts of healing, and a thousand more tales will flow.

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