

Science festival to outwit irrational beliefs

The city's first Parikrma Festival of Science will encourage students to develop a more hands-on approach towards the subject

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One of Shukla Bose's greatest challenges as the CEO and founder of Parikrma Humanity Foundation (a Bengaluru-based not-for-profit organisation that runs four schools across the city to provide education to slum children) has been to get children to give up blind practices and superstitious beliefs. "Many of them are first generation school-goers. Science is a great way to let them know that many of the beliefs are irrational," she says. For instance, many of them avoid eating or drinking during an eclipse but they don't know why. "We will explain that when there's no sun, it leads to more germs and hence, we are advised not to eat or drink during that period." In an attempt to inculcate a love for the subject and develop a more hands-on approach

from different strata will be able to interact, but also to ensure that each group understands the way the other lives. "For instance, during one of the sessions, we will make the students do a water audit, where they will calculate the water consumption in their house as well as how much they should be ideally consuming depending on the number of people in the household. The students from high-end schools will get an idea about how they can manage water economically," Bose explains. Other activities include a field trip to Jakkur Lake and the study of water conservation, water quality testing, STP visit and understanding waste water generation, rain-water harvesting, and government laws.

Some of the schools that will come together at the University of Agricultural Sciences, GKVK Campus on Bellary Road are National Public School, Delhi Public School, Mallya Aditi International School, along with government schools. The challenge has been to convince schools to send their students for

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towards learning science, Bose is organising a five-day science festival, which will bring together 20 schools and 250 students from across the city. Former President of India APJ Abdul Kalam will be inaugurating the festival.

"It's not a science fair or a competition. It is a festival. We want children to close their books and open their minds," she emphasises. The idea came to her a year ago when Bose felt she needed to do something to shake up the existing system which was restricted to learning by rote, cramming formulae and answering questions at the end of each lesson. "There are instances in everyday life where we apply science. We don't want the concept to get dehydrated through mechanical learning and students to be fearful of science," says the English literature student with an interest in science.

For the past year, Bose has been planning the festival, zeroing in on the kind of people who would be participating, drafting out the content and planning each day of the event. Based on the theme of water, the festival will see children in lab coats learning to read a water bill, using water economically (how to wash lunch boxes with minimal water), watching films such as Priya Ramasubban's *Uncommon Story about an Urban Commons* that looks at the rejuvenation of lakes in Bengaluru and learning about the battles that have been fought over water. They even have a segment on revival of watercolours, a medium that has faded with the use of oil paints and acrylics.

Bose has been insistent on including four government schools in the 20 schools that will be participating. Not just so that students

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five days. "Some of them wanted to know how their students should prepare, while others were apprehensive about sending their students away from school for a couple of days," she adds. To counter this, Bose has personally met several school principals to convince them about the importance of an initiative of this kind. "There is a reason why our country fares poorly when it comes to research and innovation. Kids need to be taught how to think outside the box," she says. Finding sponsors for this niche event wasn't easy either but as Bose says, "my love for working with children makes me work even with these hurdles."

At the end of five days, students will "record their reflections" in the form of a memorandum which they will submit to the Ministry of Water Resources, and share their ideas with activists and conservationists working towards improving water bodies in the city. The hope is that the children will take away something valuable from the event which, in turn, will create socially-engaged citizens in the future.

Parikrma Festival of Science will be held from January 19-23 in GKVK, Bellary Road