

Best Practice I

1. Title of the Practice

Paryavarniya Samvednansheelta: Sensitivity towards the Environment

Knowledge of diversity of our environment is vital to achieving a society, concerned about the responsible use of the environment and its conservation. Environment is no longer a merely a priority for the government, corporate organisations or the development sector but a responsibility and obligation of every individual. Thus, developing consciousness and appreciation of the natural habitat is central to developing sensitive students. While the violation against the environment perpetrated by previous generations needs to be reversed, it is crucial that today's generation are mobilised, their behaviour and attitudes transformed, thereby creating a viable and green earth for future generations. The focus of educational institutions today, has to be towards training and sensitising students to the criticality of generating a viable world ethos, inviolable biodiversity, and a green haven for tomorrow.

SPMC, understanding the criticality of enthusing future generations to the importance of serving and saving the environment, one of our endeavours is '*Paryavarniya Samvednansheelta*'.

1. Goals of the Practice

The intended outcome of '*Paryavarniya Samvednansheelta: Sensitivity towards the Environment*' are to instill environment consciousness in the students, reduce the carbon footprint on the environment, and create and bequeath a legacy of a safe and sustainable environment to the future generations.

SPMC's deep commitment to the natural environment is the underlying principle that guides this practice. Our institution considers it important to not only teach the students about environmental issues and its conservation, but also to live in continual harmony with the immediate surroundings. It is the constant endeavor of the college to help students understand and appreciate the linkages that can be forged between what they study about the environment and what they witness being practiced. Although we have been environmentally sensitive since the very inception of the institution, the growing need and urgency to address environmental concerns has necessitated that our Golden Jubilee festivities are supplemented with an ode to youth that progresses towards sustainable development.

1. The Context

The past few decades have been marked with rapid industrialization, and resultant urbanisation, alarming levels of pollution, particularly in Delhi, and disconnect of human beings with their immediate environs. The resultant feelings of anxiety and alienation, that characterise urban life, are oft manifested in behaviours of college students. It is in this discord that we attempt to address through our efforts to educate environmentally sensitive youth.

These initiatives and designated green spaces in college have made the institution environmentally friendly and its students environmentally conscious. Our campus has been conferred "The Green Campus" award in 2017, bearing testimony to the keen sensitivity our administration, faculty and students who are actively involved in translating

this practice. Our gardeners too, feel a deep sense of commitment towards the environment and one of them has also been conferred an award in this regard.

1. The Practice

Some of the initiatives that have been undertaken by us are geared towards spreading awareness, judicious use of resources and energy conservation. To this effect, the subsequent paragraphs detail out our activities.

- **Energy Conservation and Use of Renewable Sources of Energy**

Saur Urja: The construction of the college building is such that it maximizes on the natural light in classrooms, in turn saving electricity. One of our achievements in the direction of energy conservation has been to install solar lights in our college. We have also recently successfully installed solar panels that will not only reduce electricity bills but also make optimal usage of the vast space available on the rooftops of the college buildings.

- *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle:* We have undertaken several practices that address the fundamental principles of optimum resource utilization.

The energy consuming bulbs are being replaced with energy saving LED bulbs in a phased manner.

We are geared towards minimizing the use of paper. In this direction, IQAC has played a significant role by shifting office correspondence through emails, sharing information about time table, upcoming events, and important notices on website, maintenance of students' and faculty records online as far as possible.

The centralized admission and fee payment system has largely contributed towards the reduction of paper usage. All financial transactions have also shifted to electronic mode.

For more than a decade now, the college has been recycling paper and using it for sending out invites for special events such as the annual day and sports day. We are actively working towards reviving this practice.

We regularly organize e-waste collection drive which is then sent to appropriate recycling organisations. Students, faculty and administrative staff are encouraged to bring e-waste from their homes, such as discarded mobile phones, computers, radios, disk and pen drives, chargers, data cables etc.

We are also introducing setting up of vertical gardens in reused plastic waste bottles from the college canteen, around the college boundary wall. This will add to the green space in and around the college. Indoor plants add grace and elegance to the college building and liven up the concrete space. Our college gardens have received numerous awards over a period of years. We boast of a dedicated gardening staff that works throughout the year in creating lush lawns with seasonal plants and flowers.

- **Jagriti: Spreading Environmental Awareness**

Measures to spread awareness about environment are part and parcel of the everyday institutional life.

Celebration of *Hariyali Diwas* and organising tree plantation drives are some of our most vibrant annual activities. *Hariyali Diwas* features students' competitions that encourage usage of eco friendly products including rangoli competition. We also set up food stalls and foster tapping into natural dyes for adornment. The entire college ethos is geared towards celebrating oneness with environment.

Further, on various events organized throughout the year, at the departmental and college levels, guests are felicitated with planters instead of traditional mementos or flower bouquets. In the previous year, we also gifted 'plantable pens' that have been developed by our own alumnus. It is indeed a matter of great pride that our students are able to carry the sensitivity that they develop in their stay in the college to the life beyond!

Our Eco Club in collaboration with the Department of Environmental Science conducted a tree census. The tree census was conducted in 2017 with the help of a taxonomist. 423 trees present in the college campus were numbered. Each tree not only carries a number, but also the common name and scientific genus that enable students to gain adequate knowledge as they walk through the college campus.

Tips on eco-friendly practices that can be used at home and in college are prominently displayed in the college.

Every year students are taken to Yamuna Biodiversity Park and Aravali Biodiversity Park. The visits serve a two-fold purpose. First, it acquaints students with the rich biodiversity existent in our country. Second, it develops a sense of appreciation towards the possibility of converting a dry, barren land into a forest within the city limits.

Students also engage in interactive sessions with faculty and scholars from The Energy Research Institute (TERI) and renowned environmental activists such as Mr. Siraj Kesar. Such engagements benefit the youth by broadening their outlook and developing an intimate relationship with our surroundings.

Talks with environmental activists and movie and documentary screenings also make students living in the comfort of the capital city reflect on the impact of unbridled advancements in the name of development in places such as Narmada, Silent Valley, Aravalli Range, and the like.

In association with the TERI School of Advanced Studies, Embassy of Sweden, and the Eco-Club initiative of Department of Environment, Government of NCT of Delhi 7 Days Challenge was taken in 2018 by college students to change their daily lifestyle and orient it toward sustainable living.

- **Efforts for Carbon Neutrality**

We maintain two lush green lawns and has a well-kept sports ground. The college building is interspersed with various green spaces, in the form of trees and pathways covered with plants. We also have herbal garden. The garden comprises of *Tulsi*, Mint, *Ashwagandha*, *Aloe Vera* and *Turmeric* plants. Keeping in mind the medicinal utility of these plants, students and teachers are encouraged to opt for natural remedies and palliatives for lifestyle challenges.

SPMC is well-connected through public transport. We encourage students and faculty members to travel by metro and CNG buses and promote car-pool amongst the faculty members to minimize pollution emissions.

The college is equipped with two 10,000 liter underground tanks, which economizes the usage of water. The vast space of the playground acts as a natural seepage area for rain water. The playground acts as a natural rain water harvesting conduit.

- **Waste Segregation and Management**

The institution practices waste segregation at the time of collection itself. Students are informed to separate out wet and dry waste into different colour waste bins. The waste from canteen and garden is duly disposed-off in a pit in one corner of the college campus. We are converting this into a usable compost pit through vermin-culture. This will largely contribute to the reuse of waste in beautifying the college lawns.

Students are encouraged to practice minimal food wastage in the college canteen through offering eatables in various portion sizes.

1. Evidence of Success

Environment sensitization is an ongoing project. The success of the project can be gauged from the fact that the college keeps making considerable efforts to widen the ambit of the project and allocate as many resources as possible for its functioning and upgradation. Another yardstick for measuring success is student participation. All the environmental conservation initiatives undertaken by the college have full student support.

1. Challenges

There are many challenges and hurdles that we have faced and continue to face in implementing this practice. Environment conservation isn't anything new but its application at the scale of an entire organization is a novel idea for the students. This challenge is tackled by the college by holding environment related events as outlined above.

Best Practice II

1. Title of the Practice

Prayaas- Towards Creating Inclusive Physical and Mental Spaces

1. Goal

As the nomenclature suggests, *Prayaas* is an initiative towards empowering students from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, by providing them with a space for thought, expression, and encouragement. A democratic, multicultural, multilingual, disabled friendly and economically viable space nurtures attitudes of acceptance towards others, pride in our backgrounds and confidence in one's identity.

The college firmly believes in Tagore's conception of a fearless mind. It strives towards creating an environment:

“...where knowledge is free

and the world has not been broken up into fragments

by narrow domestic walls.”

We thus strive towards ensuring a barrier free environment, i.e. an environment that is free from physical, psychological, and financial hurdles. We believe that it is the youth of our country that have the potential to bring about a change in society. As an educational institution, we take it as our responsibility to empower students to become change agents. Accordingly, the theme of the Golden Jubilee Year of the college is **Youth for Sustainable Development**.

1. The Context

In a meritocratic world that focuses on academic excellence, admission in a college in University of Delhi is a feat in itself. The college invites students from different social strata. Most of these students have also struggled against social and economic obstacles in accessing higher education. It is the responsibility of the college to ensure that every student who gains admission here explores her maximum academic and creative potential. At SPMC, we understand that our students need the time, space and exposure that are essential to unlearning the teachings of a patriarchal system. It is only when they break the hierarchies emanating from stereotypes of caste, class, gender, and region that they will be able to ask informed questions about the socio-cultural ethos around them. Our institution is committed towards creating this enabling space for all the students, through close-knit personal engagements, as well as through, infrastructural optimization and financial assistance. SPMC aims at creating a participative paradigm, which enables healthy debate and discussion.

Over the last half a century, the college has continually worked towards an evolving world order. We are not just responsive to but also promotive of social change. Recent developments of broadening the definition of disability in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018 has brought psychological disorders and learning challenges into its ambit, in addition to physical disabilities. In creating an inclusive space, we not only use the law as the guideline but develop a conservative and promotive model, rather than merely a curative one. In other words, our focus is not just on meeting legal provisions but on developing young women who are sensitive and empathetic.

The college has always strongly believed in a productive alliance of education, teaching and community service. In this context, the idea of focusing on slum areas came from faculty members and students who drew upon their own life experiences of absurdity of extreme poverty. Having lived through the difficulties of urban poor locale, our students are able to empathise with the living conditions of the residential area around the college. The few coming from privileged backgrounds gain from insights shared by these students and develop an attitude of understanding and compassion.

1. The Practice

Sambal: Scaffolding Equal Opportunities: Sambal is a programme focussed on initiating a systemic process of scaffolding students and building an inclusive physical and social environment in the college. The programme works through three clear strands: financial assistance scheme, *Chetna*, the Enabling Unit of the college, and *Samta*, embracing Social Diversity.

Under its comprehensive financial assistance program, *Sambal*, the college provides various financial aids to students who find accessing education difficult, coming from modest financial backgrounds. Apart from 17 Awards and 15 Scholarships, the college also provides financial assistance under the program *Sambal*. Partial or full fee

concession is granted to economically weak students and students belonging to Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes are awarded Post-Matric Scholarships by the Directorate of Education, Delhi Administration. Students Aid Committee provides various ad hoc grants to deserving students in each academic session. *Shri Vijay Chandola Memorial Fund* was set up to provide financial scaffolds to the monetarily underprivileged. To further aid the meritorious students the college has Punita Needs cum Merit Scholarship, Shri Sultan Chand Memorial Scholarship, Sushma Gupta Memorial Scholarships, and Shri S.M. Puri Memorial Scholarships.

The second focus in *Sambal* is on creating a just space that is free from physical and psychological trauma. In this, the emphasis is on embracing diversity and removing hindrances in learning processes.

Chetna, the Enabling Unit, actively works towards ensuring that students have barrier free access to all educational opportunities available in the college. With the common aim of ensuring that students face zero discrimination on grounds of (dis)abilities. Developing a bank of audio books and resources, making ebooks available to students and collaborating with NSS to arrange volunteers for peer reading and learning for students with (dis)abilities are some of the regular activities of *Chetna*.

Our vision for inclusion encompasses physical and social diversity. Thus, it is not just physical but psychological barriers that we aim to address through *Samta*: Embracing Social Diversity. An active effort is made to ensure that students from diverse regional, cultural and linguistic backgrounds feel welcome and comfortable in the college. One of the initiatives in this respect is the setting up of the North East Students Cell. Away from home, students from diverse cultural backgrounds find support in the college by joining a special body where they can voice their anxieties and concerns openly. These, and other concerns, are addressed by the cell by arranging a range of activities that make the culture of the North East accessible to all students of the college. This also fosters greater tolerance and acceptance towards one another.

With the specific purpose of preventing and addressing experiences of discrimination within the institution, we have set up a special committee for students from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe backgrounds. Although every member of the college, student, teacher, and staff, is sensitized to the specific needs of the students from disadvantaged social backgrounds, we believe that it is not just overt forms of discrimination but the subtleties of oppression, violation of rights, denial of access, and establishing an equitable society. This is done through addressing instances of discrimination faced by students on a need basis, counselling students experiencing discrimination in society at large and sensitizing students towards government policy initiatives that aim to neutralise the centuries of oppression meted out against certain sections of society.

Infrastructure: The college boasts of having one of the best infrastructural facilities in the University of Delhi, with its classrooms equipped with projectors, open green spaces and a smoke free environment, in a low fee charging higher education institution in the capital city of Delhi. Large classrooms allow for free movement and restructuring of learning spaces. Coupled with technological support, classrooms are conducive to pedagogic innovations that encourage debates, discussions, peer learning, expressing alternative viewpoints, presentations and movie screenings. Open spaces in the campus provide ample opportunities to students to engage in taking learning beyond the classroom and exchanging perspectives freely. An open space fosters democratic exchange of ideas and stimulates intellectual appreciation of alternative viewpoints. Ample seating spaces in the rock garden, outside the canteen, gazebo, open viewing spaces in basketball courts,

gardens and playgrounds, and plaza at the heart of the college, are hotbeds of stimulating discussions for students.

Further, the building is equipped with ramps, tactile pathways, elevators (both in the main college building and the library), and wheel-chair friendly classrooms and restrooms that make the college a disabled friendly space. The college is working towards creating a barrier free environment in college to help aid the physical access to all students. The library is equipped with Braille literature and various softwares to aid the learning of the visually challenged students. The Equal Opportunity Cell and Enabling Unit is working on developing an audio library for visually challenged students under their initiative *Read For Me- Learning Initiative for Visually Challenged Students*. All the efforts discussed above are geared towards sensitizing the students of our college to understand the challenges that come with physical and emotional disabilities and reducing feeling of isolation and alienation. The college also has a Northeast Student Cell, which was established under the directive of the University of Delhi to minimize the socio-cultural harassment that this section of our society faces. The aim of the cell is not only to counsel and empower the girls coming from Northeast but also to sensitize all the students of the college to be appreciative of the multilingual and multicultural aspect of our country. By providing them with a space to freely express their concerns, the college ensures that an enriching multicultural setup is maintained in college.

Samavesh: Program for the Welfare and Upliftment of Slum Areas: The program initially started with a small group of students and interested faculty members who worked hard towards establishing a structure, vision and plan for the program. The cornerstone of any such project is a relationship of mutual understanding and cooperation between the different units of the project. The program was devised as an opportunity for students to realize their belief in the strength of education and initiative by intervening in real life hardships to make a tangible difference. The process of interacting with people of slum areas requires sensitivity and an awareness of how to tackle cultural, social and economic differences. A number of in-house workshops were conducted prior to slum visits and actual engagement. With experience, the students have developed a commitment towards humanitarian intervention through problem solving and tactical management of available resources.

The NSS has left no stone unturned in encouraging the students to take an active part in actual camps and visits. Nearly 500 NSS students devoted 15 hours each to the project. This is not only beneficial in the immediate results it bears but also in the larger frame as these students are more likely to remain attached to the values and virtues of community service and, therefore, will develop into strong and committed citizens.

Some of the key on-field activities conducted during the course of the project are listed below:

- Community Service Events at Peeragarhi Refugee Camp, PaschimVihar
- *Sab Padhein Accha, Sab Badhein Accha:* Conducted on 8 September 2014, it was an attempt to create awareness regarding the importance of education to the process of individual and social development through organized teaching, interaction sessions in slum areas.
- Stop Crackers, Save Environment: Conducted on 20 October 2014, the event was designed to sensitize people to the importance of living in harmony without natural environment. Bursting of crackers is a massive menace in a city already afflicted by air and noise pollution.

- Stop Violence against Women: Conducted on 9 September 2014, this was an intervention in the unfortunate but widespread problem of domestic abuse and violence against women. The students interacted with people regarding different ways of understanding gender, the increasing problem of rape and harassment in the city and the different ways of countering such a culture on an individual and community level.
- SEVA at ESI Hospital, Raja Garden: From 16th Nov 2014 – February 2015, the students volunteered to set-up medical assistance support with the cooperation of ESI Hospital, Raja Garden. The program was an attempt to sensitize people about the importance of regular check-ups and good dietary habits. All such events also provide an opportunity to the volunteering students to learn. Students who participate in medical care community service are also likely to remain more active, healthy and physically fit.
- Clean India Day, 12 February 2015: Students carried out awareness and cleanliness activities on this special day, encouraging widespread participation and highlighting useful recycling and waste management practices.
- Our students also visited Nihalpur slum area to carry out various educational, cleanliness and counselling activities. Apart from being a successful intervention meant to improve the basic living conditions of the area, the camp was also a significant learning curve for the students who derive confidence and courage from their initiatives.

Thus, *Prayaas* was devised as an opportunity for students to realize their belief in the strength of education and initiative by intervening in real life hardships to make a tangible difference. The process of interacting with people of slum areas requires sensitivity and an awareness of how to address cultural, social and economic differences. With experience, students have developed a commitment towards humanitarian intervention through problem solving and tactical management of available resources.

The program instils a spirit of welfare, care and initiative in students by providing them with an avenue to apply their acquired skills to the harsh challenges of the conditions of slum areas. Widespread problems of lack of education, issues of cleanliness, poor living conditions are targeted by the students. They attempt to set-up a basic structure for short and long-term solutions to these issues. The students are especially encouraged to bring classroom learning, the importance of education to the slum areas by conducting hands-on workshops, reading and writing sessions. Another critical aim of the program is to improve access to medical care facilities. The program also plans to set up a system of incentives and rewards to encourage further participation in this process of developing self-sufficiency through learning and improvement of basic living conditions.

The project plans a similar visit to Madipur village in the near future. That visit would also entail greater participation as we plan to invite Family and Child Welfare Department students and faculty members to set-up counselling sessions. The project also wishes to organize clothes, books and stationery donation drives to create a store of resources that can be deployed wherever required.

Read for Me: Learning Initiative for Visually Challenged Students: This program, initiated by *Chetna*- the Enabling Unit of the college, is multifocal in its approach. The program aims to record coursework and other secondary readings for visually challenged students while enabling the students to read and record for their peers. Due to constant revisions in the coursework and systems and with the introduction of CBCS mode, there is a serious lack of access of primary material for our visually challenged students. To counter this, we felt a need for an audio library but instead of recording it with professional

help, we reached out to our students, thus instilling a spirit of helping their classmates and understanding the challenges faced by them. Not only that, these student volunteers are honing their own reading skills and learning the nuances of voice modulation and fluency in language, techniques which are impossible to work on in a time bound classroom setup. Therefore, through this audio library we are creating a space not only for mutual interaction linking them with the love for books and reading, but also for understanding the nuances of reading aloud and how it helps in the learning of language. We plan to host our student volunteers on a rolling basis, so that more students can benefit from this program.

1. Evidence of Success

The first measure of the success of all such projects is the holistic development of individual personality of the students. Initiative and participation in such projects builds the self-confidence of students and this spills into their academic performance and classroom participation. The students naturally begin to evaluate and think critically the real circumstances that surround them but also the education that they receive. Therefore, passive learning is displaced by active, engaged, hands-on education.

Each individual project also comes along with spontaneous, immediate as well as long-term structural results. Cleanliness drives, educational workshops and donation drives encourage the recipients of these benefits to pursue a life of dignity and self-sufficiency. The students achieve a massive task for the larger community by bridging the gap between civil society and those on the margins of it. Initiating a process of interaction by itself is a considerable achievement for the project.

One of the other prized achievements of these programs is in the spirited environment of the college. The college is a visible hub of multicultural activities and it gets showcased in its various cultural events and competitions, transforming it into a space where each student has become our utmost priority and all the policies and systems are drafted by keeping the interest of the students at the forefront. Such an enabling and transparent system has empowered our students, who realize their potential and go on to achieve accolades in whichever field they pursue, with energy and zeal.

Problems Encountered and Resources Required

The college makes constant effort to counter problems that are slowing the progress of this practice. Inadequate ability of funds often restricts us from initiating more financial aid programs for deserving candidates. It is often a barrier in extending the scope and effectiveness of some of our initiatives such as providing basic medical care (first aid-kits, medicines of common use) and installation of new inventive systems to help the students with disability. The institution is committed to go beyond the limits imposed by economic and resource constraints. These problems are countered by an abundance of human resources who have a willingness to contribute in all possible ways.