

Guest Editorial

By Dr Itishree Padhi;

Professor and Head in Anthropology BJB Autonomous College, Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

I was on cloud nine, seeing my tiny tots back to my Ashram-like kinder garden almost after two years! Holding them made me feel as if I had regained all the strength I lost severely during the unprecedented pandemic. I was terribly missing the warmth of human touch and the comforting feeling of holding my angels in video calls. Touch deprivation is so painful.

For the last many years, my life has revolved around these small kids, including a few from slums, who are in my home away from their own, who stay with me for four to five hours daily. All between 4-6 age, they come for a year or two and with all my head, heart and hand, I prepare them to deal with the outside world boldly with a strong foundation in every single child's life, motivating them to face reality and fly on their wings!

"Hello, children! Have you started painting again? Are you ready to solve puzzles, to dance on the tune of your favourite music??"
No response.

There was no response as the hall was bubbling with the sounds of my angels' chuckling and giggling. I, too, was smiling through their lively guaw. That was so fulfilling and gratifying!!

Teaching them to draw the standing line, sleeping line, bending line, and again making them draw a half circle, full circle, dots.... nothing more, nothing less and they are done with all alphabets! Amazing! From prayer to painting, rhymes to the meme, each child's interest is carefully observed, and I try to shape it with touches of ethics and values indispensable for their firm footing on the mother earth.

Only a few days later, I suddenly noticed that my most beautiful angel was trying to wipe her tears from her wishy-washy pink face with marks of blisters, and she looked distressed.

I called her, made her sit on my lap and asked, pointing to the deep scars – What happened here today?

She was in a dilemma- to speak or not to, remained silent. I held her face lovingly, turned her towards me and asked again – Who made you sad darling ??

'Driver uncle'- she said. 'Where'? 'Inside the car, while coming here' – Her answer startled me, for a second I could not make sense. When I did the reply was scary, puzzling and disturbing. With deep dilemma and confusion, she glared at me through her tender, innocent eyes. I didn't uncover what could be a more heinous crime, and if we all are safe on this planet, earth!

"When desire blinds the mind with delusions and dust, O thou holy one, thou wakeful, come with thy light and the thunder prayed."
– Rabindranath Tagore.

I was shattered when I heard that my child was abused on the way to my sanctuary, my safe house of all spaces. Endless questions muddled my mind. What are we doing so far? We are always made to realize that children are the most precious and beautiful creations on earth. Where and why do we fail so miserably? Why is so much darkness still obstructing the future of our countless children? I am sure this is not the educated and civilized world we have been dreaming of for years, and I assure you, there is no modern technique- no software to remove this darkness. Each child deserves to enjoy its childhood in full bloom before entering adulthood. There will be many such interruptions in our efforts to make the



world a better place for children but we must hold on to the mantra: Tamasoma Jyothirgamaya- from darkness lead me to light.

Kudos to the Anthropos Foundation of India (AIF) for its commendable and continuous efforts to eliminate darkness that haunts our society and to make our world a better place to live, especially, for our children. AIF shoulders huge responsibility in sensitizing parents, sharpening teachers and in sincerely attempting to develop public awareness by alerting stakeholders to realize how crucial childhood is to a child and how effectively childhood matters! Suppose the notion of innocence refers to the simplicity and purity of childhood. In that case, we owe a lot to seeing if every child grows up with all their innocence and turn into a responsible citizen of the country! Because growing up comes at the

cost of the innocence of a child (unknown).

I strongly feel the exigency to make our children understand the thin line between bad touch and good touch through a sequence of conversations between parents and children and family. We cannot predict the future, but we definitely have some power to shape it. Knowledge, determination and self-guidance can prompt one to make endeavors in the desired direction, and these attempts subsequently can help unlock better futures for our children.

"The safety of people should be the highest law." - rightly said Marcus Tullius Cicero.

