



• Thrilled slumkids enjoy learning with their tablets. HT PHOTO

Tablets in hand, slumkids get a feel of hi-tech learning

HT EXCLUSIVE

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LUCKNOW: It's a sight to behold! Slum and village kids sitting under a tree, tablets in hand, learning to read and write English alphabets and numbers, besides trying their hand on digital drawing on the electronic slates. Excitement and happiness is writ large on their faces.

This is the scene every morning in Varanasi's Bhalasori village and the slum in Mawalya, when residents of the area are out to earn their livelihood.

Part of the global literacy programme of Dalit Laxmi Centre

HT CONNECT

Bhalasori village in Dibraganj block of Varanasi has a Hindustan Times connection, too. Ramesh Devi of Bhalasori won the prestigious 'HT Woman Special Award' in 2012 for entrepreneurship. Member of a self-help group, Ramesh, who was facing huge financial crisis, start-

ed making plastic bottles 11 years back. Today she is a successful entrepreneur providing employment to many others. Fully realising the importance of education, she has provided space on her residence premises to set up the Bhalasori centre of the digital school.

for Ethics and Transformative Values at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge, USA, the scheme plans to bring 100 under-privileged children of Mawalya area and Bhalasori village into mainstream education system.

The gender ratio of these 20 years age group children is 1:1 girls to boys.

While there is no government school in Mawalya, the nearest school from Bhalasori is situated two km away in Naya Bazar.

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The study material that is uploaded at MIT and delivered at these two centres through free Wi-Fi, includes digital drawing, alphabets, numbers, nursery rhymes, and also has exercise books and a test paper. Fifty tablets have been provided to the two centres, which teach 25 kids each, in two shifts.

Sheela Pandey, who assists the children at the Mawalya centre, says, "Children are quickly learning techniques to handle the screens. Also, a special bond is developing among them as they help each other in use of the tablet."

The centre has come as a boon for the kids' parents too as they don't have to worry about them while they go out in search of work. Most of the men here are

daily wagers and farm workers while womenfolk work as domestic help in houses in the area.

Saroja Rajbhar, a domestic worker in Mawalya, says, "My two daughters - Shweta (5) and Swati (6) - regularly attend 'computer-wall' classes. And now they have also started teaching me ABC at home." Another domestic worker Rekha Devi Rajbhar, whose six-year old daughter Soni has been attending the school since day one, is confused. She says she doesn't understand half of the things the girl now tells her.

Five-year old Priyanshu Yadav now gets up in the morning on his own as he doesn't want to miss school. He says, excitedly, "I don't need any help from the teacher. I can learn on my own. It's so simple. All I have to do is move my fingers on the screen."

The two unique study centres are run by NGO Human Welfare Association (HWA) with financial support of Sir Durabji Tata Trust (Mumbai) and Prajnayoga Foundation Charitable Society.

HWA president Rajnikant says, "The literacy project gives under-privileged kids freedom to learn on their own with limited assistance from teacher. They were given the tablets on June 8. Till then they did not know English and had never seen a computer. Today they are actively engaged in the education programme." (With inputs from Soniya Lohia in Varanasi)



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