

Institutional Best Practices

Making Plantation and Preservation of Trees a Mass Movement

Objectives:

- To put into practice general awareness of the importance of preservation of Nature.
- To nurture among the students the attitude and patience necessary for plantation of trees and their upbringing.
- To inculcate the interest in plant diversity and reverence for the ecosystem among the students, faculty and society at large.
- To contribute in improving the soil quality, organic carbon levels into the soil, counter desertification and thereby help slowing down the menace of global warming.
- To add to the aesthetic appearance of the campus through an experiential as well as enriching exercise.
- To develop skilled human resource and cater to the needs of the society.

Context:

In this era of environmental catastrophe and steady decline in plant diversity, the need to undertake reforestation drives has become pertinent. Existing trees should be preserved while new trees should be planted to reduce water runoff. Tree canopy can intercept a significant amount of rainfall before it becomes surplus. Trees have the capacity to improve water quality through the processes of evapotranspiration and nutrient uptake. Further, through root growth, trees can improve the infiltration capacity of the soils in which they grow. However, the formal tree plantation programmes often fail due to lack of proper initiatives and sustained efforts. On this backdrop, the present practice was launched with a zeal of bringing about a sustainable make-over of the institutional premises while increasing the greenery of the entire locality through pro-active participation of the students.

The institute believes in inculcating the ethos of nurturing environment among the faculty and students. This finds reflection in the floral diversity hosted by the campus. The institute has conceived of and brought into practice a nature-friendly assignment wherein selected students of each academic stream undertake responsibility of bringing up a chosen plant species of ecological, economic and medicinal importance. A systematic plan has been chalked out to make plantation and preservation of trees a mass movement.

Practice:

The institution enthusiastically runs the 'Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil Earn and Learn Scheme' under the aegis of Savitribai Phule Pune University. The main objective of the scheme, as envisaged by the university, is to develop a student as a multifaceted personality with academic excellence and a commitment to an egalitarian society. This scheme is basically undertaken for the benefit of students who are economically backward and can hardly afford higher education. The scheme has been designed to imbibe upon the student the idea that no work is big or small and there is dignity in labour. Thanks to this scheme, higher education has become accessible and available to the poor, meritorious and the marginalised.

The college has a 'Student Development Office' which coordinates this scheme, along with the others. The NCC and NSS work under this office. The Student Development Officer, along with other committee members, plans and executes the recruitment procedure for students. The norms and guidelines laid down by the university in this connection are strictly followed. While selecting the students, the Head of the Department of Botany interviews them in order to find out their interest in flora and fauna. Their physical fitness and willingness to work on the field are also taken into consideration. Once the selection is finalised and approved by the Principal, these students are educated and encouraged to take up the activity of plantation and preservation of various types of trees on the campus. At the same time, they are trained

to make vermicomposting. The plants are nurtured by these students throughout their academic affiliation with the college. Their non-participating counterpart is made to visit, observe and understand the nuances of the whole exercise occasionally. This is done under the guidance of the Department of Botany. They are provided with necessary support, training and guidance. The students then work as the ambassadors of this inspiring initiative. The NCC cadets and NSS volunteers are oriented to fortify these efforts. An appeal is made to everyone time and again to donate plants on special occasions like birthdays. The members on the Management as well as the faculty on the campus have responded to it positively. It has resulted in growing affinity with the ongoing exercise among all the stake holders. The other stakeholders too are routinely enriched with the necessary scholastic inputs on the flora and its upkeep.

Evidence of Success:

In the last few years, the students have developed the taste for this activity. The campus is now noticeably verdant and vivacious than it was in the past. This project also finds its reflection in the NCC and NSS programmes undertaken by the college. Prior to plantation, certain parameters - soil type, soil pH, soil compaction, the hydrology of proposed planting sites, etc. - were paid heed to ensure they are suitable for planting. These evaluations provided a basis for species selection and determination of the need for any special site preparation techniques. This enterprise has added vibrant plant diversity on the campus and ensured a steady input of flora. At present, the institute boasts of around 800 species of trees, shrubs and herbs that constitute a diverse habitat for a wide array of birds, insects and such arboreal fauna. The green campus, with its floral assortment, silently passes on a sublime message of harmonious symbiosis. Through conservation of flora and fauna, the institute practically manifests its innate concern for the Mother Nature. It is indeed a source of inspiration for the students, faculty and the visitors on the campus. There is remarkable rise in general awareness of the importance of preservation of Nature among everyone linked with this activity. Many faculty members voluntarily donate plants on the occasion of their birthday.

Naturally, they develop a special affection and affinity with those plants. The instances of setting on fire the dry leaves and branches have almost come to nought. All in all, enhanced interest in plant diversity and reverence for the ecosystem among the students, faculty and society at large.

Problems Encountered and Resources Required:

At the outset, the scheme encountered the basic problem of surveillance. Knowingly or unwittingly, the trespassers damaged the plants. They also spoiled the surrounding area. They used to cut the twigs to their own convenience. The stray animals treaded through the plantation, causing serious harm to the newly planted saplings. Lack of sufficient supply of water was another major hurdle. The source of water (well) was too far from the site. However, this obstacle was removed in the course of time. With the necessary resources made available, the project faced few problems in its conceptualisation. During the pandemic period, it received another setback. Due to strict lockdown and imposed restrictions on physical movement, it was nearly impossible to look after the cultivation. In spite of this, the NCC office and the Department of Botany worked in tandem with each other to save this treasure. Now, it has regained its momentum.

Sustenance of Reading Culture through 'Best Library User Award'

Objectives:

- To sustain reading culture on the college campus.
- To empower the students to achieve core competencies and face the global challenges.
- To inculcate a value system among the students through diverse reading.
- To enrich the learning experience of the students using internet searching tools.
- To train the learners think critically and comprehensively.
- To develop the students' imagination and boost their creative talent.
- To improve students' attention span and concentration capacity.
- To avail the therapeutic benefits of reading to overcome stress and cope with conflicts.

Context:

Reading is essential for personality development. Indeed, today's readers are more likely to become tomorrow's leaders. Reading is a time-tested technique to attain a person's mental and emotional growth. Inculcating the habit of reading is essential for the development of critical thinking skills. Reading helps a lot in building one's vocabulary and casts a lifelong influence on the development of the reader's cognitive skills. In an HEI, it has countless pedagogic benefits. Reading in early years ensures a pupil's academic success and imparts a lifelong love for learning. Excellent language skills lead to greater general knowledge through multilingual as well as multicultural exposure. Studies have substantiated that reading encourages the brain to think in a sequential pattern which is essential for logical analysis and clarity of expression. Reading improves memory, enhances empathic skills and nurtures tolerance. The institution intends to pass on all these benefits to its beneficiaries.

Practice:

Book is a source of invaluable information, intellectual insights and inspiring ideas. Books open doors to a world of ingenuity, creativity, and resourcefulness. At any stage, they can become a person's closest confidant and constant counsel for life. The institution is well aware of the significance of reading in the learner's life. Therefore, every year, 'User Orientation Programme' is convened for the new entrants at undergraduate and post graduate levels across all disciplines. Generally, the programme is planned in the months of August-September, when the admission process is nearly completed. The programme is hosted by 'Sheth Madhavlalji Dhoot Knowledge Resource Centre' of the college. 'Best Library User Award' is an innovative initiative of the institution.

The academic library of the institution organises various events aimed at increasing student's interest in books. These activities include Book Exhibition, Reading Inspiration Day, Books at Your Doorstep, Acquaintance Yourself with Classics, *Granth Dindi*, Library Orientation Programme, Book Review Competition, etc. 'Best Library User Award' is the culmination of these endeavours. This honour is conferred upon the student on the basis certain pre-determined parameters such as:

- Highest library usage as reflected in the Daily Attendance Register
- Careful analysis of the Library Cards which testify the student's range of reading
- Library usage for participation or performance in inter-collegiate competitions like elocution, drama enactment, poetry recitation, essay writing
- Average time spent by the users in the library during University Examinations and otherwise
- Number of photocopies of reference material procured by the students from the college library
- Active participation in the 'Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil Earn and Learn Scheme' launched by the SPPU
- Adherence to the rules and regulations laid by the library from time to time

The institution has a duly constituted Library Committee. It comprises of a Chairman, Secretary and members. The meetings of the committee are held at regular intervals. The screening of the contenders for the 'Best Library User Award' is one of the major responsibilities of this committee. The committee recommends the name to the Principal for final approval. The student is felicitated with the award at the hands of the Chief Guest on the occasion of Annual Prize Distribution Function. The rationale underlying this event is to acknowledge and appreciate the student's innate admiration for books in ceremonious manner. At the same time, it is an attempt to pass on a positive message to the other students attending the gathering.

Evidence of Success:

The 'User Orientation Programme' has secured significant success. Students entering the first year of all undergraduate and post graduate programmes - for whom it was intended and initiated - welcomed this activity. Linkage with the world of books proved to be enriching and enlightening for most of them. Spending time with the books as well as with each other proved conducive to the inculcation of a value system among them. It was a gesture on the part of the institution to encourage them to respect the cultural pluralities and diversities amongst them.

Apart from this, the students could witness the drastic change in functioning of the library due to availability of digital means. They came across new concepts like automation, Library Management System (LMS), periodicals, print and non-print material, publication ethics and plagiarism, etc. They were introduced to the renowned agencies including Information and Library Network Centre (INFLIBNET), Developing Library Network (DELNET) and National Information Centre (NIC). 'Best Library User Award' was sought after by the students, especially those preparing for competitive examinations. Thus, it had a lion's share in sustaining reading culture on the college campus. It has been instrumental in bringing about positive change in the students' mindset.

Problems Encountered and Resources Required:

The programme encountered certain obstacles due to insufficient manpower, limitations of infrastructure, difficulty in deciding a suitable time slot for the students of different disciplines, etc. Many students were reluctant to approach the library authorities due to diffidence. The students from rural background felt it challenging to tune themselves with their urban counterpart. Above all, it was a gigantic task on the part of the organisers to divert the students' attention from screen to script. A few of them were restless when asked to reduce their presence on the social media and concentrate on what they read. Initially they ignored the tips to improve attention span and concentration capacity. It was strenuous to induce them to avail the therapeutic benefits of reading. They were hardly convinced about the viewpoint that reading is a remedy to overcome stress and cope with conflicts. Students from Marathi medium avoided borrowing books in English.