

The Art of Living Free Tribal Schools revolutionise tribal education in India

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"Education is civilisation's greatest leveller. It has the power to empower the weakest of the weak, bring peace to the world and alleviate poverty. It is often seen as the only lit path in the pursuit of happiness." Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, a globally revered spiritual leader and humanitarian, emphasises the transformative potential of education, especially for children.

In 1999, alongside a dedicated team of Art of Living volunteers, Gurudev undertook the challenging task of establishing free schools in remote tribal villages of Jharkhand. What began with a single school and 12 students in Ghatshila blossomed into an extensive network of 1,262 free schools spanning 2,032 villages across 22 states in India. Today, these free schools provide quality education from kindergarten to high school for over 1,00,000 children.

The mission: To deliver world-class education and foster strong values

The Art of Living Free Tribal Schools weave Vedic principles and Indian culture into their fabric, creating centres where academic excellence and personal growth flourish harmoniously. Students from marginalised communities are given opportunities they would not have otherwise received - they are strengthened both mentally and physically through a rich curriculum that includes yoga and innovative learning methods. Life skills are taught alongside academics, instilling a positive outlook and a lifelong thirst for knowledge.

Changing Mindsets

Despite the zero cost, many parents initially hesitated to enrol their children, fearing the loss of an income source. Today, these students are breaking barriers, setting new records, and bringing pride to their communities by excelling in diverse fields. Whether they're winning archery medals, dominating the football field, or showcasing their technical skills in robotics, these students are thriving. The schools provide comprehensive development opportunities, including access to libraries, sports training, and various crafts; equipping students with skills for sustainable livelihoods.

All the students come from low-income families, 48% of which are girls. With a minimal dropout rate and over hundreds of new admissions annually, the schools are nurturing a bright future for

their communities.

A Student's Perspective

"I'm Anil Kumar Murmu, an 8th-grade student at The Art Of Living Free Tribal School in Hendaljuri, Jharkhand. I enjoy learning here. Besides academics, we engage in computer skills, robot programming, drawing, football, and archery. My parents, who are farmers, are proud of my education here. I aspire to join the Indian Armed Forces and love studying with all my teachers."

Empowering the Next Generation

"I recently took my board exams and got 84 marks," says Sunanda. Wearing a blue skirt and checked shirt, her confidence and clear communication might make one think she's from a different kind of school. But Sunanda is one of the 3,200 first-generation rural children who benefitted from free education through The Art of Living's tribal welfare projects in Jharkhand.

Sima Gope, an alumna of The Art of Living Free Tribal School in Ghatshila, Jharkhand and currently serving with the BSF, is a symbol of the success of The Art of Living's initiatives, inspiring countless young people. Her journey proves that students from these schools can, with determination, achieve their aspirations.

Teachers Making a Difference

"I'm Sudhanshu Sahoo, and I have been teaching in Hendaljuri since 2018. The nurturing environment here encourages every child's progress, which I sincerely appreciate. It's remarkable that children can access a school that inspires excellence in such a remote area. I am fortunate to teach here, and I thank Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar for this opportunity."

"I'm Babita Pathar from The Art of Living Free Tribal School in Ghatshila, Jharkhand, 2013 batch. I teach at Kesarpur School, a branch of the same institution under The Art of Living. I thank our dedicated teachers for their hard work in providing quality education."

Facilities and Support

Students benefit from a range of free provisions such as midday meals, medical camps, well-equipped libraries, bicycles, school buses, books, computer labs, sports equipment, and stationery. The curriculum includes exploring robot programming, artistic expression through painting, precision in archery, cultivating green thumbs, discovering natural farming practices and more.

Collaboration

The Art of Living; Housing Finance Ltd. and the Pahel Foundation have formed a partnership to improve educational facilities and sustainable development in free tribal schools in East Singhbhum District, Jharkhand. As a result, three schools now have fully equipped computer labs. Additionally, two schools have benefitted from installing solar photovoltaic systems, ensuring a clean and renewable energy source. Transportation support is provided to students living in remote tribal settlements, enhancing their access to education.

Shining Scholars

Manu Singh, a standout student from The Art of Living Free Tribal School in Khunti, secured the 4th position in the recent district exams with an impressive 92.4% in Class X. Manu is a first-generation learner - his parents never attended school.

Seven outstanding Class VII students from The Art of Living Free Tribal School in Hendaļjuri, Jharkhand, have been honoured with scholarships through the prestigious JRD Jyoti Fellowship for the second consecutive year.

The Winning Streak

- The Art of Living Free Tribal School in Hendaļjuri excelled at the State Archery Championship in Hazaribagh on September 29th, 2023.
- At the HCL-ICC Inter-Camp Archery Tournament in Ghatsila on March 12, 2024:
 1. Meghrai Soren clinched the gold.
 2. Shraddha Namata secured the silver.
 3. Alomani Mahato earned two silver medals.
- The Hendaļjuri football team secured the second runners-up trophy at the JRD Foundation tournament at Tin Plate on March 18, 2024, competing against nineteen teams.
- Hendaļjuri secured the runner-up position in the Tata Kolhan Super League Football Tournament, held at FTC Baraghat (Mosabani) and organised by the Tata Steel Foundation.
- 7th grade Hendaļjuri students won a bronze medal in JRD Tata Foundation's Inter-School Archery Competition, showcasing their remarkable achievement.

The Art of Living's dedication to education is creating a world of happiness and opportunity.

The long-term goal of tribal education is to uplift marginalised communities by providing education and empowerment. Teachers work diligently with students, encouraging their interests and aspirations. Through The Art of Living Free Tribal Schools, thousands of first-generation learners are receiving the education and support they need to succeed. Of great significance is the fact that while acquiring modern knowledge and science, ancient traditions are also preserved.

About The Art of Living Social Projects

The Art of Living is dedicated to empowering individuals with a unique blend of innovative programmes and contemporary techniques. The organisation fosters personal and professional growth, equipping individuals globally with essential life skills, emotional intelligence, and resilience for navigating the complexities of today's world.

Press release by CISION

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