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Empowering Rural Livelihoods: A Closer Look at Barefoot College

Barefoot College, situated in Tilonia, Rajasthan is a community-based grassroots organization working to make marginalized communities sustainable and self-sufficient since 1972.

The founder of Barefoot College, Mr. Bunker Roy once famously said, "Strengthen the rural areas and you will find less people migrating to urban areas. You give them opportunity, self-respect & self-confidence, they will never go to an urban slum". The visit to Barefoot College reaffirmed this sentiment and renewed my passion to work towards rural livelihoods. It's an innovative model that has enabled countless individuals, often women, to establish sustainable livelihoods within their own communities.

This college provides training to people in varied sectors, often depending on the need of the community and to enable them to have a sustainable livelihood. Solar is one of the courses that is conducted on the campus. It was impressive to see a class that is bustling with women, especially for a course which is considered to be non-traditional. It was endearing to hear their stories of courage and commitment - leaving their families behind to join the training, staying at an unknown place for months and future plans of being an entrepreneur. In the classroom, it was a common sight to see women with toddlers on their lap while they practiced the wiring for their assignment. Barefoot College has built a whole community in their premises, where a woman who aims to enrol herself for a course can bring her child and the education needs of these children are supported till class 8th.

There were also international students coming from countries such as Peru, Uganda, Sudan, Chile, Nigeria, and a few more. To communicate with these students, they employed innovative ways such as color coding and sign language to learn how to wire and assemble a solar lamp. This exemplified the institution's inclusive and innovative pedagogical approach.

Apart from the Solar training room, there are scores of other centres and programs that supports this unique ecosystem. There is a Medical Section, where Barefoot College provides essential care to its community members, and the Botanical Section, which is dedicated to the preservation of endangered medicinal species. A visit to the 'Kabaad ka Jugaad' (Best out of Waste) section unveiled how the team beautifully recycles objects like bins, vase, containers / boxes out of waste newspapers. They also produce book covers, book marks, tea coasters and more out of the bits of cloth that is considered wasted, which are available for sale under the brand '*Hatheli Sansthan*'.

The visit is incomplete without the trademark puppet show. The trajectory of the show is such that it conveyed the historical struggles of the marginalized community, shedding light on their past ostracism, unheard grievances, and demystifying the social ills of the society by the innovative use of puppetry.

The experience of Barefoot College has filled me with unforgettable moments, motivation and inspiration for the work and ignited a fresh outlook towards livelihoods.

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