

‘The Week’ Magazine, February 9th 2003: ‘Looking for that Spark’:

USP: LOOKING FOR THAT ‘SPARK’

Sri Atmananda Memorial School:

Malakkara, Kerala

Inception: 1987

Examinations: ICSE

Fees: Rs 1,500 to 1,700 a month

There was a scuffle on the school grounds. A mountain of children falling all over a man in the middle. No sooner was he tossing them off, than they were back on him. Boisterous fun? Also called teacher-child bonding.

Vijayalakshmi and Surabi Pradeep of class 4 are demonstrating Bharatanatyam to a group of kindergartners who are learning the Malayalam letter ‘bh’. The girls had suggested the idea to the KG teacher, recorded the *jathi* (song) using their own voices on tape, and dressed in costumes for the occasion... Eight-year-olds, and already into production!

The lower primary in Sri Atmananda Memorial is dynamic where “the verandahs and playgrounds are the classrooms”. The upper primary and high school sections are on a mountaintop. The school, which follows the KPM approach to [Children], takes its name from its founder [Sri] K. Padmanabha Menon. The approach: the teacher values the child unconditionally, the child trusts the teacher and feels safe to express itself.

“We make the opportunity, they take everything as a challenge and children don’t even realize they are learning,” says principal Tarla Nanavati. Examinations are introduced in a fun way in class 5 through an Exam Fest. Children and teachers submit their questions in advance and on the day of the fest everyone joins in answering them. Board games - created by the teachers, and in some cases by the children themselves — are used to present subjects in an appealing way. “They are designed so that no one loses; everyone learns,” says Sheridan Wilson, secretary of the foundation that runs the school. Orient Longman published a group of these games under the title *Educational Board Games*.

The measure of success of their students? “There was one boy who love to sit in the sink all day, when he was in the KG,” recalls Suzanne Buckley, joint secretary. “Today he is studying hotel management. In his life, he is a success. People tell us that our children have a brightness. It is because they have been valued. They don’t carry baggage and it makes them very strong.” It is easy to understand why.

By Farwa Imam Ali, Nistula Hebbar and Litta Jacob