

# THE KAJOLI MODEL

## Learning with Laughter, Growing with Joy

**What truly sustains the Kajoli Model over time is its deeply rooted, community-driven structure. These centres are not dependent on external aid; rather, they thrive on the collective efforts and commitment of the local community.**

WASIM BIN HABIB, back from Nilphamari

"Who will pick up the duck's photo?"

The moment Rafia Sonamoni posed the question to a group of 26 children, four eager hands shot up, accompanied by excited shouts of, "I will!"

Among them, Partha Roy was the most enthusiastic. He was chosen to pick the card with the duck's picture from a large board made of black cloth with pockets. Each pocket held a card – one side displaying a word and the other featuring an image of the word alongside the text.

Sprinting towards the board, the five-year-old scanned the cards quickly and selected the one with the duck's photo. Turning to his classmates, he stretched out his hand with the card and asked, "Friends, have I picked the duck's photo?"

"Yes!" the children chorused, clapping enthusiastically.

Rafia, smiling warmly, thanked Partha and then guided him towards the next challenge: assembling the word. She asked him to find and arrange the individual letter cards to spell "duck."

Partha turned back to the board and began searching another row of

why kids learn so fast."

The centre was set up on an open veranda at Rafia's home. She finds it rewarding when guardians express their happiness at seeing their children read and write so quickly.

"Most of the guardians are very enthusiastic about their children's education here. They are particularly amazed to see their kids learning Bangla and English without having any textbooks or khata," said Rafia, a first-year honours student at Nilphamari Government College.

The Daily Star recently visited eight such centres, popularly known as the "Kajoli Model", in Nilphamari and witnessed how a remarkable initiative is shaping early education and empowering young learners with essential literacy skills.

#### LEARNING THROUGH PLAY: THE KAJOLI MODEL

The journey of the Kajoli Early Childhood Learning Model, developed by RIB, began in 2002 following the successful completion of a unique action research project in Kajoli, a village in Sreepur Upazila of Magura district. In January of the following year, 10 centres were launched.

The main objective was to develop an early childhood model that makes education accessible and attractive to children from marginalised and disadvantaged communities in Bangladesh, ensuring pre-school education is available at very low or no cost.

"Many parents from disadvantaged families believe that education is difficult and expensive, and meant for wealthy families. We decided to break this misconception," Dr Shamsul Bari, Chairman of RIB, told The Daily Star.

Through RIB's research, he said, they decided to do away with traditional textbooks, paper, and pens in the Kajoli Model because these involve costs. "At the same time, we wanted to instil in children the idea that learning is fun," said Bari, who conceived the model through his extensive experience of teaching Bengali at several universities in the US.

Under the model, each learning centre has 26 children, a teacher, a

division – through visual and tactile learning.

By manipulating the beads, students develop an understanding of numbers and patterns. For example, they can physically group beads to see how multiplication works, or slide them apart to explore subtraction.

"All we wanted was to make education feel like fun. Children see the pocket board activities as fun and games and therefore do not lose interest in learning. This method fosters curiosity and builds confidence," said Dr Bari, a former top-ranking official of UNHCR.

"After attending classes for a year, students have a solid foundation and are fully prepared for primary education at local schools," he added.

Since its inception 23 years ago, nearly 99,000 children across the country have received pre-primary education through Kajoli Model centres. What started with just 10 centres grew to 200 over the years. However, the numbers declined due to the impact of Covid-19. Today, 87

Such a drill was witnessed at a centre in Ramnagar Bazar, Nilphamari Sadar.

Leading the exercise was Kotha, who guided her fellow students through the drill, encouraging them to follow her lead.

With expressive gestures, she pointed to her classmates and said, "I am," "You are," "He is," "She is." In perfect unison, her peers echoed her words.

Five-year-old Shartok then took the lead: "I am a boy," "You are a girl," "He is a boy," "She is a girl," with the class repeating each sentence after him in rhythm. The centre, set up in an unused room of a school abandoned a few years ago, resounded with the enthusiastic voices of the lively children.

Taking the floor next, Ferdousi Begum, the teacher of the centre, introduced a new set of phrases: "We are," "They are," "You are," "The boys are." She then said: "This is," "That is," "These are," "Those are." Her students followed along, their voices blending in a rhythmic chorus.

She then showed her students a pen.

The children said in unison: "I have a pen."

Students at the centre learn faster

thanks to the learning techniques,

said Ferdousi, who has been teaching

for the past four years.

She said the children's eagerness

was unmistakable.

As a demonstration, she asked her

students to write down their names.

They excitedly grabbed chalk and

rushed to the blackboard attached

to the wall, putting their learning into

action.

At a centre in Babupara of

Ramnagar, children started offering

salam as soon as this correspondent,

along with a team of RIB members,

arrived.

As their teacher, Pravati Roy, asked

them to recite a rhyme, the children

took no time to begin. "Twinkle,

twinkle little star, how I wonder what

you are..." they chorused, using hand

gestures.

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