

E-Learning Curve

An e-village square run by an NGO demystifies technology for rural children and helps them earn

By **Nirmala Ravindran**

Fingers are earnestly clicking the mouse and working the keyboard in a brick red building near Jakkur airfield on the outskirts of the country's it capital, Bangalore. But this is no software centre. It is the e-village square of an NGO Children's Love Castle (CLT). The objective of their learning centre is to demystify technology for village folk and teach them to use it for creating different products. Photoshop, CorelDraw, Java and PageMaker are no alien words for the 30-odd children here aged 5 to 12.

CLT's aim is to educate not just village children but their entire community. So their relatives are also being taught to use computers in a way that is relevant to their lives. The mothers have a dual responsibility: to learn to use a computer and take forward the adult literacy campaign. So while Begum Bibi is taught how to use a scanner to copy patterns for garments to be made in the tailoring unit, her daughter uses Photoshop to create rangoli designs for greeting cards that will be printed at the centre. Says **Bhagya Rangachar**, founder of CLT, "The aim is not to provide fancy equipment to children. We believe in integrating technology into their lives."

Pickles, spices, papads, packed snacks, garments and other products made by villagers will be e-marketed soon by CLT's women's wing comprising the mothers of the children who are associated with the organisation. Once the structure of the e-market is in place, it will be possible to place orders online. **Rangachar** says that technology has now become an integral part of the life of villagers who have participated in CLT's programmes.

The NGO has not only opened a window to technology for underprivileged children but also made them aware about issues like rainwater harvesting. In some cases, it has made schooling possible for children whose parents did not have enough money to do so. Rashmi, 12, was on the verge of dropping out of school when CLT bailed her out by providing mid-day meals and helping her earn through its programmes. She now performs daily chores at the CLT centre and also helps in taking care of the younger children. Rashmi was part of the group which went to Boston to participate in a meeting of children from all over the world.

CLT's efforts combine conventional education and non-formal learning. Experts from

PICTURE SPEAK

LENDING A HAND: **Rangachar**
with CLT's children

the fields of technology, art and theatre contribute to the growth of children. Students have developed strong ties among themselves and with their teachers. Ties that liberate.