

# Stage of opportunities for kids

**JHINUK MAZUMDAR AND NEHASINGH**

Calcutta: An eight-year-old boy whose vision is blurred behind a couple of feet told his friend his dream was to recite in front of a large audience and win a prize.

Avirup Raha, a Class IV student of Louis Braille Memorial School for the Sightless, was among 15 girls and boys who participated in a 10-day theatre workshop and staged a play at the end of it.

"This is the first time I am performing on such a stage and I want more such opportunities. I believe I can do everything and my poor vision cannot restrict me," Avirup said after the play on Thursday.

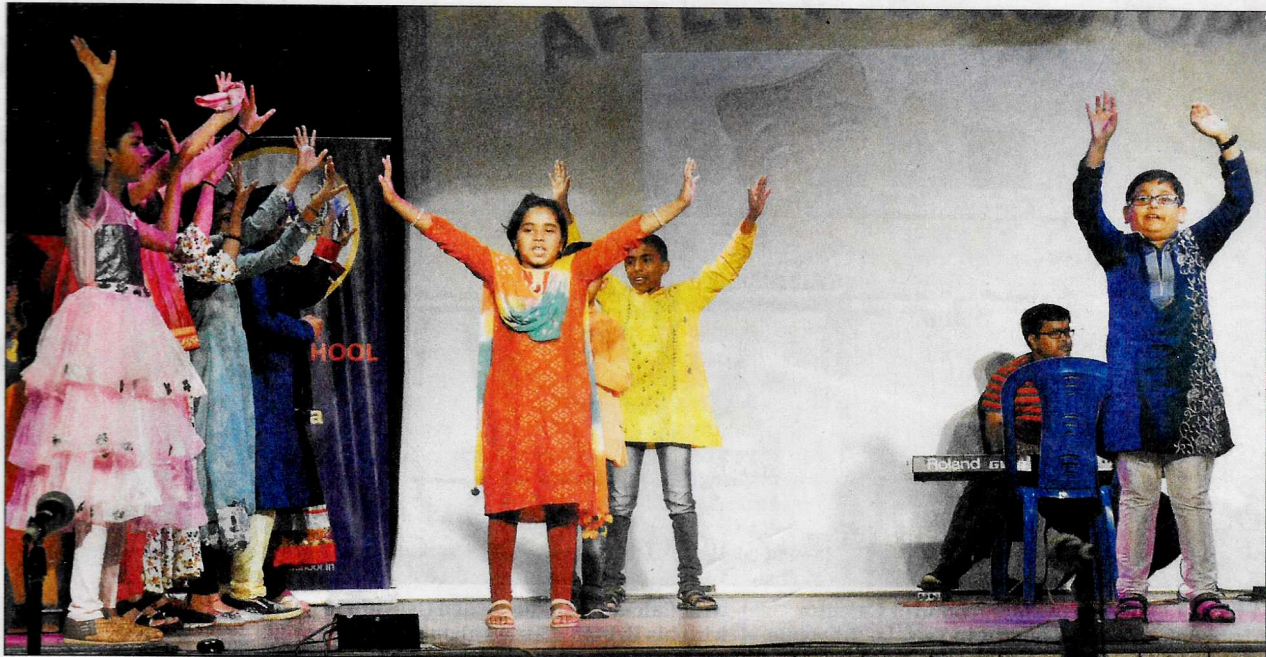
The boy, along with his mother, travels all the way from his school in Uttarpara to Apeejay School on Park Street, where the workshop is conducted, every day before going home to Boinchee in Hooghly district, more than 100 km away.

The participants at the workshop — most of them first-generation learners and from underprivileged families — attend tutorial classes at Apeejay Anand Children's Library every day. The parents of many of the children work as drivers or help.

"We want to provide the facilities that we offer the children of our school to other kids as well because they have potential that can be nurtured. If given the right opportunity, they will be able to maximise their potential," said Reeta Chatterjee, the principal of Apeejay Schools.

Suparna Mondal, 9, who lives in a garage with her elder sister and parents, also took part in the workshop. Her mother works as a help, while her father sells lottery tickets. He would earlier build panels with bamboo poles but had to give up the work after he fell while dismantling one and fractured both his ankles.

"We have shifted from Barhat to Calcutta in search of better opportunities. My younger one attends classes at the library to learn English," said



Children enact a play at Apeejay School, Salt Lake, at the end of the 10-day theatre workshop. Pictures by Sanat Kr Sinha



The children with their certificates after the programme

Suparna's mother, Purnima. The workshop conducted by Rijita Chatterjee, a theatre artist who has done a course in theatre studies from the University of Surrey, UK, had participants aged eight to 14.

One of the short plays put

up by the children spoke about freedom from starvation, inequality and partiality at home. Some of the children said they did not have the freedom to wear what they wanted or to go out and play because they have to help in household

chores. "Initially, they were not ready to speak but gradually they opened up through theatre. They didn't speak about their hardships at home directly but it came out through their performances. One of

them started crying while reciting her lines and one of them wanted to talk about his aspirations," Rijita said. "The girls and boys have become more confident and each of them would look forward to the workshop and attend it."