

Site Visit Report – April, 2001

by

S. Sundar Kumar Iyer

Asha Mid-Hudson Valley Volunteer

During my recent trip to Kolkata (Calcutta) in late April, 2001, I visited the Anandan project to which some funds were sent by Asha Yale last year. Before leaving for India, I had sent an email to Ms. Indrani Ghosh (the primary contact and the aunt of Karna Basu – ex Asha Yale volunteer) informing her about my likely visit to the project. She acknowledged my email and gave me contact information for the project.

I had called up Ms. Simanti Bose (at whose house the Janak Road project is located) on 20th April. I came to know that Anandan had expanded its activities since Asha Yale had sent funds to the project. Besides the children's coaching facility at Janak Road, they had another location at Hazra Road. I was informed that the children were to give a cultural performance at the Hazra Rd. school the next afternoon and was invited to attend it. Since I had already committed to some work on Saturday noon, I was unable to promise to attend it, but said that I will do my best to attend.

On Saturday, 21st April, I did manage to go to the school, but reached late and when I went there, the programme had just ended. I could see that the children were very excited and were wearing different costumes and felt bad that I missed their performance. ☹ However, I did briefly get to meet Ms. Indrani Ghosh, who introduced me to Ms. Nandani Mitra, the treasurer for Anandan. They invited me to visit the centres anytime during the weekdays. Ms. Mitra offered me take to the two centres on Monday, after which, I could join the core group of Anandan at their monthly meeting.

On Monday, 23rd April, I went to Ms. Mitra's residence from where she took me to the centre at Hazra Rd. With the help of the Calcutta Corporation, Anandan managed to get two rooms at a school run by the Corporation, where they were running vocational training and another coaching centre for children. I was told that today, there are 82 children (60 + 22) in the two centres. There are 8 students enrolled for training in tailoring and 25 for training as beauticians. [These numbers do not match up with another document that I received. It is possible that the figures have changed since the document was prepared.]

The Hazra Road Centre

When we arrived at the Hazra Rd. centre, the "classes" had just started (Figure 1). There were four girls who were attending a tailoring class (Figure 2). They were in the Class X-XII students' age-group and some of them had just given the board examinations. I, briefly, talked to them. It was clear to me that this training was a source of encouragement for these girls to take up some vocation and also gain self confidence and economic independence. Then I went to the coaching class going on in the adjacent room. There were about 15 children present (Figure 3). They came from poor families and were attending primary schools in the area. This coaching centre provides them the much needed academic guidance and support. I talked to the students and the teachers. The children were full of enthusiasm. I asked them the names of the schools they attended and what they were studying. They answered me with cheerfulness and clarity.

Following this, we went to the Janak Road centre. On the way, Ms. Mitra explained to me the challenges faced by the children and women from the underprivileged sections of the society. She felt that helping them become economically independence was important.

The Janak Road Centre

The Janak Road Centre was the place Anandan started its activities and is run in the house of Ms. Simanti Bose (Figure 4 and 5). There were about 10 children. I was told that the attendance was poor probably because of the big cultural programme during the weekend. I talked to the children and asked them questions based on what they were studying. It was clear the children were at home here and were getting the much needed academic environment that is so important at their young impressionable age. Many of the children when the first came were performing very poorly in academics, were not well mannered and not much aware of hygiene. But over time, they have improved in academics. Many of them had been admitted to good schools in the locality. The nutritional tiffin that is provided to the children has also

helped in improving their health. A case to the point is young Mampi Mondol. When she had come to Anandan, she had not even learned to hold the pencil properly. However, today, she is a good student and hence has been admitted to a Swarna school and continues to perform well. She is one of the students whose schooling is being sponsored by Anandan.

At Janak Road centre, I also got to see the cupboard that was purchased with some of the money sent by Asha-Yale (Figure 6). This was serving the purpose of storing all the books and material needed to run the centre at Janak Road.

Anandan Volunteers Meeting

We then proceeded to one of the residence of Ms. Indrani Ghosh, where the meeting of the core members of Anandan was being held. The meeting began on time. The members thanked Asha Yale for their generous support and for being there when Anandan activities had just taken off. Ms. Indirani Ghosh described to me the goals and vision of Anandan and passed me some typed material describing the group. (Appendix I). Because of the greater need and demand for the facilities provided by Anandan, there is a need for a more space as well as a more permanent location. The group has been approaching the Corporation for allotting it a building to carry on its activities. They plan to continue exploring this option once the State Assembly elections got over. The alternative plan was to locate a flat, raise funds and purchase it. The long term vision is have many such centres around the city which will be a source of support for any child who is in need of it. I was then asked to give an overview of Asha for Education, which I did. Following this, we had some snacks and I had to leave while the group continued their meeting to review the status and progress of the activities at Anandan.

Asha Yale Funds Usage

Anandan members appreciated the support of Asha-Yale. Asha Yale had sent \$500. Portions of the fund have been allocated for tiffin and toys for the children. Some of the money has been spent for buying a cupboard. The money is also being used to pay rent to the Calcutta Corporation for the two classrooms being used for Anandan activities. Details of the finances can be found in Appendix II in the email originally sent by the treasurer Ms. Nandani Mitra.

Summary and Observations

- Anandan has managed to expand its activities to include more children and also to start some vocational training for young girls.
- The children I met appeared to be at home at the two centres. I think that these centres are providing a nurturing academic environment during the day for these children at an impressionable age.
- The Anandan team appears to be dynamic and is working towards a goal of providing facilities in the city that can be of benefit for underprivileged children.
- The short term goal for this team is to provide a bigger and more permanent centre to carry on its activities.
- The team has been proactive in pursuing avenues to reach its goals, such as, approaching the local government or raising funds from friends and well wishers as is required.



Figure 1. Ms. Nandani Mitra, the treasurer for Anandan, in front of the school run by Calcutta Corporation. The second centre of Anandan is run in two rooms rented from the corporation.



Figure 2. Students at the tailoring and cutting class at the Hazra Road centre.



Figure 3. Children at the coaching class in the Hazra Road centre of Anandan.



Figure 4. Some of the volunteers and children at the Janak Road centre of Anandan.



Figure 5. A few more children and a volunteer at the Janak Road centre.



Figure 6. This bookshelf was purchased with Asha-Yale funds.

Appendix I

Printed text passed to me at the Anandan Volunteers' Meeting.

Anandan is a society registered under the Society Registration Act working for the welfare of children and women from economically backward sections of the community. It was started in April 1999 and set up its first centre with a group of 15 children at a volunteer's house.

The aim of the Centre is to:

1. provide an all round education to needy children;
2. help children who attend school to get a better understanding of the school curriculum;
3. educate children who for various reasons are not able to attend school;
4. prepare children to join school and to sponsor their education;
5. inculcate civic values in children and help them to develop into responsible members of society;
6. develop good reading habits and an appreciation of fine arts and music;
7. teach women vocational skills which will help them to earn a livelihood.

In November, 2000 a second centre was started at the premises of a school of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation. 20 children are enrolled at the centre. Alongside, a vocational centre for women was set up. Women are taught tailoring, beauty treatment and spoken English. At present there are 24 students, two general teachers and two vocational teachers.

The volunteers take turns to visit the centres every day and participate in teaching and supervision. They also fund the activities of the society and bear the cost of refreshments to the children. Funds are also being raised from friends and relatives in India and abroad.

The society intends to increase the number of students and expand the activities. It has plans to introduce courses on embroidery, making soft toys, stained glass, gift boxes, etc. It has plans to introduce computers courses for women and children. The idea is to help women earn and be independent economically.

The main constraint for expansion is shortage of space. It is essential for the society to have a building of its own to carry out its activities properly. We have approached the Calcutta Municipal Corporation to allot a building exclusively to Anandan to carry out its services to the community.

The society is also building a corpus for the purpose, mainly with the assistance from individuals and organisations. We appeal to you to contribute to the fund.

We have a dream which we hope will some day turn into a reality. We visualise a future where Anandan will have centres in different parts of the city where children can come for educational toys and equipment; where they can come to read books or to look at colourful pictures; where they can come to play and work on the computer; where they can come to learn handicrafts and music. Anandan will be a place where children and women from a deprived background will be helped to blossom and to develop their total personality. We hope that these children will grow into responsible members of society and will take an active part in the development of the country.

Anandan Centres:

15 Janak Road
Calcutta 700029

44/1 Hazra Road
Calcutta 700019

Contact phone numbers: Indrani Ghosh 91 33 4646860
Shimanti Bose 91 33 4662361

Email indrani@cal.vsnl.net.in
kumar@cal3.vsnl.net.in

Appendix II

Email report of usage of Asha funds by Anandan that was forwarded to me.

From:
 indrani@cal.vsnl.net.in | Block Address | Add to Address Book
To:
 sskiyer@yahoo.com
Subject:
 Fw: Donation from Yale
Date:
 Mon, 30 Apr 2001 22:23:25 +0530

Dear Sundar
I am forwarding the letter from our Treasurer, Mrs Nandini Mitra
Indrani Ghosh

-----Original Message-----

From: NANDINI MITRA <kumar@cal3.vsnl.net.in>
To: INDRANI <indrani@cal.vsnl.net.in>
Date: Monday, April 30, 2001 10:44 PM
Subject: Fw: Donation from Yale

>

>----- Original Message -----

>From: NANDINI MITRA <kumar@cal3.vsnl.net.in>
>To: <indrani@cal.vsnl.net.in>
>Sent: Monday, April 30, 2001 9:55 PM
>Subject: Donation from Yale

>

>

>> Dear Indrani,
>> Please forward to Sunder K Iyer and to Asha Yale.
>> We sent by post dated 19th. Sept. '00 , to Asha Yale an account of
how we
>> were spending the donation given to Anandan ,Calcutta.
>> We recieved Rs.22,578 (USD 500) On7th.Sep.2K.
>> We utilised Rs.5,000/ to build a cupboard,
>> Rs. 2,000/ to purchase educational toys
>> .We sanctioned Rs.6,000/ for tiffin for the yr. from Sep.'00 to
Aug.2001.
>> In the meantime we have rented 2 rooms from Calcutta Municipal
>Corporation,
>> where we have a similar set up as in our Janak Rd. center i.e. we
help
>> school going children with their home work and teach children who
are
>> unable to go to school mostly for monetary reasons. We are

sponsoring

>six

>> such children to Svarna School.

>> In Hazra Rd. center we are giving vocational training to young girls and

>> women. Our cost of running our two centers have gone up considerably. So

>we

>> have been using

>> Approx. Rs.10,000/ still left from your donation to pay rent of Rs.500/

>> per month to Cal. Mun. Corp. rent for the 2 rooms in Hazra Rd. from Oct.

>'01

>> till July 2001.

>> Besides the donations given by the volunteers working for Anandan , Asha

>> Yale was the first to donate to Anandan, it gave us a moral boost and we

>> felt we could increase our activities ,money will come if we kept >working

>> honestly and sincerely.

>> We will introduce teaching through school net with computers within >2months.

>> We have many projects on the anvil., but the most urgent need is a larger

>> place of our own. So we are going to start a building fund. Please do

>help

>> us ,to help improve the lives of slum children.

>> Yours sincerely,

>> Nandini Mitra

>> Treasurer Anandan

>>

>

>