

Site Visit: Jeevan Daan Samiti
Date: 10th Sept 2004
Place: Ghazipur District
Centers: The permanent centers at Hridapur,

Vallabh bhai and I started around 9.30 am from Kaithi. The first stop was the Musahaar Basti at Hridapur. Almost every member of this Basti is involved with the Brick Kilns. As the brick kilns were closed for monsoons, everyone was back at Hridapur. During the monsoon season, they supplement their incomes by making *pathals* (plates made of leaves) or by whittling barks of trees into thin sticks that are used for inserting into paans. The income from these activities is not much so most of them are very poor. Besides, the trees yielding large leaves have been cut down so they are reduced now to making only these sticks for sale. Some of them have few yards of land where they try to grow rice/sugarcane. However as there was no proper monsoon this year, they will not be able to earn much, if at all anything, from this year's crop.

It was nearing closing time when we reached the Basti. The school runs every day for 2 hours in the morning and 2 hours in the evening. There are 2 teachers at this center. One of them lives there and the school runs where his house is located. The age of the children varies right from 4 years to 10 years or so. Many of the children have been now enrolled in the government school located nearby. However. The dropout rate is high because the children prefer to go and earn money. For a day's work at the Brick Kiln they get anywhere between 200 to 300 rupees, which you can see is quite a lot.

I questioned the children. They knew how to write their names. I asked some of the children to write their friend's name, again a task they were able to perform creditably. Vishvesh has purchased for them simple books, the alphabets in English and

Hindi, math books, which they are using. One thing I realized was that they use Bhojpuri at home so in a sense even Hindi is an alien language for them.

Vallabh bhai meantime was talking to the elders in the basti. One of the questions was why is that the children encouraged to work in the brick kilns. Of course money is one aspect but why is education not being pursued. In that basti only 2 persons had a modicum of education, one of who was now teaching the children. The abject poverty in which the villagers were living was another issue of concern. Compared to other dalits like the harijans, or the clan to which Mayawati belongs, Musahaars have not made much progress. Vallabh bhai wanted to know whether this was due to their being resigned to their fate? Anyway, both Vallabh bhai and Vishvesh Kumar were of the opinion that this issue needs to be discussed extensively and that the Mushaars should be encouraged to improve not only their economic condition but also the literacy rate.

From Hridarpur, we went to the Ramdaspur basti, which is also of Mushaars. Ramanand is the teacher here but he had left to attend college. The center runs for 2 hours in the morning; Ramanand teaches here and then goes to college, comes back in the evening and again runs the center for 2 hours. In addition, Ramanand also dispenses medicines. Only Ramanand is educated in this basti. However, the economic condition of the Mushaars is better at this basti than at Hridapur. None of them go to work at brick kilns. They have small plots of lands, which they tend. We met Ramanand's parents, and I got enlightened in some of the changes sweeping the countryside. One of the issues Vishvesh is working is the Right to Information and Right to Food. I am not sure how many of you know of the workshop that was held in Bhopal regarding Right to Information and Right to Food, organized by Aruna Roy, Jean Dreze and others. Anyway the basic premise is the Supreme Court order, which has guaranteed Right to Information.

Plus the government of India has issued ration card to below poverty line citizens, which entitles them to rice, wheat, sugar, and kerosene at very nominal prices. Of course the problem is implementation. So what was happening was that the village Pradhan, the ration shop wallah, and all the sundry people were colluding to deny the BPL card owner's food grains. With the Right to Food Campaign, Vishvesh Kumar, Vallabh bhai, and other NGOs working in this region have been urging the people to demand their food grains. We checked Ramanand's parents BPL card. For the past 8 months, the ration shop wallah had not only not given them food but also had not filled their card with a NO (this is important if they want to drag the shop owner to the court). But the month Vishvesh started his campaign; the shop owner had released the appropriate amounts of food grain.

This campaign, along with that of Right of Information, forms a chunk of JDS activities. Last time they held one of their meetings, they were nearly beaten up as the Pradhans, the shop owners, and the local politicians do not want such activities spreading in the region.

The next stop was at the Girls School, Saidat. If you remember, we provided money for establishing a sewing center at Hridarpur. However, the sewing center never really took off for the following reasons:

1. It is almost impossible to get someone to come to the Mushaar's Basti and teach the ladies. The Mushaars are untouchable so...
2. Finally they did manage to get a teacher (A Mushaar lady) but then it was time to go to the brick kilns. She is now expecting a child...

So the sewing machine was set up in the local girl's school where a teacher, Meera ji, has been hired to teach the girls both sewing and embroidery. Meera ji is a

widow with five children to support. They charge a nominal fee of Rs 10 and about 20 or so girls are learning sewing from Meera ji. We were wondering if many girls are not joining because they are unable to pay the fees. Meera ji admitted that it was indeed so. But as she has been instructed to take a fee, she is doing so. Vallabh bhai has asked Vishvesh Kumar to take a look into the modalities and see if something can be worked out so that all the girls who are interested can learn from Meera ji irrespective of the financial aspect.

The final stop was the school at Vishvesh's village, Matuchauri, where two part-time teachers have been employed. The center runs only in the evenings, the entire year. The children (30-35) have been divided based on their ages, and as two rooms are available, the center is run very efficiently. They were doing Math when I went to see the center, so I wrote simple math problems on the board and asked them to solve. They were able to do so. With the younger children, I also asked them to write their names, and then I wrote words on the board and asked them to read it...all tasks, which they performed. Most of the children are enrolled in the government school and the center helps them with their homework.

DISCUSSION WITH VISHVESH KUMAR:

One of the issues that he, Vallabh, and I discussed was about the sewing center at Hridarpur. Do we start another one there or not? The thing is that sewing center will help two-fold: 1) empowerment of women; 2) a means to supplement their income.

Vallabh suggested that the best thing to do would be to train a woman from that basti only. The teacher had suggested that his wife could be taught to sew and embroider. It seems her brother is a tailor and could be asked to train his sister.

Vishvesh agreed that it would be a good idea and said that he would discuss it with the teacher at Hridarpur.

The self-reliance schemes have not really taken off. The bee-keeping activities have not been successful and Vishvesh said that he tried it couple of times but the Queen bee vanished off. So he has decided not to ask any money for any more such schemes. The JDS members are now trying their hands at screen-printing. They have purchased all the necessary equipments and will be trying to set that up in this coming year.

The issue of next year's budget then came up. I am enclosing the budget and the report at the end of this report. The additions are as follows:

- 1) Start two new centers- At a brick kiln and at Dhanwal Mushaar basti. People have been asking for a center for their children. Please see the discussion with Vallabh.
- 2) A sewing center at Hridarpur- Needed if we want to do something for the women of the Mushaar community. Vishvesh said that if they did not set up the sewing center then he would adjust the funds with the following year's budget.
- 3) Increase in the teacher's salary- Needed as the prices have gone up. As a teacher now in a University, I am starting to feel the pinch of inflation. So I can understand why an increase in salary is needed.

DISCUSSION WITH VALLABH:

Vallabh was very positive about JDS. One of the things that he emphasized was the absolute honesty with regards to the funds. If there was any change, any modification, it was immediately conveyed to Vallabh.

I asked Vallabh about the additional centers. One of my concerns was that as JDS/Vishvesh Kumar become more involved with the Right to Information and Right to Food Campaign, will he be able to oversee this center properly. Vallabh assured me that Vishvesh would be able to look after this center without any problems. This additional center will be at a brick kiln, which was pointed out to me.

One of the major problems, Vallabh said, with regards to this community was that both the men and the women preferred to spend all their earnings on alcohol.

SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS:

It was a very satisfactory trip in the sense I could see that a real effort is being made. The best part was that the children were learning and if we asked them a question, they made every attempt to answer it.

- 1) The one attempt of JDS that I have not talked about is on the health front. At the Hridarpur center I asked Vishvesh Kumar what is the status of hospitals in these villages. They are non-existent. But Vishvesh Kumar/JDS has tried to start a health center of sorts. They have asked a person who works in a medical shop to come and dispense basic medicines like tinctures for wounds, medicines for running nose/cold etc. Did not work out too well because this person now expects to be paid. So they are looking into alternatives. One of the successful alternative method has been to ask the teacher to dispense medicines. So Ramanand of Ramdaspur basti is doing that job in addition to teaching the children. We should do something to encourage at least basic medical facilities in these villages. In

Hridarpur, when we were talking about hospitals, they were telling me about this child who died last year because of lack of medical facilities.

- 2) The teachers were sent to a training camp organized by Vallabh bhai at Kaithi.
- 3) The Sewing teacher has been encouraged to attend the sewing training at Kaithi.
- 4) What is the future of these centers? I believe that the children should be encouraged to enroll into government schools and the government schools should be pressurized into performing their duties. This is a direction into which MSS/ Rekha Chauhan is moving and I found the approach very pragmatic. Vallabh bhai was encouraging Vishvesh to start working in this direction and we should encourage this activity.
- 5) Self-reliant- Let us not talk about this one for the simple reason, I believe, it is not possible for organizations like JDS to become completely self-reliant. If they are able to do it, fine. If not, there is no point emphasizing on it. The primary concern should be the children. And if we make sure that the children go to school and the school does what it is supposed to do, the need for such centers will disappear.
- 6) The Right to Information and the Right to Food are important campaigns. I never realized how important these were till I visited the villages. Basically the Supreme Court and the GoI have ensured that the poor are able to survive, at least. There are numerous schemes including Indira Awas Yojana. The problem is the implementation and till the people for whom it is meant do not demand their rights, these

programs will be hijacked by the richer classes, irrespective of caste.

One of the major impediments in the implementation of these schemes is that people are unaware and are illiterate.

From Jeevan Daan Samiti

Vision for 2005:

Till now the children were our target audience. We were trying to get the children to come to our centers. This year onwards we will try to make the parents understand the importance of education, so that we can reduce the number of children who drop out of school and go for employment. Of course the problem is that the people are very poor and often times they do not even have 2 full meals.

The other issue is the Right to Food. This is a government scheme under which people BPL are supposed to get food grains. At Ramdaspur, the ration wallah is not distributing food grains to the Mushaar community. How can the people afford to buy grains from expensive shops? We are involved in the Right to Food and Right to Information campaigns so that we can spread the message across the community and the community becomes well informed and demands their rights. We will try to expand this program, because if a child is hungry, then he/she is not going to pay any attention to learning. We are asking for Rs 4000 to work on this issue in the 2005 budget.

We want to establish a sewing center at Hridarpur. We will train a woman from the Mushaar community. We did try to establish a sewing center earlier at this center however; the woman who was teaching went to work at the brick kiln. This time we will train a woman who will remain with the community permanently. In addition, we will also train her in the cleanliness aspect so that she can inform her community about the importance of cleanliness and hygiene.

We want to open two new additional centers. At the Bhatwala Brick kiln, the number of children from Hridarpur is going to increase so we want to open a center for 6

months at this brick kiln. The other center will be at Dhanwal Mushaar Basti, where the people are employed in cane making. This is about 2 kms from Mathuchauri. As their conditions are pitiable, we want to start an educational program here.

The rest of the centers will operate as before.

There is a slight increase in the budget as compared to the previous year.

Sincerely

Vishvesh Kumar

Budget for year 2005:

	Per month expenditure (Rs)	Expenditure for 1 year (Rs)	Total expenditure (Rs)
Full-time 2 Teacher	1000	12000 X 2	24000
Part-time 7 teacher	500	6000 X 7	42000
2 sewing teachers	400	4800 X 2	9600
One coordinator	1800	21600 X 1	21600
1 blackboard		250	250
Slates (200)		200 X 8	1600
Cycle maintenance		3000	3000
One Swing machine (foot operated)		2400	2400
Medicines		1000	1000
JDS annual function		2500	2500
Postage	300	3600	3600
Stationery	300	3600	3600
Travel	400	4800	4800
Conveyance	300	3600	3600
Telephone	300	3600	3600
Campaigns (Right to Information & Right to Food)		4000	4000
Miscellaneous Expenditure		5000	5000
TOTAL			136150.00

Teaching Centers:

- Hridarpur
 - Morning and Evenings
 - One full time teacher and one part-time teacher
 - Full time teacher will teach during both mornings and evenings while the part-time teacher will teach only during the mornings
 - Number of children Jan-Jun 30-35; Jul-Dec 65-70
 - Full-time teacher will be paid Rs 1000
 - Part-time teacher will be paid Rs 500.
- Ramdaspur (Mushaar basti)
 - Morning and Evenings
 - One full time teacher and one part-time teacher
 - Full time teacher will teach during both mornings and evenings while the part-time teacher will teach only during the mornings
 - Both teachers will live here in the basti year round.
 - Number of children 50-60
 - Full-time teacher will be paid Rs 1000
 - Part-time teacher will be paid Rs 500.
- Uchauri (Harijan basti)
 - Evenings
 - One part-time teacher
 - Center operates year round
 - Number of children 30-35
 - Part-time teacher will be paid Rs 500.

- Khajurhat Brick-kiln:
 - Mornings
 - One part-time teacher; the teacher on the closure of brick-kiln moves to Hridarpur as part-time teacher.
 - Number of children 30-35
 - Center operates from Jan-Jun
 - Part-time teacher will be paid Rs 500.
- MathUchauri (Harijan-Backward caste):
 - Evenings
 - Two part-time teachers
 - Center runs through the year.
 - Number of children 60-70
 - Part-time teachers will be paid Rs 500
- Dhanwal Mushaar Basti (Proposed Center):
 - Morning s
 - One part-time teacher
 - Through the year Center
 - Number of children 30-35
 - Part-time teacher will be paid Rs 500.
- Bhatwala Brick-kiln (proposed New Center):
 - Mornings
 - One part-time teacher
 - 6 months

- Number of children 20-25
 - Part-time teacher will be paid Rs 500.
- Saidat Sewing Center:
 - Afternoons
 - One teacher; through the year
 - Number of children – varies according to financial conditions of the family.
 - Part-time teacher will be paid Rs 400
- Hridarpur Sewing Center:
 - New Center
 - One teacher; through the year
 - Number of children – varies according to financial conditions of the family.
 - Part-time teacher will be paid Rs 400