

**Bharatiya Jan Seva Ashram (BJSA), Jaunpur
Site Visit - January 19th, 2007**

I was in the Varanasi area in January and I wanted to visit the school run by BJSA. I had mentioned to Daulat Ramji, the coordinator of BJSA that I would be visiting sometime in January but I had not been able to give the exact details. Vallabh bhai from Asha Kaithi had visited the school on several occasions and I was glad that he was going to accompany me to the school. We decided to visit the school unannounced, but just the day before we realized that it could be a holiday at the school on account of the Kumbh Mela. So Vallabh bhai spoke to Daulat Ramji and informed him that he wanted to visit the school the next day and he said that they would let the children know that the school was going to work the next day.

We left early in the morning from Kaithi towards Badlapur. This is on the main highway between Varanasi and Lucknow and the roads were in very good condition. Badlapur is where BJSA has its office and over there we met Daulat Ramji and the other staff of BJSA. We asked the staff to make copies of updates they had prepared, while we visited the school. The school was another 10 kms away and there was a road which took you for 8kms but after that we were almost driving through fields. The school was being run in the open and in the background you could see the houses of the community from where the children came. This piece of land had shade from a good number of large trees, was surrounded by fields and there was a pond nearby.



Images of the school being run in the open. You can see the houses and fields nearby.

The children were sitting in the sunlight as it was winter and it was warm and comfortable there. As we arrived one of the teachers came to speak to us while the other was taking care of the children. The children were sitting on a tarp/jute-bag and they were arranged by classes (grades). The children were definitely disturbed/distracted by our arrival but they continued with what were studying. I went around and spoke to children from different grades and most of them very enthusiastically showed me their notebooks and what they were learning in school. There were 64 children in grades 1 to 5, and two teachers - Amar Nath and Akhilesh. The teacher would give some exercise to children of one grade and then teach children from another grade. Ideally we would want a teacher for each grade but this has worked out because the number of children is not too large.



Children playing games and a kid playing with the stethoscope

There were a couple of games we had for the children. The first one had two trays built in with different shapes and children had to place pieces in the trays after matching the different shapes. One of the staff from the office took charge of the games and the children seemed to be having fun playing the games. The other toy kit was a model of the human anatomy in which you could remove different organs like the heart, lungs, liver, stomach, kidneys etc. There was a play stethoscope and Vallabh bhai got the children to hear their heart beats just like the doctor did. A couple of children tried it and they said that they could hear the heart beat. Next a little girl tried the stethoscope and she said that she could not hear anything. So Vallabh bhai tried it and he also could not hear anything. The first two kids were so excited about trying the stethoscope, that they claimed they could hear the heart beat. We later realized that we needed to cover a hole in the stethoscope with our finger to be able to hear the heart.

Over the last year there has been talk of building a structure for the school. This is especially important in the hot summer months and when it is raining. At the beginning of the current academic year many new students had joined but there were heavy rains and school could not be held and many of these new children left the school. The houses of the children are so close by, that within minutes of us arriving at the school, some of the parents came to talk to us. I got a chance to speak to a couple of parents who said that they were very happy with the running of the school but they requested our help in building a more permanent structure/roofing for the school. One of the parents said she was willing to give land for the school. Water is already available there and a roof structure could be built for shade. They said that the villagers were willing to contribute with labor for any such effort.

I had a chance to speak to both the teachers - Amar Nath and Akhilesh and took a small video of the same. (The video as well as the transcript of the conversation is available on request by emailing gagarwal_at_gmail_dot_com). I learnt that though the teacher's salaries were Rs 2000/month they had received Rs 1500/month because there was a delay in sending the money from our side. I promised to work with Daulat Ramji to send the money in advance so that such a thing did not happen again. Daulat Ramji said that he had recently received the money and that the teachers would be paid



the remaining money. Both the teachers had gone for a teacher training program a couple of weeks back and both were very excited with the various ideas/techniques they had learned there. They would be attending another teacher training session at the end of the academic year.

I spoke to the children about their trip last year and they very excitedly told me about their visit to Sarnath. The trip for this year had not been finalized yet but it going to happen soon. Over the last year this school was covered under the Asha Library Project in UP. The school was provided with a box of books and the teachers took care of the library. The children were given 3-4 days to read a book and then they could exchange it for another book. The teachers are required to keep detailed records of all the books that were borrowed and by whom. On speaking to the teachers and the children it seemed that this particular initiative was very well received by the children.

Other updates/comments

* One of the kids was mentally challenged and the teachers told me that there had been a lot of improvement in his case since he had joined. When i was taking a look at the notebooks of the different students, he had come up to me to show me what all he had learnt.

* While taking a look at the attendance register I realized that many of the students who were in Class 1 the previous year, were still in Class 1 this year. I was quite alarmed at this and asked them the reason for this. They told me that until that year there was no aanganwadi (day care center) in the village for the little kids. So for a lot of kids, the first time they came to school was when they joined Class 1 and they sometimes took a little time to get used to schooling. Very often they were not regular in the first year. Now that an aanganwadi was running, they shouldn't have this problem in the future.

* Based on a medical camp held in another school in UP (supported by Asha Austin), we learnt that many of the children in that school had vitamin deficiencies. We suggested that a similar health checkup be conducted for all the kids. Currently we support about Rs 500/month towards any medical emergencies/medicines needed for the children.

You can access other photos from the visit by visiting -

<http://data.ashanet.org/datastore/data/Chapters/Austin/Projectpics/BJSA/bjsajan07/index.html>