

## **Site visit to Bharathiya Jan Seva Ashram**

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### **Introduction and Background**

We reached the BJSA office from Mehdiganj in the morning and met up with Daulat Ram Ji. We had tea and biscuits as we discussed briefly about Bharatiya Jan Seva Ashram. The building functioned as both Daulat Ram ji's office and residence. The hall had a lot of posters on NREGA awareness and also women's empowerment schemes from the government. On the ride to the school in Jaunpur, we discussed briefly the various efforts of Bharatiya Jan Seva Ashram. The organization has a broad base and concerns itself mainly with Dalit rights. Recently, it has actively worked in creating awareness and implementing the NREGA act in rural areas of Uttar Pradesh. In the past many struggles, dharnas also been organized on the issue of land rights. Many landless laborers were able to get land under the government schemes and acts. Daulat ram ji did mention that struggles can take up a lot of effort and people need to be constantly motivated to persist. The school at Jaunpur is one of many schools that BJSA supports in the region. There was always an effort to get the government to establish a government school in this village. Finally it's been possible mainly because of a Dalit sarpanch being elected this time around. As soon as we reached the school we were offered water and 'gud' (jaggery or country made sugar)

### **Mahendra's interaction with children**

Mahendra, a Lok samiti volunteer from Mehdiganj accompanied me in the trip to the School. He is a trained teacher who has taught in NFEs before. He tried engaging the children in brief discussions. The room was split into two and has two teachers. Classes 1, 2 and 3 were facing one end of the room and Classes 4 and 5 were facing the other end. The room did look a bit cramped for space. Mahendra tried engaging the younger kids with a discussion on illness and various reasons for it. He then led the discussion into personal hygiene. With Classes 4 and 5, he gave a multiplication problem to solve. Many kids had some trouble solving it. A few kids did arrive at the answer pretty quickly. Children in most cases were reluctant to communicate freely. This could be due to some anxiety in presence of strangers.

### **Discussion with Daulat Ram ji and the government school headmaster**

The government school building is right next to BJSA. The building compound is more spacious than the current room. It still has only two classrooms through. This would be a full fledged primary school up to 5<sup>th</sup> Std. There will be a play area, toilets, mid-day meals (with a kitchen to cook the same), uniforms etc. We had a discussion with the headmaster and recorded it on video. The headmaster was willing to work with BJSA in transitioning all children to the government school. There will be 2 full time teachers other than the headmaster himself. He mentioned that he would ensure that there would be no problems for the children from the dalit community here. He expected about 70-200 kids to join the school. There was a brief discussion on how to transition kids currently in 5<sup>th</sup> Std. Both the government school headmaster and Daulat ram ji were confident of finding good schools in the area with nominal fees. We also discussed the

proximity of other government high schools in the region. Daulat ram ji mentioned that they would try and support the kids if necessary. We also had a brief discussion on the current BJSA teachers working as para teachers (under SSA, they get appointed as 'Shiksha Mitra') and how they can get paid Rs. 3,200 p.m. The headmaster mentioned that he had discussed this with the education department. While, there is no problem with the teachers working in the school, funding their salaries would not be possible at this point. Daulat Ram ji also mentioned that while the community knows that the government school has come up, a formal discussion of transition plans is yet to take place. In general he believed the community is happy and would be comfortable with the plan to transition.

### **Discussion with Teachers**

When Daulat ram ji was not around, the teachers did mention that they are getting the requisite salary amounts in time and they currently face no problems. Then we discussed about the new government school and what the teachers felt about it. They felt they could be of immense help at the government school. They mentioned that teacher training had helped them hone their skills and the transition of kids to the new school would be easier done with their presence in the school. They mentioned that currently when children finish the 5<sup>th</sup> Std. they are mainstreamed into the 'Santh Nigamandar bal sikshan sansthan'. So far, 12 children have been mainstreamed into these schools successfully and have appeared in board exams. The teachers explained how they could face difficulties if they don't get the opportunity as government school teachers. To become a full time government school teacher, one has to finish a B.Ed degree. The teachers each have a B.A and one of them is pursuing a M.A through correspondence. There was a brief discussion on how they could qualify as government teachers – full time or as para teachers.

### **Discussion with community**

The community mainly consists of dalit landless laborers who work on other farms. An elderly lady and a few others joined Daulat Ram ji, the teachers and us. She was happy that the government school had come up in her community. There was a brief discussion on what would happen to the existing structure. The land was owned by the old lady. Daulat ram ji mentioned that it could be donated to the family and they can decide what to do with it. The community then discussed briefly and some of the suggestions that came about included a Tailoring center for women or a women's education center. Later we walked through the houses in the community to take a look at the library (books and toys in a chest stored in a home). We also had a kid explaining about her trip to Sarnath and what she saw there.

While travelling back to Daulat ram ji's center for lunch, we briefly discussed other aspects of the organization's efforts as well. We also discussed about a child who seemed autistic at the school. The child was Daulat Ram ji's brother's son. He mentioned that they have not tried finding a special education center to enroll the child. BJSA's school as such does not break away from the conventional education system. It strives hard to establish schools where there is absolutely no access to any schooling at all. If the efforts to establish a government school bear fruit, then the kids are transitioned over to the government school. Daulat Ram ji mentioned that they are

exploring other areas in which they could establish a similar school. It was also not clear as to what would happen to the children after the primary schooling,i.e. If they need support for fees or any further education, it was not clear if BJSA had any plans as of yet.