

## **Visit to Vishwabharati School, aanavaTTi, Shimoga District, Karnataka.**

AanavaTTi (derives from aane = elephant, + haTTi = shelter) is about 90 kms from Shimoga. The total journey-time from Mysore was 10.5 hours. There was a european girl in the bus from Shimoga to aanavaTTi, cursing the bumpy ride and finding it impossible to sleep. I pitied her, but could not do much. I knew her as Susan from Switzerland, going to the same Vishwabharati School. Sanjay Dongre (Secretary of the Vishwabharati Trust which runs the school) had told me over phone that such a girl would be coming to the school too, and would be staying in aanavaTTi and teaching at the school for 6 months. The bus reached aanavaTTi at 6 in the morning. Sanjay was there to receive us. It was raining when the bus reached aanavaTTi.

He took both of us directly to his place and asked us to rest for some time. I got up at 9:30 am. Then we started talking. We conversed in the best kannaDa you can ever get to listen to in the whole world. We had breakfast prepared by his wife and left together with Susan to see the school. I am writing down what I saw at the school and what I learnt from talking to Sanjay and other members of the Trust. Of course, I will add my own comments.

### **About AanavaTTi**

aanavaTTi is a village with approx. 15000 people. The people are mostly farmers, and mostly lack schooling (I wouldn't say education). There is a famous kaiTabhaarEshvara (kaiTabha is a demon killed by Shiva) Temple in aanavaTTi, declared as a protected monument by the Archeo. Survey of India. aanavaTTi can be approached by bus from Shimoga. Private buses run every 10 minutes from Shimoga and back. KSRTC runs a bus too, but only twice daily. The ride is extremely bumpy. One of the many TECHNICAL reasons for the bad roads is, I think, the fact that trees are planted at the side of the road. The roots uproot the road. I learnt that aanavaTTi is a place in which everybody knows everybody irrespective of caste/religion. And of course, everybody knows Sanjay Dongre. Children passing by do a namaste to him and say "Sanjay maamaa, suprabhaatam!".

### **About Vishwabharati Trust**

This trust was started in 1997 by Sanjay Dongre and a few others with the aim of helping the people of aanavaTTi. Sanjay Dongre completed his entire education (until BA) in aanavaTTi itself, and in kannaDa medium. The school was started 2 years before the Trust was founded, in a shed and received patronage from Swami Chidrupananda Saraswati (disciple of Swami Dayananda Saraswati of Coimbatore) and Swami Vishweshwaratirtha Swamiji of Pejawar. The trust aims at the complete development of aanavaTTi. I see that the path it takes is of education. Big English newspapers call this "Community education". AIDS awareness, LITERACY campaigns, DESILTATION of the local lake - you name it, and this Trust has championed the cause. I see total dedication. If you ever any doubt about NGOs, come to aanavaTTi and cleanse yourself of it.

## About the Vishwabharati School

The school was started in 1995, as such. It's a private school, which began in a shed. I will go to the current situation of the school: The land (if I remember it correctly, it's about an acre) was donated by one Mr. Nagewar. The building has 5 rooms in the front and 7 in the back. The 5 rooms in the front are a temporary arrangement, and will be removed once the 7 rooms at the back are ready. There is a big tree and a well inside the school compound. Some toilets have been built on the right side. The area near the tree serves as a playground + prayer/assembly area. Classes are conducted from LKG to 7th Std. The children have a prescribed uniform, and either bring their own lunch or go home for lunch. School starts at 8:45. There's a prayer, which includes chanting of "OM", the national anthem, and a few shlokas from the Vedas and Bhagavadgita.

I visited 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 7th standard classes. What I remember most of the school is the picture of the innocent children with running noses, hands folded in a "namaste", reciting verses from the Bhagavadgita, with legs firmly on the classroom floor full of mud. The body of these angels starts from the ground, and for about a foot into the air, you cannot tell which is earth and which is human. Such high is the unity, the harmony between man and nature in this school. About 3 feet from the ground stands the head, filled with promise for the future universal harmony, as is evident from the wonderful way in which the mouth recites the Bhagavadgita, the Vedas, Mankutimmana Kagga (a kannada poem), and suchlike scriptures. One of the verses they recited from the Mankutimmana Kagga in the 3rd standard brought tears to my eyes: "kallaagu kaShTada maLe suriyE maMkutimma" (Oh foolish Timma, turn into stone when difficulty rains!". The foolish Timma was none but I, who have not imbibed a grain of salt of the education on the lips of each one of those children. I prayed for only one thing: May those muddy legs never, never leave the earth! May these children never forget that they are not really different from the earth on which they stand!

The picture of those children with muddy legs and head full of Vedic shlokas is just perfect. It is these who can ever do anything for our country. Not they whose legs are not muddy, and not they whose heads are full of negative thoughts. In those children, I saw the perfect blend of work and thought. Even if one is taken away, it leads to destruction. The school syllabus is as prescribed by the state govt. Used textbooks are obtained second-hand from the local Govt. School. The trust has provided notebooks for many poor students.

I have finally found an ideal school which produces the brave children I dream of. This is it. Come to aanavaTTi and see for yourself. Not the Mahaveera Schools, not the CFTRI schools, not the Govt Schools of Mysore, but this is the ideal school, right in aanavaTTi. What Asha Ehv can do. The school badly needs money. The 7 classrooms need flooring. The cost is estimated to be Rs. 80,000. There are other ways to help, too. I will be sending the feedback form to Vishal.

Cheers  
Kiran