

## Genuine Information Report

Free Education Center, Ina Bajwa village, Sangroor, Punjab

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If we consider the realistic progress that Punjab has made in the overall Indian context and use this to judge the development of the school, in the medium sized and economically backward village of Ina Bajwa, run by Gurdayal Singh Sheetal and Darshan Singh Bajwa who are associated with Asha Trust – we will find that the school has adopted a teaching routine that is disorganized but at the same time is relevant and has great potential. Punjab, which is touted as a developed Indian state, has now fallen prey to money-lenders. The farmer of Punjab, who is hailed as being economically well-off, is now committing suicide. There is a feeling of despondence everywhere. People are fleeing their villages to arrange for food. Five farmers have committed suicide in Ina Bajwa in the past years due to debt and other such problems.

There is a school beside Ina Bajwa village where the children go to study but its condition is pitiful due to the lack of teachers. The children lack even the basic knowledge and so the school (ASV) was initiated free of charge for the children. The school runs from 4:30PM to 6PM. There are 6 teachers (male and female combined) who teach the children. When I reached the school, there were 206 children in total. From their looks, they seemed to belong to impoverished families. All the children were sitting in the ground and studying. The teachers had organized them into different classes and were imparting the fruits of knowledge to them.

What I really liked about the children was that all of them seemed independent and not intimidated and were talking and interacting animatedly. Here the attempt was being made to teach the children about the balance between human beings and nature and other contemporary social issues through education. With the help of the locals, Darshan Singh distributes copies, books and other educational material to the children from time to time.

In this center a kid who was previously a bonded laborer is currently being taught, some kids are disabled, there are some kids who had never received any form of education before. This school is being run in a Dalit dharmshala. This center could be run as a center for non-formal and alternate education because the children learn about human values and compassion here along with conventional education.

[Rest of the report is about site a visit to two other schools run by Asha Trust, and the writer is obviously less impressed with them]

### **Special Notes**

1. The center has been inspired by the pitiable story of Jata Singh, who is the child of a bonded laborer. His father had expired and his mother is disabled and so this child has to work in a tea-stall, washing plates, to earn his meals. He studies in this center.

2. This village had an unhealthy trend of people esp. the children consuming too much 'Gutkha' and 'bhang'. This used to be quite widespread but within the last one year, there has been a marginal reduction in this trend. Also overall, more people are placing less importance in human values.