Gyan Sewa Bharti Sansthan Site Visit Report
by Chandan Kumar*[*]
[Date of Site Visit: 24 May 2013]

I talked to Shekhar-ji [*Shekhar Jha, who manages GSBS – NK*] over the phone on the 23rd of May 2013 at 7pm in the evening, and I decided to go to Kamalpur on May 24 (Friday).

This was my first site visit, so before going there I made some preparations in advance and made some notes in my diary. I prepared four groups of questions:

- first group for Shekhar Jha
- second group for the teachers
- third group for the children
- fourth group for the parents

With these preparations, I left Sukhpur for Kamalpur at 8:30am on the 24th with a friend, Praveen, on my motorbike. We reached GSBS at 11:30am where we were met by Shekhar Jha. I first asked Shekhar Jha about the class time table, and he told me that the morning class is held for 3 hours from 6am to 9am. Sometimes, on days that children don't come in the morning, they hold a one-hour class in the afternoon from 1pm to 2pm.

I then asked Shekhar-ji the following questions [*Shekhar-ji's responses are also noted below – NK*]

a) How many centres are operational at present?
SJ: We have two centres operating at present - one each in Kamalpur and Haripur.

b) At present, how many children and how many teachers do you have in your organization?
SJ: Altogether, we have about 150 children and 4 teachers in the two centres. There are two teachers each in the Kamalpur and Haripur centres.

c) Do you take any fees from the children?
SJ: We don't take any fees from the children. We provide them with free education.

d) Do you organize parent-teacher meetings?
SJ: When necessary, we hold parent-teacher meetings.

Having obtained this information from Shekhar-ji, we had lunch at 12:15pm and rested for a while. At 1pm, we went with Shekhar-ji to see the Kamalpur class.

The classroom constructed at Kamalpur [*a permanent (pukka) classroom structure was constructed using funds from the Asha QED program –NK*] is 23 feet long and 16 feet wide. When I entered the classroom, I found it very strange that there was no blackboard or class time table chart or "primary education chart" to be seen. There

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[*] * translated into English by Navin Kashyap

were some 50 children and 2 teachers in the class, and on the wall there was a very nice Quotation Chart which I quite liked. Another interesting feature of the class was that it had one male teacher and one lady teacher. I inspected the attendance register after which I had a chat with the teachers and the children. I spent some time with the children, shared my own experience with the teachers [*Chandan runs a non-formal education centre catering to some 70 children in his village of Sukhpur –NK*], and then talked to some 2-3 parents who were present.

At 2:15pm, we left from Kamalpur to see the class at Haripur. The distance between Kamalpur and Haripur is about 4km. Reaching the Haripur class at 2:20pm, we noted a blackboard and two teachers taking an open-air class for about 45 children. I had a camera with me, with which I took some photos of the class. I then examined the attendance register for the class and saw that it contained the names of 73 children. Upon enquiring with the two male teachers about the children, I learnt that some children were absent that day.

Shekhar-ji told me that this class also had one male teacher and one lady teacher, but the lady teacher had been absent since January on account of illness. In her place, he had kept a male teacher. We then talked to some 5-6 parents who were present there.

At both centres, I asked the teachers the following questions:

a) How many children do you have in your class? And how many shifts do you operate in?

Response: Kamalpur has 70 children and Haripur has 75 children. We teach in just one 3-hour shift.

b) Do you conduct any progress tests for the children?

Response: No, we don't conduct any tests or examinations.

c) Do you call parents for meetings?

Response: Sometimes, as and when necessary.

d) When a child does not come to the class for 2-3 days, what do you do?

Response: We send someone to call them.

I then shared my experiences and best practices from running my own centre with the teachers:

(i) Having a class time table and class division [*into sections –NK*]
(ii) Conducting scheduled weekly or monthly tests
(iii) Preparing a monthly activity report to be shown to Shekhar-ji

I told the teachers that the 3-hour class could be divided into two parts (shifts), for example, 6:00-7:30am and 7:30-9:00am. In each shift, keep only a small number (say, 10-15) of children per teacher. By doing so, they would be able to teach and explain things to the children in a better manner. To determine the children's progress, they could hold weekly or monthly tests. And by maintaining a class activity report, the teachers and Shekhar-ji would be able to keep track of what they did each month.

I asked the children at the two centres some questions, as follows:

a) Do you come here to study every day?

Response: Yes, we come every day.

b) What do you like about the centre? And what don't you like?
Response: We like to study here, as we get free education here. We don't like the fact that we don't get to play games here.

The questions I asked the parents at Haripur and Kamalpur were the following:

a) How do you like this organization [*GSBS -NK*]?
Response: The organization is good. There should be organizations such as this in every village where the children of the poor can study. The children even get free notebooks, pens and textbooks from time to time.

However, the Haripur parents also said that because there is no permanent structure for a classroom there, the children and teachers experience some discomfort.

b) How can you help this organization?
Response: Why don't you tell us how we can help the organization.

So, I brought up the "One-Rupee-A-Day" programme and explained its value. I told the parents that you can help the organization by paying one rupee a day as school fees. [*Chandan is able to get some support for his centre at Sukhpur through such a programme. This also makes the parents feel vested in their children's education – NK*] All the parents agreed that they could certainly help in this manner.

After all this, I had a chat with Shekhar-ji as well and shared my experiences with him. I brought up an issue I had noticed with the Kamalpur classroom. Because the Kamalpur classroom has an asbestos sheet as roof, it becomes very hot inside. To mitigate this effect and cool things down, I suggested the use of jute bags below the asbestos roof or a layer of straw over the roof to provide some insulation.

I advised Shekhar-ji to start a "One-Rupee-A-Day" programme, and explained its benefits. I also advised him to visit the classes from time to time to check whether or not the teachers are present, and whether or not teaching is happening. I suggested that he hold monthly meetings with his teachers to discuss all aspects of what happens in the classes, and to inspect their work.

I told Shekhar-ji that in order to encourage the children, he should organize competitions from time to time. Also, he should have a monthly meeting with the parents to hear from them about the outcome of the efforts that he and the teachers put in.

We left Kamalpur at 5:30pm and were back home in Sukhpur by 7:30pm.

Recommendation

At the end of the day, the conclusion I draw from my side is that Haripur needs a permanent classroom. If this is constructed, the classes there would run smoothly. The parents there even told me that they would pool together some small pieces of their land for such a classroom. I recommend that a low-budget classroom be constructed at Haripur. I also recommend that play material such as a carrom board, board games, a football etc. be made available to the children at both centres.

In summary, I recommend that Gyan Sewa Bharti Sansthan be supported, and at Haripur, a low-cost classroom, made of bamboo and straw matting, be constructed.

Kamalpur Classroom

Haripur Centre

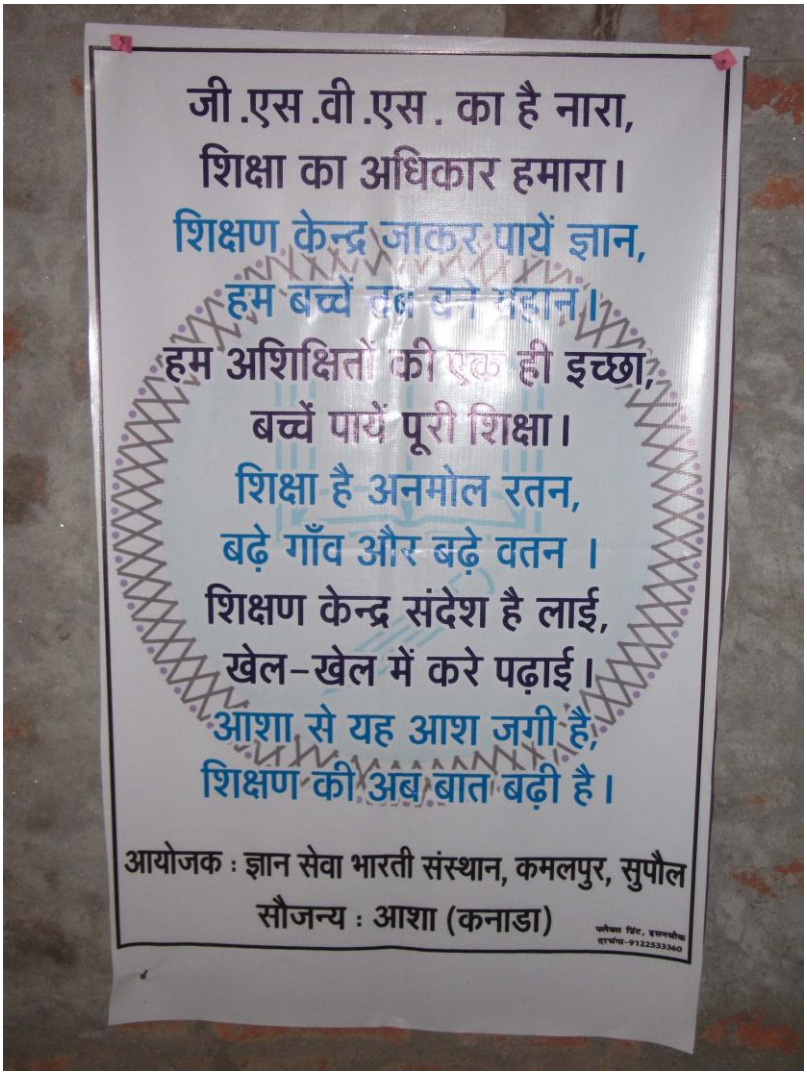

Chart in Kamalpur classroom. The translation is as follows (the rhyming lines of the Hindi original have not been preserved):

It is the slogan of G.S.B.S.
That education is our right.
By receiving knowledge at the education centre
We children can become great
For us uneducated there is but one wish
That our children receive a complete education
Education is an invaluable jewel
That brings progress to village and country
The education centre brings this message
Let us learn through fun and games
Through Asha this hope has arisen
The word of education is spreading

Organizer: Gyan Sewa Bharti Sansthan, Kamalpur, Supaul
Courtesy of: Asha (Canada)