

Ananda Bharathi

(Reg. No 48 of 1991)

July 10, 2004

Dear Friend,

It is time to greet you again with our yearly newsletter. This year saw us cope with another shifting of premises. There have also been issues with regard to children's regularity, which we had to address in a focused manner.

The rapid increase in the cost of living is a tremendous pressure on our girls and their households. This has resulted in many girls dropping out from studies, to work full time. Some manage to attend the school but are irregular. Most of them are unable to attend the tailoring class. Though our frequent discussions help them understand the importance of gaining these skills, the realities of day-to-day life come in the way of their regular attendance. We continue with visits to their homes to maintain touch with their family members.

Ananda Bharathi re-opened on 10th June this year, with only 24 girls. A group coming from one locality dropped out. Efforts to talk to their parents have gone in vain. This, in addition to a few teenagers staying away from the school, reduced the number all of a sudden. Six new entrants at the beginner's level have brought cheer to the school. They are enjoying the free and activity oriented lessons.

We have 8 teachers - four full-time and four part-time. Since we do not have a full time teacher at the secondary level for Maths and Science, we have sought the support of a formal school in the neighbourhood for Manjula and Vanaja to write 7th examinations in April 2005. We need to find full time teacher, so that Ananda Bharathi can teach the children Science and Maths up to the level of 7th class. This year one of our friends Krishnamohan is coming once a week to teach the senior girls. We hope this will ease a part of our problem.

A group of 4 children are now at the 6th class level. Sailaja continues her lessons in General Science with focus on health and hygiene. The middle level group of 5 children started their lessons with Janaki in General Science and Social Studies. Jyothi who joined us last year has settled down well. She teaches Mathematics and Science for primary classes.

Jyotilakshmi who was supporting Anuradha with the entry-level children, has completed the lab technician course and has left to pursue her career as a technician. She has been of immense help to us and we wish her the very best for the future. Anuradha is now completely in charge of the youngest group, we are now looking for another teacher.

Manisha continues to teach Hindi once a week. One group is now learning the basics and another group is at the 6th level. The tailoring class continues from 12.30 to 2PM on three days in a week under the guidance of Vishalam Krishnan and Padmavathi. However some seniors have left and some others are not able to spare the time. The girls who are presently in the class are in the process of acquiring the skill of using the sewing machine.

Last academic year we had to shift premises, since the owner had other commitments. On 8th November, we moved to another independent house in the neighbourhood. This is smaller than the old premises. It will be nice if we can find a bigger place with a playground in the neighbourhood with a long-term commitment from the owner.

We have been feeling the need to ensure the minimum set of ground rules in the school. We found that increasing negative influence of media on children, coupled with financial problems at home is contributing to deteriorating discipline. There have also been problems related to behaviour of teenage girls. We have been debating over this among ourselves and with the children to find a viable middle ground between strict regimentation and total freedom. We had a discussion with the senior children on "Discipline and Punishment". Children agreed that rules are necessary, but they should know the reasons for having them. On punishment, senior children felt that it is not necessary to have severe punishments whereas the new entrants felt that it is necessary.

We continue to support some of our girls who are now in higher classes in schools or colleges. We have supported 6 children last year and in the coming year we need to support 4 more children. We also provide assistance to our children when they need medical aid that they cannot afford. We have been able to extend this support because of the generous contributions from you.

Yadalakshmi has finished Intermediate and wants to pursue further studies. Anita and Thirupathamma are in the second year of Intermediate in Residential Schools. Lalita and Maria have come to class IX. Ruthamma, Premalatha and Venkatamma are now in the second year of degree course in Sarada College; tuition fee waiver continues. These children continue to come to Janaki's house to study and she helps them to cope with English medium. We extend support financially, for one-time needs such as examination fees. After a long search, last August we have placed Shobha Rani with Dr. Lakshmi Prasanna who runs a Paediatric nursing home in Hyderabad. The doctor has been very encouraging and supportive and Shobha is being trained in nursing.

We would like to share our insights gained from the experience of our girls who have entered the graduation level. The protective atmosphere of the Residential schools, the utter lack of career guidance and the change to English medium have posed problems. In addition, adjusting to living at home and working to contribute to the family income has added to their stress. Considering that we do not see too many options in jobs after graduation, we welcome advice and suggestions for courses after Intermediate (Class XII) or tenth.

Just before the school closed for summer, Kanakamma, a senior student in the school was diagnosed with tuberculosis. We are helping her financially to tide over the crisis and also through counselling to prevent worsening of the problem. We hope to see her back in school soon.

As a part of our efforts to record data about our girls, data sheets have been designed and we have started recording.

Last year changes have been made in the school committee. Meena Hariharan is Vice-President and Madhavi is Joint Secretary. S. Durga Bhavani has been co-opted.

Last year, Ramesh, a long time friend of Ananda Bharathi, presented us a solar cooker. We have shown it to our children and tried our hands at cooking. Navanirmithi of Mumbai has donated us a Maths kit, which is very useful. In the financial year 2003-04, we received donations of Rs.2.8 Lakhs including a sum of \$1000 from Asha. The interests from our Corpus and these donations have helped us meet the expenses. Asha is supporting us this year too, with a donation of \$1500. We acknowledge the support that we received from Karthika, an Asha volunteer and our good friend. She has mobilised individual donations and also introduced us to the Asha friends network. School is now on Asha website (<http://www.ashanet.org/projects/project-view.php?p=339>)

During the summer vacation we had planning meetings to discuss the working of the school. Major work items relating to the school have been identified and distributed. It has been decided to have regular teachers' meetings. Anuradha started recording the curriculum for the younger children as this would help teachers handling primary classes.

Events

Eleanor Watts and Hansa participated in our Independence Day celebrations. Children spoke about the freedom struggle and four children spoke in Hindi on Jyoti Ba Phule. The girls put up a play on Conservation which they had improvised. On Teachers' day one of the senior girls, Kalpana, spoke on Dr. Radhakrishnan. Our girls from Residential schools were present for Gandhi Jayanthi. They spoke on Salt Satyagraha and adopting Gandhiji's ideals as revealed by his autobiography was discussed. There were two songs on Gandhi Thatha. On Children's day we had a talk and discussion on Nehru, his policies and writings. Children had a play session with educational toys. Sparklers were distributed for Deepavali festival. Before Christmas, we read out an article on Jesus Christ and his message of love and compassion.

In December Anuradha had taken 5 children to Sweekar to undergo tests for speech and hearing. Some remedial activities were suggested and were conveyed to their mothers. Last year we could not attend the Network meeting at Mysore. This year it is in Hyderabad and we are looking forward to participating and supporting it.

On 10th January the children and teachers along with some friends visited the State Museum in Public Gardens. They were excited to see a good collection of birds at the Aviary. On Republic day Children spoke on Elections. They also read out a Telugu play "Meena vinna katha". The President Abdul Kalam had given a pledge to be taken by children. Our girls also took the pledge.

On Science Day, the children performed simple experiments on air including the making of a parachute and mothers were invited. The children felt very happy to explain the experiments to their mothers. Telugu play that they read out on republic day was repeated for the mothers. On March 8th, teachers spoke on the history and working of Lijjat Papad, an enterprise started by housewives. The children put up a play on the misplaced importance given to the male child in the family. Direction and dialogue were by the children.

This year the Telugu translation of Swami and Friends was read out and the children enjoyed listening to this wonderful story. Our postal savings scheme continues and the children are bringing the money quite promptly.

Before closing school in April we had a session of painting on wet paper and some games. On the last day mothers were invited to the school. We discussed with them their future plans for the girls and recorded some basic data.

REACHING OUT

In the month of August some of the teachers from Ananda Bharathi participated in a meeting organised by Asha, in Hyderabad, to network organisations working in the area of education. Through this we got a chance to meet people and share our experiences. In February Sailaja and Anuradha attended a meeting in Chennai organised by the Learning Network, Asha.

Our Visitors

Our children always extend a hearty welcome to the visitors and learn a great deal from the interaction. In June'03 Carl Smith, a teacher of Indian history at the University of Missouri visited the school. He brought the contribution from the girls of Pittsburgh Middle school who had been inspired by a book on an Indian girl who struggles to get educated.

Student groups, as part of the "Study India" programme of Hyderabad Central University, visited in July. One group was from Europe and another from USA. Dr. Kamakshi Bhate and Dr Jos Mooij visited the school on 23rd August. Kamakshi spoke to the children on basic health care and common diseases like tuberculosis. Jos who is from Netherlands explained why she and her family chose to work in India. Children actively participated in both the discussions and asked several questions.

On 19th August Ravi and Shanmuga from Asha visited. They spent time and observed the school activities and also showed paper folding to the children. Dr Jayanthi Sivaswamy of IIIT, Hyderabad visited the school and shared her experiences in Delhi where she was associated with a unit like ours.

Before we conclude we wish to reiterate a few of our issues that are **Need of the hour**: A Maths & Science teacher at Secondary level; a teacher for primary level (Telugu medium); Your continued support through donations and your time; better premises with a long term commitment.

It is gratifying that our efforts in convincing Manjula's parents to send her to the formal school have borne fruit. Manjula was earning over thousand rupees a month and the family needed it. They agreed to forego that amount to get her educated. For the first time they thought her need for education as important as that of her brothers. Such change in attitudes helps to boost our morale.

Cordially yours,

Janaki N Iyer