FILLING VOID GAP IN OUR GIRLS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Although the pace of social change in West Bengal has accelerated in recent years because of globalization trends, the problem of gender inequality in West Bengal has revealed a new dimension. Rural areas of West Bengal are highly infamous for child marriage, trafficking, school dropouts and atrocities against women and girl children. In spite of the Government providing free education for the girls, they hardly attain the schools as they are forced to take the responsibility of the entire household on their little shoulders as most of the mothers are busy generating money for their household. We can find these girls from extremely poor backgrounds working in the farm land with their parents, looking after their siblings and grannies, rearing domestic animals, doing all the household activities, etc. Therefore they hardly get time or support to attain school. These are the same girls who are extremely prone to trafficking, child marriage, school dropouts, violence, sexual abuse, etc. Till now we have come across so many such girls and thereafter we realized the importance of supporting these most under privileged and destitute girls who sometimes were the victims of child marriages, trafficking, sexual abuse, child labourer, etc. Filling the void gap has become a tremendous necessity and so we decided to bring them under one single roof and support them until they are retained back to formal education.

We have a Day Care Centre where 100 most vulnerable girls are kept from morning to evening so that their parents don’t get the chance to send their daughters to the fields for work. Here we provide them clothing, breakfast, lunch, education, computer training, dance, music and arts, etc. Besides this, these girls are also provided information on gender issues. When these girls are grown up, they will come to understand that their deprivation not only starts from their family but also their community and nation. All are equally responsible for her deprivation and getting back her basic rights; especially education, is her Birth-right and she has to get it. Unless she gets these rights, she can never improve her social status. In short, EDUCATION is the only key that leads her towards a dignified life.

Within the span of 4 to 5 years with Nishtha We keep a close follow-up on these girls to ensure they don’t get dropped out. We also build a close relationship with the parents of these girls after sensitizing them so that they give more importance to the education of their daughters. We also try providing the parents of these girls with some alternative livelihood if required; especially so that the family don’t need to force their daughters to work as child labourers to generate income. Going through this process we ensure retaining her to formal education just from the Day Care Centre.

Our prime aim is sensitizing the families, communities of such girls within 4 to 5 years so that they can spontaneously support their daughters to take formal education, complete their Secondary, Higher Secondary and so on. We are glad to inform you that till now we have 25 graduate girls who once were a part of this Day Care Centre. These were the same out of school girls whom we brought once while they were about 10 to 11 years of age. There were many hurdles on the way but fortunately we could get through all odds. With their own ability, these girls accomplished their education and gradually marched towards success. We know how essential it is having this Day Care Centre and it has to be expanded. However we regret due to lack of funds, we can never expand it. Moreover; in our working areas we have thousands of such girls but unfortunately we lack the resources of supporting these girls. Moreover, these most neglected girls have proved that if they are supported they can work wonders. We are constantly trying our heart and soul to support 100 most destitute girls.

Everything was going on systematically and we were gradually heading towards success; however whatever we had been doing till now has gone in vain in these last two years. The global pandemic, Lockdown and two disastrous cyclones, Amphan and Yaas have ruined peoples life and they now have reached an impasse. On one side people were fighting with the human made Bio-Virus, on the other hand they were being challenged by the two natural disasters. This was nothing but the final nail in the coffin. People now have surrendered themselves to fate. Neither they have a roof over their heads nor do they have any options for generating any income. Whatever limited resources they were equipped with, is now history. People now have reached the utter depression. Their attitude has changed drastically and they now seem more interested in gathering food and generating money.
Now giving a vigorous comeback is the need of the hour. Now we need to bring the girls again to the forefront by reducing the Gender discrimination, engaging them with formal education, encouraging them to become good leaders and most importantly presenting them with the livelihood opportunity. If we overlook the situation, then a huge gender gap will prevail here once again which seems to have already raised its head. Already we are seeing a sharp rise in violence and atrocities against girls and women, child marriage in the name of fake marriages, trafficking, school dropouts, etc. The situation has turned grim when the schools were commenced on the online portals during the lockdown period. All these are nothing but another disaster which needs to be reduced with immediate effect. All of a sudden people’s attitude has changed and it seems we have reached back 30 years behind. In this last one year, our Asha for Education supported Girls’ groups stopped 31 child marriages; whereas they rescued 12 girls from being trafficked; however 2 girls couldn’t be rescued. All the saved girls have been retained back to formal education. Most significantly these rescued girls too seldom come to the day care centre for gaining mental and educational support. This is high time to save these out of school girls and it is only possible if we provide support after including them in the Day Care Centre. Only after this we can ensure their proper protection; else we would see these girls going in the depth of darkness.

With the support taken from various Good Samaritans we continued running this Day Care Centre in the last two years. In the year 2020 we somehow managed to give the travel allowance of the girls who came from the remotest part of the villages, provided them food and gave salary to the teachers. But after the year 2021 it has become next to impossible to raise any funds to meet the need; especially providing food and travel allowance. We desperately want to protect these girls in such a crucial juncture and so we earnestly appeal Asha for Education to come for the rescue. If we get their support, we can meet the target easily.

We pray you to extend your kind support for these girls at least till June 2022 and we are hopeful, we surely might be capable enough to raise funds till then and support this program thereafter. Here we also want to bring to your kind notice that this is a running program and girls getting in and out of this project is quite normal since here they not only are kept with the aim to be in the Day Care Centre, but our prime focus is on equipping these destitute girls proper training, education and then, retaining them to mainstream education by enrolling their names in the schools. This will remain an ongoing process and through it we can surely ensure protection to the girls of the 12-15 years of age to some extent. No doubt there is a requirement of having regular support. But as of now your support surely would be like an oasis in the desert.

We appeal you to provide us the part support to the 100 most destitute Girls of our Day Care Centre by providing the undermentioned activities;

1. Lunch for the 100 children.
2. Two time food for the 5 residential staff.
3. Transportation cost for one auto rickshaw for the girls coming from the remotest parts of the villages where they hardly have any mode of transport. (We have two hired
vehicle in which the teachers go to interior parts of those villages and bring the girls here in the Day Care Centre. However Nishtha is appealing Asha for Education only for part support.

These are the three most vital necessities which we are urging you to help us with. Your support will surely help these poor destitute girls to a great extent and we are optimistic we shall not be deprived from getting your kind and generous support.