

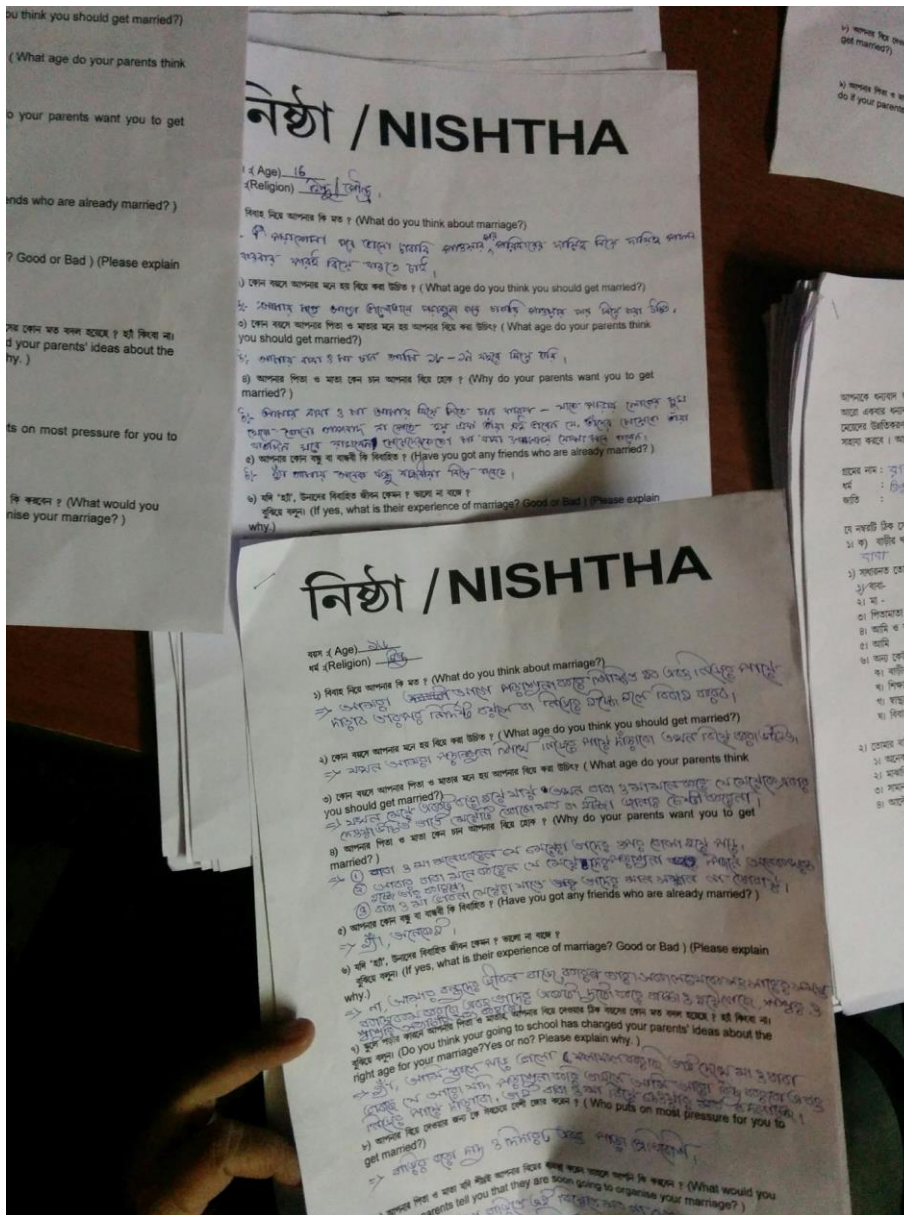
Site visit to Nishtha Jagaran
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Focus points for visit:

- I have gone through previous report by Padmanava Sen and also talked with him about Nishtha's situation, background and progress.
- Stress on the computer and spoken English training programme results, and the plan for placement of the girls to work and be self sufficient.
- Problem about dropping out of course/class/early marriage.

Summary

1. Reached Nishtha centre around 11.30 AM from Kolkata through train from Sealdah to Baruipur and met Mina di. A form fill-up was going on, where girls were made aware of how their parents might pressurize them to marry, and what they feel about it, or what they feel are the positives of not marrying early. I talked to some girls within this group, who had taken computer training through Don Bosco. They have learned, how to switch on/off, paint, MS Word, excel, slides (in their terms, means PowerPoint), some girls are taking extra training in Tally (accounting software), or one girl in medical laboratory technician in Golpark, Kolkata. most girls 17-18 years age, they want placement with 2 conditions – (1) part-time employment as they want to continue studies in school (class 11-12) or college (B.A pass course) and (2) jpb must be near to home (up to Bagha Jatin station as parents do not want them to go far. Mina di recounted one story of a girl who went to Kolkata to work, was murdered by people who thought she was being independent. It appears that perceptions and prejudices of parents and girls matter here.



Sample of the questionnaire forms being filled up by the Nishtha Jagaran girls

3. Talked with Mina-di about challenges:

About placement, the Father in charge from Don Bosco has said he is looking. Spoken English training not good as the class was taught by Anglo Indian whose accent students could not understand and even Mina-di could not understand, hence girls did not get interest in learning. The girls want spoken English training, especially those who did not get into the first class of 40 students. Tapan da suggested that first spoken English and next computer training, in gradual steps, rather than together, as learning computers needed some English improvement.

Observations:

- Parents of girls are taking pride in their first generation going to college (maybe we can capitalize on this)
- Girls want to go to school/college and do part-time job to utilize their computer training. I asked the girls if they would give me word about continuing studies and try be self sufficient with job, and NOT marry, they said “Yes, they want job!!” (in chorus).

4. Next on, went in auto-rickshaw with Tapan da to the nearby villages. We talked about reasons of drop-out. Hhe said families here are mostly agricultural laborers, who do not put importance to girl's education. It appears that gender bias is present, maybe parental awareness programmes might help, families have many mouth to feed. Learned about child protection committee setup by each village, and now trafficking is less, however some incidents still happening.

5. Reached first village named Roskhali. Greeted by Kishori bahini (Nishtha’s young girls training group). They told about how Nishtha has helped them stay in school and then go to college. The girl who spoke is daughter of a mason and is now in first year college (B.A 1st year). None of the students have been in the 40 student group for spoken English+ computer but they want to be part of that, and I asked them if they would work outside Baruipur, they said same thing about working nearby and not in Kolkata.

They showed the lessons they have learned in gender sensitization program which focus on issues such as: what jobs are generally considered fit for men versus women or both for e.g driving or cooking, or childcare. Interestingly some of the students said convincingly that some jobs are done by both genders, while some jobs were identified as stereotypical i.e. 'this is a man’s job or only women can do this". They were then corrected by the leader of Kishori bahini. Hygiene (washing hands) was also another issue that was focused on in the training. The students performed some dances and recitation. The mothers agreed education has value and said they would support education. When the students were asked if they would continue their studies after class 10 for 11-2 or go to college after class 11-12 (it was a mixed group), all hands went up.



6. Second village we travelled to was Chondipur. We met 5-6 girls there who had been in the spoken English programme, some asked "Dada, how are you?" However, they could not recognize the logo on my shirt "Georgia Tech". With regards to computer training they mentioned same; typing, paint, PowerPoint, doing projects on MS word, excel. The training was spread over 6 months. However there were 3 people per computer so they needed more practice.

Tapanda wanted some computers in Nishtha center to practice, maybe some donated ones. Given they spent Rs.20,000 for 6 months on training with Don Bosco, some basic configuration computers can be surely obtained for their practice at the center? Tapanda also mentioned that they can pay for a resource person to maintain the computers. However Anu /Padmanava told about previous bad experience about infrastructure created at another Asha supported site, which had not been properly used/run into problems). They also wanted certificate for this course, so that they can show proof for asking for jobs. However, till now Don Bosco have not given anything.

We talked about the Computer Training and Spoken English, and if they would actually go out to work after receiving this training. I also asked them about touch screen mobiles/tablets to which they said that their fathers give them to their brothers and not them indicating a gender divide. Some 3-4 girls had mobile phones with camera (smart phones) and took photos with me.

Couple students mentioned how Nishtha has made them more confident, education has given them more exposure. Classes by Nishtha include Health and Hygiene, Reproductive health, Adolescence training, Child Rights, Gender Rights, Child Marriage. The girls presented a dance-

drama about child marriage with strong message. They spoke about positive things if they continue studies and not marry now, some said 18 years is the minimum age while some said 25 years. Asked how many of them want to go to college, nearly all raised up their hands. I also interacted with their mothers who said they value education.



7. Next stop was Night shelter. I did not take any photos. The sex worker mothers spoke about how Nishtha has helped their next generation of children escape sex work. 2 students who are now in nursing training will be completed in 6 months. I talked with students at the shelter who recited poems and sang songs.

Discussion with Mina di and observations

- Spoken English training provided initially by Don Bosco was futile, which is evident when I asked the students to say their name and which class they study in English and they could not.
- Computer training – need additional practice computers (mentioned above). I talked about the Asha Mumbai model (may need to contact Dr Smita Puniyani about how she set it up)
- Placement of girls in jobs appears to be ongoing with Father from Don Bosco but Mina-di wants Anu to talk to Father and tell about the 2 conditions: (1) girls want part -time and not full time work as students want to continue studies and (2) job placements need

to be nearby to Baruipur or few stations towards Kolkata (Baruipur-Mallikpur-Subhasgram-Sonarpur-Garia-New Garia-Baghajatin-Jadavpur).

- We talked about possibly roping in the help of Ramkrishna mission in Narendrapur (supported by Asha) for training the students in spoken English and Computer training. However Narendrapur teachers/monks would not come to Baruipur to train the girls and secondly Don Bosco had assured of placement which is not the case with Ramakrishna mission.
- Mina di mentioned that we need to decide about additional training for job training which is 1000 Rs per student (500 per month for 2 months) for the 40 students which Don Bosco would provide to make the girls fit for recruitment.