

# Sargachi Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama

## A Site Visit Report

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I had the opportunity to revisit our Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama (RKMA) Sargachi Project, situated near Berhampur in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal. This visit, conducted from 5th to 7th July 2025, provided fresh insight into the Ashrama's evolving activities and its commendable efforts in empowering rural communities.

I arrived at the Ashrama on the evening of 5th July, after a long journey from Coochbehar. After settling in and interacting briefly with the monks and residents, I spent the next two days surveying the various activities and facilities supported by Asha for Education. During this time, I met with Tushar Maharaj and several associates of the Ashrama who graciously guided me through each unit.



## Pisciculture

On the morning of 6th July, I began with a visit to the pisciculture project. The reservoirs were clean and well-maintained, and I observed the seamless transition of fingerlings into the larger ponds. The water circulation system powered by electric pumps was fully functional. I also had conversations with a few local youth who are undergoing training in fish farming. They expressed satisfaction in acquiring livelihood skills through this program. The technical supervision continues under the guidance of fisheries experts, and the project remains sustainable both ecologically and financially.





## Sculpture & Auditorium

Later, I was taken to the cultural wing of the Ashrama. The auditorium, as in previous years, remains the central space for community gatherings and training. What stood out this time was the addition of new wall sculptures portraying moments from the life of Swami Vivekananda and rural life in Bengal. All sculptures were crafted by local students and volunteers under the mentorship of Tushar Maharaj and his team. The sculpture of Ramaktishna, Nataraj, Vivekananda continues to greet visitors at the entrance and is a proud symbol of the Ashrama's artistic excellence.



## Natural History Museum

One of the unique aspects of RKMA Sargachi is its museum of natural history and regional heritage. I spent considerable time inside the museum on 7th July, examining models of flora, fauna, and geographical exhibits. Students are not only maintaining these models but also learning to replicate and restore them. The Ashrama has introduced new local specimen displays and continues to preserve rare taxidermy artifacts under the guidance of trained artists.



## **Akhandananda Skill Development Center**

A short drive took me to the Akhandananda Skill Development Center located in Baigachi. The center remains vibrant with activity. Courses in basic computer training, electrical repair, mechanical servicing (e.g., car and refrigerator repair), and mobile phone servicing are ongoing. I met a few students who had recently completed their training and are now employed at service centers in Berhampur and even Kolkata. Some alumni have launched small businesses and are mentoring current trainees.



## **Handloom & Powerloom Unit**

The textile wing of the Center, as before, is a productive unit managed by local women and men. Using both manual and power looms, the unit produces dhoti, saree, towels, sweatshirts, and bedsheets. The new weaving machines installed with Asha's support have enhanced productivity. I was pleased to see some youth learning dyeing techniques and basic tailoring, aiming to open small apparel stalls.





## Terracotta & Glass Ornament Units

I also revisited the terracotta and glass ornament making sections. Youth trainees demonstrated slip-casting and jigger-jolly techniques in pottery-making. The newly installed furnace was in operation. Glass melting and molding for jewelry continues with added sophistication—molds are now used for uniformity and fine design. Products are sold in local markets, and the Ashrama is planning to develop an e-commerce channel for wider outreach.



## Self-Help Group (SHG) Activities

The SHG unit remains one of the most inspiring aspects of the project. Around 30 women are involved in producing jute bags, leather handicrafts, herbal soaps, and food items. This time, I learned they have received a recurring order from the West Bengal government to supply food and hygiene products to ration shops. The Neem soap section, in particular, has expanded, and more women are being trained in packaging and quality control. While they still lack infrastructure for large-scale production, their journey toward financial independence is commendable.



## Woolen Winter Garments

A newly added section to the skill training lineup is woolen wear production, where young women are being trained to operate sewing and overlock machines to create sweaters, scarves, caps, and jackets. The products are of good quality and are being distributed through local fairs and NGOs during winter drives. There is a plan to link this with rural school uniform supply programs in colder regions of Bengal.





## Leather Craft Training

I also visited the leather goods unit, where basic training in making purses, belts, and simple utility bags is underway. The raw material is locally sourced, and students are learning cutting, pasting, stitching, and finishing techniques. This unit empowers both men and women with a practical, income-generating skill set that is in high demand in urban markets.



## Handloom & Powerloom

The weaving unit is running smoothly, with several operational looms producing items like sarees, towels, bedsheets, and dhotis. The students and local women are trained not just in weaving but also in basic textile design and finishing. This year, I saw the introduction of sweatshirt weaving machines, some funded through Asha. Demand for these winter items is rising, and sales are promising.







## Jute Bags & Garments Making

A highly successful program continues to be the jute bag and tailoring unit, largely run by women from nearby villages. They are creating eco-friendly shopping bags, office pouches, and school bags. The sewing unit is producing uniforms, kurtas, blouses, and baby clothes. This unit is also contributing to the Self-Help Group (SHG) program, supporting over 30 women with steady monthly earnings.



## **Fiber Glass Sculptures & Utility Items**

Under the artistic leadership of Tushar Maharaj, the fiberglass unit continues to produce both sculptures and functional items. From Nataraj statues to molded wall art and garden decor pieces, the quality and creativity of this work is outstanding. Many are being sold to nearby institutions and temples, and some are commissioned for public spaces. The students here are learning from real-life projects.



## **Food Processing Unit**

The food processing section of the Ashrama is now producing a wider range of items—pickles, papads, spice mixes, baked goods, and herbal soaps. This year, a major milestone was reached when the Ashrama's SHG group received approval from the West Bengal government to supply selected products to ration shops. Women working here are earning monthly incomes and gaining confidence as entrepreneurs.







## **Horticultural Nursery**

One of the newer but promising units is the horticultural nursery. I visited the greenhouses and open plots where medicinal plants, seasonal flowers, and fruit saplings are being cultivated. Students are being trained in plant propagation, potting, compost preparation, and nursery management. The saplings are sold locally and to schools for campus greening initiatives. The unit also promotes home-gardening in nearby villages.

The Ashrama's commitment to nurturing rural youth and women—while staying rooted in values—makes it a unique and exemplary model. Asha's consistent support over the years has played a crucial role in this growth. I look forward to continued collaboration, deeper engagement, and more such transformational visits in the future.



## **Agricultural Machinery Training Unit**

On the morning of 7th July, I visited the agricultural machinery training unit—a practical and essential skill-building facility, especially for youth from farming backgrounds. This unit focuses on repair, maintenance, and operational training of commonly used agricultural tools such as power tillers, sprayers, weeders, irrigation pumps, and mini-tractors. I observed a batch of trainees actively working on dismantling and reassembling a small diesel engine under the guidance of a skilled instructor.

The training includes both theoretical understanding and hands-on modules, enabling participants to confidently service agri-machinery used in their own or neighboring farms. Several of the students shared that they plan to open local repair garages or work with rural equipment dealers post-training. The unit has received equipment support from donors and is currently seeking more toolkits to accommodate the growing number of trainees.



This practical, employment-linked program is helping bridge the gap between modern agriculture and rural youth, while also reducing dependency on external technicians—making it a highly impactful component of the Ashrama's vocational education system.



## Final Thoughts

The Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama in Sargachi continues to be a beacon of hope and transformation in rural Murshidabad. With Asha for Education's sustained support, hundreds of lives are being uplifted through skill development, education, and livelihood empowerment. I came away deeply moved, especially seeing how former trainees are now returning as trainers or volunteers – an organic cycle of change that speaks volumes about the project's success.

