

Report of the Site-Visit to Saugath, Palamu, Jharkhand

At the outset, I would like to gratefully acknowledge the trust and confidence ASHA for Education has placed upon me to undertake this site visit. Hereby I present you the report of my site visit to Saugath, in the district of Palamu, Jharkhand. Thanks to Ms. Anuradhaji for accepting my offer. As per the plan I undertook a train journey on 25 July to Daltenganj, Jharkhand. It was the nearest station I could reach. There I met Mr. Jitendra Pandey, the president and the project coordinator of Saugath. It was our first meeting and we pleasantly introduced one another.



After our brief introduction we sat together to plan for the site visit. We decided to visit the primary school (Balvadi Siksha Kendra) in the next morning, run by Saugath, supported by ASHA. After our night stay at Daltenganj we set out at seven o'clock in the morning by motorcycle. We travelled about 40 km to reach the school. It was a tiresome journey on woefully bumpy roads. We had to travel through the forest to reach the destination. It is also an unsafe area controlled by the Naxalites of the area. It took more than two hours to reach the village named Patt, where the Balvadi is situated. This village is located just at the border of two districts, Palamu and Gaduva.



Socio-Economic Situation of the Village



Majority of the people living in this village and the surrounding areas are tribals, Dalits and backward class. They are economically very poor. Their economic support comes from daily labour especially from field works and from beedi (a thin cigarette or mini-cigar filled with tobacco flake and commonly wrapped in a Tendu) leaves collection. Most men travel to nearby villages to find work. Literacy rate is



abysmal in this area. People are concerned about making their both ends meet rather than education for their children. In this village there is no school, neither government nor private. Not even a primary/elementary school is available in the vicinity. I visited a non-functional school which is three kilometres away.

Baalvadi Kendra (Kindergarten) of Saugath



In the morning when we reached the Balvadi was going on. There were about forty children divided in two classrooms. Their age was approximately between 3-5 years. There are two teachers, Priyanka Kumari and Kusum Devi, teaching since 2014. The former is an intermediate pass and the latter is only a high School pass, which testifies the standard of literacy in that area. The school is from 7



am to 02 o'clock in the afternoon. The inspiring factor is that these children now come to school either on their own or their parents accompany them. They travel more than a kilometre to reach the



school. The organisation provides them bag, textbooks and notebooks, dress/school uniform, shoes, writing materials and other necessary things.

I took special interest to interact with teachers. They are very happy about the work. They try creatively teaching children through nursery rhymes, songs, games and so on. I interacted with children too to assess their basic knowledge in English, Hindi and mathematics. I was very much impressed by their response.

Midday Meal

In the morning children are given some biscuits. Ms. Sandhariya Devi, the cook, prepares good and nutritious lunch for all children. Seasonal vegetables, eggs, daal/lentils, rice, are given on different days. The day I visited there was egg-curry for all. I also checked the cooking place and facilities, plates and utensils. I am pleased to bring to your notice that it is well kept.



The day I visited there were also some parents and guardians of the children. I enquired from them about the midday meal. They are very happy about the good food served to their children. They all appreciated the great work done by Saugath for the education of their children.

Health Check-Up for Children

I met Mr. Javed Ahmad, who does regular check-up for children and administers medicine when needed. In my interaction with him I came to know that he is only a *Registered Medical Practitioner* (RMP). He treats only ordinary ailments. He has limited amount of medicine/tablets. The cases he is unable to treat refers them to other doctors know to Mr. Jitendra. The latter knows and friendly with some doctors who do free service to him Balvadi Children.

Honoraria

Two school teachers, the cook and the doctor reported that they get their honorarium on time, every month. It is paid through the bank. However, they expressed unhappiness over the fact that there had been no increment in the past two years. They have requested to consider the matter.

My Observations and Suggestions

The Balvadi is doing very well. There is better awareness about education among children and parents/ guardians. To my observation, the Balvadi is like a thin lifeline to the village, where access to school is a distant dream for these kids. In order to make it function in a better way I have the following suggestions:

- Most of the children in the school are below 6 years. It is not practical to teach this age group with books alone. They require a play-school model where they can be taught through other means such as games, music and stories. Such facilities are not available in this existing structure. We know that children require totally a different atmosphere for learning.
- The teachers, Priyanca and Kusum, have not undergone any formal or special training to teach kids, at this level. They require training.
- The teachers need to be more punctual. They should have regular meetings with parents/guardians. I suggest, therefore, to hold parents meeting once a month. In fact it is an opportunity for the teachers to address the parents and guardians about education of children, their health, upbringing and other issues. It is the only available opportunity to motivate parents.

- To my observation, no contribution from parents/guardians is taken. In order to make parents and guardians feel the sense of responsibility towards their children's education it is essential to make them contribute something. I talked about it to some of the parents present on that day. They were willing to contribute in kind, they said. Hence, I suggest to take a contribution in kind (especially grains) at least twice a year which can be used for the midday meal.
- At the moment the Balvadi is run in a rented hut (house) without any facilities for toilet, drinking water, place to play, etc. This has many practical difficulties for both, teachers as well as for students. I was told that Ms. Priyanka Kumari, one of the teachers, is willing to donate a small plot of land for a school so that there is a permanent school in the village. This will stand as a model for the entire village. Upon hearing, I was very much interested to see the proposed land and its location. I did see the land. It is a very good location, by the side of a main road. It is very convenient for people. I recommend you to look into this suggestion.

Chotanagpur Adivasi-Harijan Utthan Samiti (CAHUS)

We remained in the centre until 02 pm. After that we left for Daltenganj. On return we had a meeting with Saugat and CAHUS staff. Mr. Jitendra Pandey and the secretary of Saugat said that they had been monitoring the Balvadi in the past but henceforth they would like to assign the work to CAHUS. They would like to close down permanently their organisation, Saugat. Total contemptuous attitude and neglect of the present government, they shared, has pushed them to come to such a drastic decision. To the question, who will coordinate with Balvadi Kendra, he replied, he himself would take the responsibility. However, after listening to them and after my own personal assessment, I requested them to reconsider the decision. To which Mr. Jitendra replied, he will once again discuss the matter with his staff. It is better, I suggested, that Saugat continues its work and takes up the responsibility of coordinating Balvadi Kendra.

I also met Mr. Ajay Kumar, the Director of CAHUS. He communicated to me that if ASHA for Education is willing to give the responsibility to their organisation they are ready to run it. I checked their documents of registration, bylaws, FCRA, 12B, Bank statement, Income Tax return, Annual report, and so on. All their documents seem to be okay. They say, through their organisation, CAHUS, some social work activities are going on. I could not testify it. However so far they have not received any foreign funding. My suggestions in this regard:

- It is recommended that Saugat continues the work of Balvadi Kendra
- Under any circumstance if ASHA should entrust the responsibilities to CAHUS it should thoroughly study and scrutinise all their documents I mentioned above. Only after verification ASHA should consider funding it.
- If Mr. Jitendra coordinates the work of Balvadi Kendra it is good otherwise a responsible person should be kept in charge.



My site visit to Jharkhand was indeed a unique experience. It gave an opportunity for a first-hand experience of tribal socio-economic situation very closely. I appreciate you for choosing this interior tribal area to bring the light of literacy and education. That too, to people who have no chance to think of education and an alternative future for their children. I wish your efforts will continue to bring the light of literacy and knowledge to the poor and the marginalised section of this area.

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