**Site Visit to Aavishkaar, Palampur, on December 1, 2015: A Report by Surabhi Yadav**

I arrived at Palampur on December 1, 2015, with intent to spend a week’s time at Aavishkaar to volunteer in the last leg of one of their residential camps. This particular camp was organized for the girls from Bihar's Mushahar community, one of the most underserved communities in India. Around 20 girls from the age group of 10 yrs to 15 yrs attended the camp with the help of another NGO in Bihar, Nari Gunjan.

 Situated in a cozy corner in Palampur amid snow clad mountains and pristine greenery, Aavishkaar's campus seemed apt for its core activity - broad-based education. I reached the campus around 8 AM, where the girls were playing a variety of games in their cliques. Mr. Vikram Singh, one of the three core associates of the organizations, received me at the gate, and the girls helped me settle in the hostel in their rooms.

It seemed that the residents of the camp were used to meeting and greeting new faces. The girls gave me a quick tour of the campus and also introduced me to the caretaker of the hostel. We all had breakfast together in the hostel mess, and the girls headed for their first class of the day. Using a variety of props, Mr. Bharat Shresth, a mathematics enthusiast and an IIT Kanpur alumnus taught the girls about fractions. Right in the first activity of this camp, I got the flavor of Aavishkaar's pedagogy methodology. The instructor knew each student's pace and personality traits, and every student was given instructions accordingly.

Each and everyone was given ample amount of attention. Storytelling and hands-on experience were used to introduce concepts of science, math, and arts. The class was primarily driven by interaction and dialogue among themselves and with the instructor. This was consistent through all the different activities that I attended for next five days.

I met the founders of the organization, Sandhya, and Sarit soon after the class and they warmly introduced me to everyone on the campus. Sandhya. Their young daughter Shamli learns with the residents of the camp. While giving a tour to the various facilities on the campus, Sandhya talked about the inherent belief with which Aavishkaar functions. It runs on a belief that there is no standardized method of learning that works for all, and there is no such thing as a ‘right time’ for kids to master something. Every mind is unique and has an innate curiosity; our job is to create space where the kid can observe and pursue his/her curiosity freely.

The campus is well equipped for residential month long camps. Apart from a well-managed hostel, the campus has a library, science lab, computer lab, carpentry lab, dance & music room and large open space for kids to play. And of course, the Brooks and the mountains are always at everyone’s disposal for exploring nature and making endless products using natural resources. The library has almost eight thousand story, comics, science, maths and art books. All hand-picked by the founders (and as demanded by the kids whenever they did).

Based on a week-long observation, I ascertained that a typical day in the camp includes few Maths and Science classes, different play activities exposing them to different art forms (such as dance, drama, photography, origami, carpentry, etc.), games and story sessions, Yoga/Karate, tea breaks and of course, lots of chatter. The day would end with dance and music over a bonfire in the courtyard or a movie screening in the hostel.

The instructors use the physical modules (conceptualized and made in-house) to introduce any concept to the kids. For instance, they learn about different forms of energy by making an electricity generating water turbine; they learn English by singing new songs; they learn decimals by using the Fraction Tower Cubes and the list is endless.

The camps also facilitate interaction of kids with a wide variety of people who love to work with kids in the area of their expertise or interest. This versatile exposure fuels the curiosity of the kids, which result in more tinkering and some clarity on their interests.

As the camp came to its closing, a cultural performance event was organized on the campus. From singing English and Hindi songs to skits, the girls confidently performed in front of the local residents. The show only confirmed how effective Aavishkaar's has been in seeding positive impressions in the minds of these young girls who come from very disturbed backgrounds.