Site visit to Lok Chetana Samiti, Girls Hostel, Varanasi  
Feb 2023

Lok Chetana Samiti runs a Girl's Hostel for approximately 40 girl students in Varanasi. The girl students primarily belong to the Musahar community, a very marginalized community in the society. Most girls are first-generation schoolgoers and come from families where the parents either work as migrant laborers or other low-income jobs that they cannot afford any education expenses for their children.

The girl's hostel is a decently large building with a kitchen and cafeteria on the ground level and a few large common areas on the two floors above. The girls live/sleep in dormitory-style rooms with 10-15 girls in one room. All girls are of the school-going (no college or working age woman is permitted to stay) age and are enrolled in schools nearby, most of them going to the closest municipal school, which is a short walk away. The girls age ranges from 7-15 (grades II to X). The parents visit generally over the weekends or whenever they are back in the area after their migrant jobs wrap up for the season. Most parents are appreciative of the support provided by the hostel and the hostel has had many instances of hosting sets of siblings from the same household.

Overall, I found the girls to be very active and sharp but the quality of education needs work. The municipal school’s quality of education isn’t great but it works best given the location of the hostel. The hostel obviously is meant to provide supplementary support and having just one staff means this teacher can at best provide cursory guidance and occasional help with their homework.
The hostel has a full-time staff of 3 with one cook, one teacher, and one general helper. While the hostel has been around for over 15 years, Asha Atlanta started supporting the hostel in 2017 and continued support until 2021 after which for reasons of volunteer turnover and budget the support stopped. My visit coincided with the Asha India conference and I had met some members of the board on an earlier visit so there was a certain degree of familiarity with the organization’s work. The interactive session organized by the hostel between the girls and the Asha India conference delegates was very interactive and lively and was thoroughly enjoyed.

The organization has some support from Manos Unidas (Spain) and another from Misereor Aachan (Germany) for the grassroots-level transformative works but they are looking for support of general operational expenses. Asha Mumbai provided temporary relief by offering support for 3-4 months in 2023.

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