**Meet our Girls: Stories from the Dorms!**

**Narratives from the Manas Ganga Hostellers.**

**Manas Ganga Senior Secondary School.**

**Bodh Shiksha Samiti.**

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1. **Introduction**

*“The concept of hostel isnot only limited to place of residence, hostel is a human practicallaboratory. Therefore hostel is not simply a place for living; it is a centre of education. Students learn as much as from their teachers as well as fellows during hostel stay. It enriches the understanding of the curriculum through analytical discussion among the students living in the hostels, and may contribute to character building as well. Students in hostel not only learn the theoretical material they also learn how to enhance their personal abilities and learn to live independently.”[[1]](#footnote-2)*

* 1. **Bodh and Manas Ganga**

Urban slums, an alarmingly rapid and unfortunate consequence of unplanned, unbound, and sometimes unnecessary or forced urbanization, are often seen as spaces of moral, social, economic and cultural degeneracy and hopelessness. Similarly, far to reach rural hamlets are also homes of people living in a reality where the state’s contribution to ensuring a quality life is minimal. Backed by our firm faith in the ability of education to create meaningful lives and our conviction that every child can, should and deserves to learn, it was these spaces that we, at Bodh Shiksha Samiti, chose to see as spaces of vibrant, meaningful, dignified life through the creation of educated evolving learning communities. Our vision, in its broadest form, is the delivery of quality education to every child. Our goal is not the mere delivery of quality education to all, but the conscious and firm resolve to ensure every child successfully attains his/her highest potential possible and in our vision of equal and universal education we place those with histories of marginalization and deprivation, as our most immediate partners, guides and learners.Children from slum communities, whose fate is seen to be necessarily tied with their family occupation, whose financial, social and cultural capital are meagre, and whose potential our mainstream education system and its exclusive pedagogy fails to recognise and effectively develop, are our chief motivation and primary learners.

Within this deprivation, is a double deprivation for the girls from these communities, whose roles and responsibilities have been defined through the ages, education for whom is a dream but not always a reality and the support of the family/ society for the same is not as it is for the male child. We feel that it is a problem that there are very few girls who are finishing college and those who do finish college, many a times are held back in their growth journeys because of gender conflicts.Early marriage, lack of willingness of parents/in-laws to let them enrol in secondary schools and college, lack of confidence of the girls in respect to mobility for education or employment, lack of negotiation skills amongst the girls to convince the families towards their betterment, lack of awareness regarding what they really want to do in their lives, etc. all make it a problem of both access and quality of secondary education that is being provided to the girls at the moment. Because of historical reasons, girls do need special inputs to feel more strengthened to be in the position to shape their own lives.

Given the widely prevalent scenario of household resources being diverted towards the educational needs of the male child, girls from families of the urban slums/villages we work with are often in dire need of spaces of freedom, expression and education and the resources to occupy such spaces.

It is with the resolve to create and make accessible such a space that Bodh established its first senior secondary school called ‘Manas Ganga Senior Secondary School for Girls’. Manas Ganga was set up in the year 2007 as a residential senior secondary school. The school is a formal school that has residential facilities and has had large batches of residential students in the past years but is currently hosting a group of eleven girls only due to funding gaps that we hope and resolve to eliminate as soon as possible through our wonderfully generous donors. The school is from pre-primary to grade 12 and has 350 students. The school is a girls' school from grade 6 onwards and presently has humanities faculty from grade 11th onwards. From next academic session, the school will have science stream too.

The school is a recognized school by the Government of Rajasthan and caters to children from nearby slums and villages around Jaipur city. Presently children come from almost 30 different locations. The school is situated in the main resource centre of the organization which acts as a training centre and has its central office (operations) too. Every year around 1500 government teachers/ principals or more than 300 teaches of different institutions visit the school to get practical insights into how the quality schools should be like.

* 1. **The Manas Ganga Team**

The team here at Manas Ganga comprises of the Education Resource Centre ( our subject specific departments that are involved in conducting pedagogical research, creating new materials and TLMs and providing academic support our teacher collective), our teachers, our principal and the central office which provides assistance to the school in its daily operations. While we have a large teacher collective which is central to our school, the following are the key department heads for our school representative of our school collective:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Role** |
| Yogendra Bhushan | Director/ Overall programme leadership and direction |
| Meenakshi Agarwal | Principal |
| Lekha Mohan | Sr. Fellow, Academic leadership to the school for science education |
| Rajesh Kumar Sharma | Sr. Fellow, Academic leadership to the school for Mathematics |
| Kusum Ji | Sr. Fellow, Academic leadership to the school for Hindi Language Education |
| Nayan Mehrotra | Sr. Fellow, Academic leadership and material development for English Language Programme |
| Divya Singh | Sr. Fellow, Overall documentation and development of the programme activities |
| Chetna Tondon | Sr.Fellow, Academic leadership of the arts (music and other aesthetic forms) programme |
| Mamta Sharma | Assistant Principal |
| Ishwar Prasad Sharma | Sr. Teacher |
| Anil Kaur | Assistant teacher |
| Sheeba | Teacher |

On a total, there are around **20 teachers** who are teaching part time/ full time in the school.

* 1. **The Manas Ganga Hostel**

Bodh has run a residential senior secondary school for 10 years and it had large enrolments of girls of the age group 13-16 years from rural Rajasthan, who had never gone to school earlier and were directly brought to the hostel to be facilitated to bridge their learning gaps of primary classes and later study the curriculum of grades 6th to 12th.

Three batches of the residential school ( called Manas Ganga) finished their grade 12 and they all got into college ( 70% getting into the best humanities college of the state) as they had finished their grade 12 with really good academic grades. All the girls (100) were from both economically and socially marginalized backgrounds and had their parents married off by an age below 10. They had not just negotiated at their homes to not marry till they felt they were ready but also convinced them to let them study in hostel if they couldn’t delay marriage. Most of them who finished their college are working and some are preparing for government jobs. The impact it has had on the communities is that there are many more girls who have decided to study after grade 8 and are also traveling to nearby towns to study further.

Our hostel currently saw the registration of 15 young girls this session, out of which four have left due to various reasons and one has resolved to come back to the hostel in sometime. The rest of the narrative hereon will give an account of our current batch of hostellers, who may be small in number, but are by no means small in their dreams and resolve to achieve excellence.

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1. **Hostel days: Narratives from a home away from home.**
   1. **Meet Our Girls!**

A group of vibrant, smiling, hopeful, brave faces joined us for this academic session, full of vigour and strength to make for thema home away from home. The following is an introduction to these lovely residents of Manas Ganga Hostel.

1. **Our Roald Dahl Fan: Kavita Gujjar**

Kavita Gujjar is a student at Manas Ganga and studies in class IX. She is 13 years old and is the daughter of Mr Ramlal Gujjar and Mrs Geeta Devi. Her father is engaged in farming and her mother is a housewife, who Kavita says does just as much work at home as her father in the fields. She is from Tonk and had studied in a government school at Tonk from Pre-school till class 3rd. Post that she completed classes 4th to 8th from IRB Bodhshala school ( A school run collectively run by Bodh and IRB) , Tonk after which she has joined us here at Manas Ganga upon the suggestion of her teachers at school. She has three siblings, one of whom is pursuing B.Sc. Nursing from Maharani College; the other is in class 11 with Science (Biology) stream and the third in IRB Bodhshala School, Tonk. She joined the hostel in the month of August and has been here for three months now. Her favourite subject is Mathematics and she wants to pursue Science stream in school and bachelors in Mathematics in college. She then wants to become an IPS officer. She is very hopeful and excited about Manas Ganga starting its Science stream and its very own college. She loves reading books of Roald Dahl (The Magic Finger she said was her favourite) and likes to play football.

1. **Travel dreams:Arpita Singh**

Arpita is a student of Manas Ganga and studies in class 11th. She is 15 years old and is the daughter of Mr Sanjay Singh and Mrs Asha Singh. Her father is engaged in farming and rents out tube wells for farm irrigation and her mother is a housewife. She is from Uttar Pradesh and has studied from a mix of a private school called Mahatma Inter College and a government school near her village in UP prior to joining us here at Manas Ganga in July, 2017. The subjects she finds interesting are Political Science, History and Drawing. She wishes to pursue Political Science and History in college and has always dreamt of becoming an IPS officer. She feels Manas Ganga and staying in the hostel is bringing her closer to this dream. She likes playing, singing and loves to travel! Her sister, also her local guardian here, feels that Manas Ganga and its hostel can provide Arpita with the safe, creative and engaging study space that she needs, where she will get adequately individualised attention and considerable exposure to different people and points of views.

1. **Our hard worker: Kanika Kashyap**

Kanika is a student of Manas Ganga and studies in class 8th. She is 13 years old and is the daughter of Mr Vinod Kumar Mehra and Meena Devi. Her father is engaged in farming and in a property enterprise and her mother is a housewife. She lives in a joint family and is from Dausa. She is here with her younger sister and has studied in two private schools of Dausa prior to joining us here at Manas Ganga. She joined the school and the hostel in October, 2017 and has been here for a month. Her favourite subject is Hindi and she wishes to become a teacher. She enjoys having an independent life so early in life and enjoys the discipline and organization hostel life has brought to her life. She likes keeping her room clean and studying.

1. **Our little story teller: Aditi Kashyap**

Aditi Kashyap is a student of Manas Ganga and studies in class 7. She is 10 years old and is the daughter of Mr Vinod Kumar Mehra and Mrs Meena Devi. Her father is engaged in farming and in a property enterprise while her mother is a housewife. She is the sister of Kanika Kashyap and feels very relieved and grateful that she has her sister here too. She is from Dausa and has studied in a mix of private and government schools before having joined us here at Manas Ganga, on the advice of her aunt, who was an alumnus of Manas Ganga and its hostel herself. She has been here with us since October, 2017. Since she is having a little difficulty in adjusting to a new school and its stranger students, the hostel and the bonding that these girls have organically developed has helped her feel happy and safe away from home. She likes Science but fears Mathematics even as she said she is taking help from her fellow senior hostel mates to do better in it. She wants to become a doctor. She loves drawing, listening to stories and creating and telling stories too!

1. **Our fierce fighter: Manisha Meena**

Manisha is a student of Manas Ganga and studies in class 9th. She is 13 years old and is the daughter of Mr Jagdish Meena and Mrs Para Devi. Her father is engaged as a construction labourer and in farming and her mother is a housewife, who sometimes works as a farm labourer to supplement the family income whenever the need arises. She is from Shyampura, Thanagazi and has studied in the Shyampura Bodhshala prior to joining us at Manas Ganga in August, 2017. To her and her family, after having studied in a Bodhshala for 8 years, coming to Manas Ganga and residing in the hostel, where her family feels there is a better study environment, was the next logical step. She has three other siblings, one of them a younger sister in class 6th who plans to come to Manas Ganga soon and the other two being younger brothers in classes 4th and 2nd , all of them at the Shyampura Bodhshala. Manisha had come to the Kukas Campus and to Manas Ganga earlier in the year in June for the consolidation of the Shiksha Samar program in which she was a student volunteer, helping out teachers in teaching kids who were below class level in her summer vacations. She had loved the campus and its aura and is very excited to have become a permanent part of the school. She loves Science and English and wishes to pursue Science (Biology) in school and college and become an IPS officer post that. She likes to fight and wants to learn Karate to fight of the bad guys and girls who come her way! She also enjoys dancing and playing games.

1. **Beyond society, beyond marriage: Shalu Gujjar**

Shalu is a student of Manas Ganga and studies in class 12th. She is 17 years old and is the daughter of Mr Prakashchandra Gujjar and Mrs Kesar Devi. She is from Azabpura, Thanagazi, Alwar and has been here with us since July, 2017. She is married and has chosen to and fought her way through societal norms to come continue her studies at Manas Ganga, away from home as well as her husband’s home. Her parents see her education as contributing to a secure and independent future for their daughter and grandchildren. Shalu is the favourite hostel member of all the other girls, and is known to all as a loving and caring friend and sister, who is around for all the other hostel girls when they feel homesick or need academic help. She will be giving her board exams the next year and is known to work hard and study till late in the night by all the other hostel girls.

1. **Our tiny teacher: Urvashi**

Urvashi is a student of Manas Ganga and studies in class 7. She is 10 years old and is the daughter of Mr Babulal Meena and Mrs Suman Meena. She is from Thanagazi, Alwar. Her father is engaged in farming and her mother is a teacher. Her parents sent her to Manas Ganga and want her to stay in the hostel so that she can get everything and all facilities that wouldn’t have been possible at home, enabling her to study better and achieve her goals. They want her to be able to understand the evils of society through her education and be ready and strong enough to face and fight them. Urvashi wants to become a teacher like her mother and grandfather.

1. **Fighting all odds: Sapna**

Sapna Gujjar is a student of Manas Ganga and studies in class X. She is 16 years old and is the daughter of Mr Prakashchandra Gujjar and Mrs Kesar Devi. She is from Azabpura, Thanagazi, Alwar and has joined us here at Manas Ganga in July, 2017. Her sister Shalu Gujjar too is in the school and the hostel, which she says has made the new school and new living space much easier to adjust to and accept than it would have been otherwise. Having to convince family to give her a chance to pursue her education post marriage, and managing academic work, home and hostel have been challenging yet fun and full of learning and newfound confidence in herself.

1. **Daughter of the year: Priya Mehra**

Priya is a student of Manas Ganga and studies in class 7. She is 11 years old and is the daughter of Mr Ramdhan Kaur and Mrs Meena Devi. Her father is engaged in farming and her mother is construction labourer in addition to being a housewife. She is from Alwar and has joined us here at Manas Ganga from October, 2017. Her parents view Manas Ganga as proving a positive and creative study space and wish her daughter to work hard in the environment here and achieve success she deserves. She is very grateful to her parents for giving her this opportunity despite the family’s economic difficulties and wishes to study hard and help her family financially.

1. **Our reading riding hood! Bharti**

Bharti is a student of Manas Ganga and studies in class 11th. She is 14 years old and is the daughter of Mr Kallu ram and Mrs Urmila Devi. She is from Ambedkar Nagar, Thanagazi, Alwar. Her parents wish her to study in Manas Ganga because of its integrated, innovative teaching and all round development and growth both through the school and the learning from and experience of living in the hostel. They also believe in the school’s ability to instil values such as respect, unity, self-confidence and a free mind through their daughter’s education here. Bharti wants to study hard to alleviate her family of their financial worries and to be able to address the health problems that her parents are undergoing. Bharti likes to read and listen to stories.

1. **Our delightful dancer: Kiran**

Kiran is a student of Manas Ganga and studies in class 9th. She is 14 years old and is the daughter of Mr Shankar Lal Verma and Mrs Sugna Devi. She is from Nagtalai, Jaipur and has chosen to stay in the hostel for the congenial study environment and safety it provides. Her father runs a small grocery shop and their family is economically very unstable. She has a brother and a sister. She loves to dance and wishes to become a teacher like her teachers here at Manas Ganga so that all the girls like her can receive quality education and do their families proud.

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1. **En route Dreams: The Hostel Experience and the Way Forward**

All girls were very excited and happy with the hostel space and the following common views on some of its key aspects:

**The Advantages of Hostels:**

* A much better study space
* All time academic and emotional support from the fellow residents
* A sense of great independence, courage, pride and self-confidence at being able to manage a life on their own away from home.
* A sense of discipline and routine that was lacking when they were at home.
* Better time management
* Ability to take initiative to study on their own, without constant push from the family
* Beautifully honest bond of friendship created.
* A strange yet balanced mix of rules and regulations yet a sense of freedom
* Being able to study in Manas Ganga
* Ample space for play and scope for bettering other creative areas of interest
* A library at hand and the possibility of being able to read constantly.
* Learning to develop conflict resolution mechanisms in the face of disagreements between residents.
* Developing the wonderful mix of the virtue of sharing along with the sense of respecting each other’s private space in a place so public.

**Disadvantages of Hostels:**

* Feeling homesick and lonely at times.
* Hygiene and bringing everyone on the same page regarding sanitation norms in a hostel space is difficult.
* Disagreements growing into large fights.

**The key areas to focus on now:**

* **Finding the right female warden**: Most of the girls seem to think it necessary to have a full time residential female warden in the hostel so that they feel safe, less lack of motherly care they received at home and find a comfortable medium to communicate hostel grievances or simply to talk. Also the warden’s ideological and behavioural aspect will have to be thoroughly checked to ensure the warden doesn’t influence the children. They are aware that the organization is trying to get a warden for them and they would soon have one.
* **Bridging the funding gap**: We hope to have resolved the problem of funds soon.
* **Counselling facilities**
* **Proper documentation of hostel details and experiences**

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1. **A** Qualitative Study Investigating the Impact ofHostel Life**,** Amina Iftikhar, Asir Ajmal [↑](#footnote-ref-2)