

# **Antyodoy Anath Ashram**

**Khagendra Sishu Siksha Kendra (KSSK) and  
Vocational Training Unit (VTU)**

## **Site Visit Report**

24th April 2023

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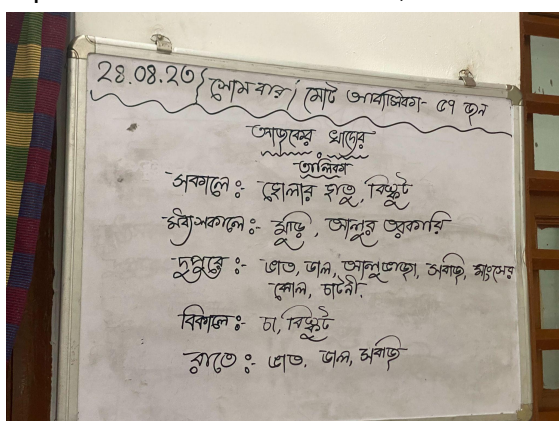
I had the pleasure of visiting Antodyoy Anath Ashram and its neighbouring KSSK school on 24th May 2023. This was my first ever site visit for an Asha project, and between all I learnt of how Asha funded projects run on the ground, the incredible welcome I received from everyone at the school, and just the beautiful surroundings I was in, it was a truly amazing experience.

## KSSK Visit

I first visited the KSSK school, where I was greeted with an enthusiastic welcoming committee of teachers and students, as well Mr Balaram Karan and Mr Manoj Kumar Dey. Mr Karan is the founder of Antyodoy Ashram, and grew the ashram from a small establishment into a flourishing campus, and established different units like the KSSK school, and the VTU unit. Manoj is the coordinator and treasurer of KSSK, and is Asha's main point of contact with the Ashram and KSSK.

Manoj took me around the school, showing me how the classrooms were setup, how the school was subdivided into the school and the Snehochaya home, the common dining hall, the prayer hall etc. I very briefly saw the students before most of them had to leave, due to a thunderstorm that was starting at that very moment. I was also introduced to the welfare officers and counsellor of Snehochaya, who gave me a little brief on the work they were doing.

I was also pointed out the kids meal routine for the Snehochaya children, 5 meals from breakfast to dinner, that were written out on a board, and a board documenting the students committee of the Snehochaya kids. The organization apparent in both things was pretty impressive. This visit was brief, after which I was taken to the Anath Ashram.



Meal plan for the day



Drawings from the prayer hall



Paintings on the school mess hall

## Ashram Visit

At the Ashram, the first thing I noticed was how incredibly clean and beautiful the campus was. There were adjoining ponds in the ashram, where the Antodyoy people would grow shrimp, rui, katla, and use those as food sources as possible. There was also a large vegetable garden all through the center of the ashram. While not much was growing there, Manoj mentioned that the garden was usually more full during winter, when things like cauliflowers, cabbage etc would be grown there. He pointed out some parts of the Ashram that had been funded from other sources, like the dining hall that had been partially funded by L&T, and the prayer hall that had been funded by the German consulate. I also was taken to the library cum selling unit of the ashram, where they have a pretty good library, mostly as i understand, from donations, and a lot of ornaments and jute products made from the VTU, that the Ashram sells for a profit to customers, both within and outside the state.

My next stop was an incredibly well put together inauguration ceremony for opening the newest floor of their Vocational Training Unit, which has been primarily funded by Asha donations. There were 2 choreographed dances, and one group song, that were all beautifully put together, made all the more impressive by the fact that some of the kids had exams coming up and had limited rehearsal time as a result.



Library at the ashram



Vocational Training Unit

### Vocational Training unit

The final stop before lunch and rest was the Vocational Training Unit, and specifically the ribbon cutting to open up the new wing of the building. After the ribbon cutting, the first room I was taken into was the learning room, where various types of classes are going to be done, with a small abacus class for the class 1 kids done at the time. The teacher explained that they were taught counting in 3 stages, first finger counting, then abacus counting, then mental counting. Another VTU wing I was shown was the computer wing, where a teacher from the Anudip foundation was teaching them basic computer skills like Word Excel Paint. He explained the work that Anudip foundation does to get these kids placed in jobs in large corporations in the city, from the computer skills and interview-specific soft skills to the tie-ups they have with several companies that allows the students to get interviews at those places.

The jute sewing unit was incredibly efficiently set up, with several folders and bottle holders that had already been made on display. It was interesting to find out that their sewing unit teacher was also an expert in his field, which given how the unit was organized made



complete sense. The large amount of bottle holders on display were mostly part of an order of about 700 of those products requested from a nearby CBSE school, and is a great example of how the ashram tries to be self-sufficient and raise funds independently. They also just started the process of making a new folder to hand off to me around then, and I was amazed to see that it got completed by the time I was leaving! I was glad too, it's a cherished little memento from the trip I'll keep with me for a long time.

There's also the fabric painting unit, where the ashram brings in plain kurtas and other clothes, and then the students and teachers combine to paint intricate designs of them, and then sells them later from their selling unit. Then there was the tailoring unit of the Ashram, where several students of all ages were hard at work making various clothes. The age distribution of this class was interesting, the class had several adult students I noticed, and a teacher pointed out to me that was because several women from the neighbouring areas also came to Antyodaya to learn sewing, since it was a skill they could use at home to make goods and even sell some for a profit. This same wing is where the Ashram had also made a large amount of masks that had been distributed to KSSK students' homes, as part of the Covid relief package.



Ashram kids in the Abacus class



Painted kurtas in the fabric painting class

## Reflections

After exploring the VTU, it was a relaxed ending to the day, with some amazing food made by the ashram cooks (including shrimp fished from their ashram pond!), and then sitting down for a bit in their guest house, all the while chatting with Manoj about his future plans for the ashram. He indeed has a lot of plans, talking about how they're trying to settle the books on the loans they took out to finish the new VTU wing, how they're trying to sell more goods from the Vocational Unit to bring in funds, how they're thinking of expanding into the online space to do so. His energy for the crucial work they are doing is apparent and inspiring. I also found quite incredible, the care they take in monitoring ashram kids from tiny children to adults looking for jobs. I do regret, after having left for the day, that I didn't interact more with the teachers and students directly, to understand their daily lives and daily challenges. I also wish I'd been able to watch the classes in action, but since by sheer coincidence the day I was visiting was a day the students had an early morning exam and a thunderstorm right after, I was unable to sit in on classes more naturally. Overall however, it was an amazing experience, and the good people at Antyodoy are doing a lot right, the kids all appeared energetic and healthy, and the Ashram was a beautiful place to visit. I hope to be back here again someday!