



*Asha for Education*TM

UFlorida Chapter

Gators for Asha, 300-9 J W Reitz Union, P.O Box 118505, Gainesville, FL 32601

www.ashanet.org/uflorida

Vikasana Site Visit Report

Date of Visit: 8th July 2008

Project Contact Information:

Name of the Project: *Vikasana Bridge School*, Bhadravathi

Organization: *Vikasana* Trust,

P B No.23, TARIKERE-577228,

Chikmagalore dist, Karnataka, India

Website: www.vikasana.org

Contact Person: A. M. Vargheese Cleatas, Chairman/Project Director

Cell: 94482 24872

Ph. 08261-222500, 223739

Email: [vikasana_ngo AT sify DOT com](mailto:vikasana_ngo@sify.com)

Site Visitor's Information:

Name: Sanketh Bhat

Email: [sanketh AT gmail DOT com](mailto:sanketh@gmail.com)

Address: 309 SW, 16th Ave, Apt #158, Gainesville, FL-32601



Asha for Education™

UFlorida Chapter

Gators for Asha, 300-9 J W Reitz Union, P.O Box 118505, Gainesville, FL 32601

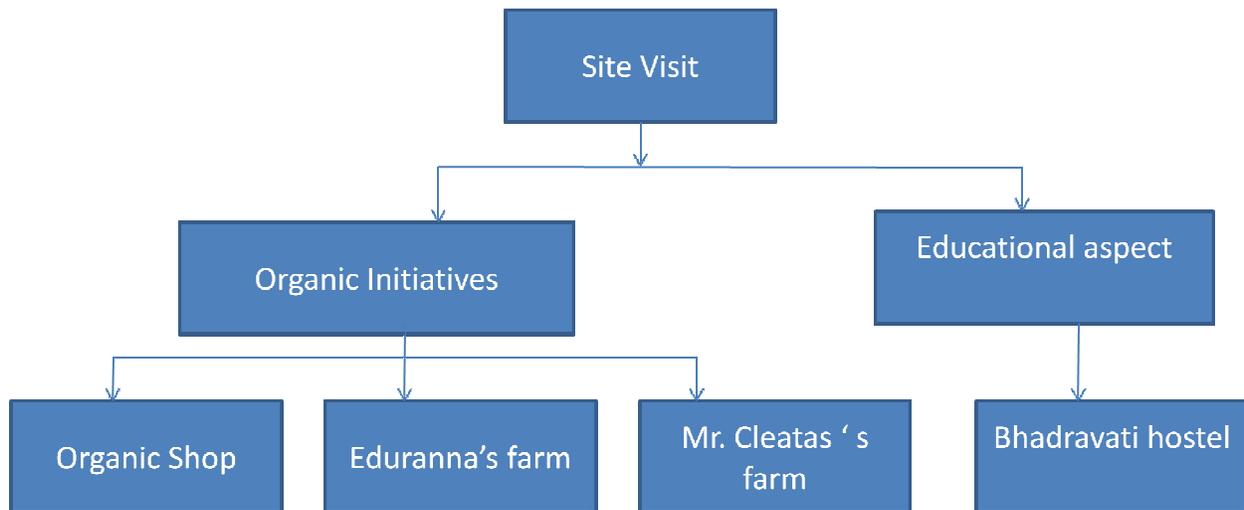
www.ashanet.org/uflorida

The Journey Begins...

On the morning of July 8th 2008, Tuesday, at around 8:30 am, I was picked up from Shimoga by Shiva, the Vikasana trust driver. After a drive of about an hour, we reached the trust office in Tarikere. There I had the opportunity of meeting several employees of Vikasana. The main office also has a library, a KKS sponsored hostel and a kitchen.

About Vikasana

VIKASANA is a non-governmental organization (NGO) established in the year 1998 for the benefit of mankind, especially the economically and socially backward rural people. The trust has worked to identify, meet the needs and aspirations of the rural poor through participatory approaches to development. Awareness raising, child labor elimination, health & nutrition, income generation, joint forest planning & management, natural resource management, non-formal education, poverty alleviation, small family norms, sustainable agriculture development, watershed development and women and child related activities have been the major thrust areas of VIKASANA.



I was in the office for about 3 hours discussing the various projects of Vikasana with the employees of the trust. Vikasana has spread its activities to around 150 villages in and around Tarikere District.



*Asha for Education*TM

UFlorida Chapter

Gators for Asha, 300-9 J W Reitz Union, P.O Box 118505, Gainesville, FL 32601

www.ashanet.org/uflorida

A few of the activities of Vikasana are:

1. **Self Help groups:** Vikasana has formed SHG of about 4 thousand women. The trust mainly acts as a facilitator of the groups and holds federations/fete annually wherein all the women of the different groups come together and share their ideas etc. It also helps the various agencies to educate and raise awareness among the women. For e.g. one member of a particular SHG wanted to marry of her minor daughter, but the other members of the group opposed and the girl got married off last year after reaching the legal age for marriage.
2. **Organic Farming Initiative:** The trust has formed an 'Association of organic farmers' to promote natural and organic farming. Currently, about 1800 farmers are in the association. Since it is more expensive for the farmers to go in for individual organic farming certification, they have formed a group. The certification will take 3 years and requires meticulous book-keeping. Since the book-keeping methodology recommended by the government is a bit difficult for the farmers to comprehend, the trust has come up with a book-keeping procedure and is inspected every year. The trust also has documented and published books on herbal medicines and natural farming practices.
3. **Seed bank:** The trust has a seed bank which gives seeds to farmers at no cost, but expects the farmers to return a certain amount of seeds at the end of the season. The main intention of the seed bank is to preserve the variety of seeds from previous generations. Mr. Cleatas claims that they have seeds of vegetables and grains which are over 100 years old. On questioning the rationale for that, Srinivas, the school coordinator was quick to mention that a particular type of leafy vegetable needed much less water and resources, than the current generation of seeds. It is to preserve the 'richness' of the older generation of food products that they have started the bank.
4. **Rain water Harvesting/water shedding etc.:** Vikasana along with some other local trusts like Pakriti has been spreading awareness of the importance of water conservation. The trust has undertaken the construction of large rain water harvesting tanks, canals etc in various villages. More details and a video documenting the trusts work regarding this aspect can be got from me.
5. **Campaign again child labor:** The trust is very aggressive in its campaign against child labor and has put up various messages sensitizing the people about the issues in various public places in different villages.



Asha for Education™

UFlorida Chapter

Gators for Asha, 300-9 J W Reitz Union, P.O Box 118505, Gainesville, FL 32601

www.ashanet.org/uflorida





*Asha for Education*TM

UFlorida Chapter

Gators for Asha, 300-9 J W Reitz Union, P.O Box 118505, Gainesville, FL 32601

www.ashanet.org/uflorida

The trust has got various awards from various agencies and the State government for its Public work. The trust was also recommended by the State government as a partner NGO to 'Childline'. Mr. Cleatas, chairman of Vikasana is also the chairman of the child protection agency, a government agency in Tarikere District.

Organic farming Initiative:

Asha has been considering a sustainability proposal for the Bhadravati School and the project was taken up at WAH 2007. With an intention of understanding the proposal a bit better, Mr. Cleatas wanted me to visit a few places regarding the proposal.

- a.) **Organic shop:** The organic farmers association has started an organic shop to sell their produce. The shop sells organic produce like organic jiggery, bananas, raagi, coconut oil, rice, pumpkins and various herbal medicines mainly made by Mrs. Lily Cleatas. All profits from the shop go to the association. Once the association gets the certification from government authorities, Mr. Cleatas is confident that they will be able to sell their produce on a much larger scale.

- b.) **Eduranna's farm:** Mr. Cleatas claims that Eduranna has been developed as an organic farmer by the trust and is a valuable part of the organic farmers association. Eduranna has 16 acres of zero cultivation, 100% natural farm. He has been an organic farmer for about 10 years and gives seminars/ lectures at various places about organic farming. The day I visited him, a forest ranger also visited the trust after attending to a lecture given by Eduranna. Eduranna grows organic coconut, sugarcane, turmeric bananas, ajola. arecanut etc in his farm. He also commercially markets organic fertilizer which he makes in his farm. He practices 'intercropping' in his farm and stressed the importance of 'Jeevanamruta' time and again.

" Jeevan amruta is not a gift of organic farming..it is a gift of nature"

-Eduranna



*Asha for Education*TM

UFlorida Chapter

Gators for Asha, 300-9 J W Reitz Union, P.O Box 118505, Gainesville, FL 32601

www.ashanet.org/uflorida

Eduranna claims that when he started natural farming, the local community thought of him as a lunatic. On being questioned on how the society sees him now that he seems to be doing well, he is quick to reply, “ They still think I am a lunatic, but one whose ideas work.”

“ I may not be a rich farmer..But I can definitely live comfortably in organic farming”

-Eduranna

Typical of natural farming, Eduranna is very scrupulous in the utilization of resources like water. He utilizes drip irrigation and is currently recharging over 10 bore wells. He has water harvesting pits in his farm. He also has a bio gas plant. He claims natural farming and intercropping is very logical and natural. He does not use any chemical pesticides and only sprays ‘Jeevan amruta’ once a month on his land. Mr. Cleatas claims that his turmeric and jaggery are in great demand across the district.

c.) **Mr. Cleatas farm:** In order to understand and practice organic and natural farming for himself, Mr. Cleatas has bought an acre of land right outside his house and has been farming there for a few years. He wants it to be a ‘model farm’ for other famers to visit, understand natural farming and practice it for themselves. Before he purchased the land, it was used by a farmer who used chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Mr. Cleatas has been growing coconut, areca nut, elephant leg gourd, bananas, chickoos, many medicinal herbs etc in the farm. I was accompanied by the organic farming coordinator of Vikasana who showed me around. Like Eduranna’s farm, Mr. Cleatas’s model farm is a zero cultivation farm. They have facility for drip irrigation, but Ms Cleatas mentioned that they hardly need to water the plants and trees, as they have a rain water harvesting pit which increases the ground water level pretty high and keeps the soil at the surface moist. They too have a bio gas plant, provision for making ‘Jeevanamruta’ and reuse water as much as possible. They have provision for generation of electricity using solar energy in their house. The yield of the farm is pretty high and they send a significant amount of vegetables and ragi to both the hostels. I have the detailed copy of the documentation which Mr. Cleatas keeps for organic certification purposes.



*Asha for Education*TM

UFlorida Chapter

Gators for Asha, 300-9 J W Reitz Union, P.O Box 118505, Gainesville, FL 32601

www.ashanet.org/uflorida

“Natural farming values land whereas by using chemical fertilizers, farmers don’t appreciate the value of the land.”

-Mr. Cleatas

They have a few cows which give them milk and provide the essential ingredient of ‘Jeevan amruta.’ They also have a few honey harvesting bee hives around the farm. Mr. Cleatas says natural farming is all about following simple and logical practices. For example, when a branch of a certain tree falls, let the branch decompose into the soil on its own, but a farmer generally tends to remove them from the farm and he thus loses the benefit of natural fertilizer and manure. The farm is sprinkled with some vegetable oils which act as a pesticide. Ajola is an aquatic plant, rich in protein, essential amino acids, vitamin A, B12, Beta carotene, Calcium, Phosphate, Iron, Copper, Magnesium, Potassium etc. Dried ajola contains 25-35% protein, 10-15% bio active compounds and polymers. When given to cows it increases the yield of milk up to 1.5 times. It can also be used as manure for plants. Growing Ajola is very easy; all you need is a pit of about 2m X 1m and a few gms of the plant. It reproduces very fast and you can get a kg of Ajola a week which can sell at Rs. 35/kg in the market. Mr. Cleatas also adds that farmers cut and burn the weeds which grow by the roadside, whereas our forefathers used to cut the weeds finely and mix it with organic manure which enriches the soil. It is such practices which differentiates organic farmers from those who use chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The coordinator of organic farming adds that organic farming can work everywhere. Farmers in Vidarbha are struggling because they are growing BT cotton which needs a lot of water. A farmer practicing intercropping and natural farming will not have high expenditure and can live comfortably. Mr. Cleatas rues that it is very difficult to change the mindset of farmers. They are just not comfortable giving up chemical fertilizers, but it is slowly changing. He also adds that if a certain year there is a rumor circulating that there is going to be a good demand for tomatoes, virtually the entire district grows tomatoes that year and the price of tomato falls that season. The importance of intercropping needs to be impressed among farmers.

d.) **Medicinal Nursery:** Ms Cleatas is very knowledgeable about herbal medicines and grows many herbs in their farm/nursery. In order that the knowledge is transferred and spread they organize site visits for many agricultural colleges. Ms. Cleatas has taken a lot of pains and collected lots of specimens and documented the procedure for making the medicines. The children from the hostel and the employees of the trust help in making the medicines so that they too understand the importance and process of making the medicines. They also have workshops during the SHG conferences where the women are taught how to make basic medicines etc. The medicines are sold at the organic shop and at the federation conferences.



*Asha for Education*TM

UFlorida Chapter

Gators for Asha, 300-9 J W Reitz Union, P.O Box 118505, Gainesville, FL 32601

www.ashanet.org/uflorida

Educational aspect: Bhadravati Hostel:

After visiting the organic farming initiatives, I visited the Bhadravati hostel at around 6:30 in the evening. The kids were eagerly waiting for me and seemed very happy to have a visitor. I was accompanied by Srinivas, the education coordinator, Mr. Cleatas and the trust driver. The kids seemed very happy to be there. Every kid introduced themselves and I was impressed to see that everyone wanted to be a doctor, engineer, lawyer, teacher etc. Most of them were orphans or had a single parent. On asking them, how they felt to be in the hostel away from their parents, I got a frank reply that initially they wanted to go back home, but later on they started liking it there as they have games, dance and other cultural activities going on in the hostel along with studies. Mr. Cleatas added that most of them excel in extracurricular activities in the schools. After the introduction, I was given a great show of various cultural dances, poems, songs etc. The kids had put up lots of drawings, writings on the wall for me to see and were eager that I acknowledge it. I was kind of surprised by their witty nature as they asked me questions like do they have hostels like these in the US. Due to crux of time I could stay in the hostel for a short time and missed out seeing the other facilities in the hostel. The senior kids are taught computer skills by the teachers and some are even taught Hindi, which is very uncharacteristic for people in the region. Mr. Cleatas mentions that the major problem they face is because of parents. The parents initially are not comfortable having kids away from them. Most of them work in coffee estates or in construction work. The kids are used to collect coffee beans as elders can't pick them or they are used to help in the construction work or take care of their siblings when their parent are out working. Whenever parents visit the children, they leave some money with the kids. Initially the kids want to run off using that money, but after they get settled in the hostel they start liking it there. I then questioned the teachers what do they do with the money. The children deposit the money with Asha, one of the teachers. If they go out on an excursion, the children ask for the money to buy some goodies etc. The hostel had gone on an excursion last year to Mysore and surrounding areas and the children still tell stories about the trip. This October Mr. Cleatas is planning to take the children to Mr George's, an Asha volunteer's house in Sirsi. Inspired by Ms. Lily Cleatas, the children had planted some pumkin plants and claim to water it every day. Overall, I think the children are happy in the hostel and they seem to be doing well under the teachers and Mr. Srinivas's guidance. I have a complete list of children in the hostel for the current year.



*Asha for Education*TM

UFlorida Chapter

Gators for Asha, 300-9 J W Reitz Union, P.O Box 118505, Gainesville, FL 32601

www.ashanet.org/uflorida

"We don't want all our kids to be engineers, doctors etc. We want them to be able to earn a livelihood and sustain their families. We are confident that it will happen."

-Mr. Cleatas

When I visited Mr. Cleatas's house the children from the KKS hostel were playing and running around as if it was their own house. In order to accommodate more children, Mr. Cleatas is constructing a floor above their house to make another hostel. I guess this shows the families commitment towards the cause.

Some success stories:

1. **Asha:** Asha grew up at the Bhadravati hostel supported by 'Asha'. She is now the teacher, mentor and the cook at the school along with another tutor. The kids seem to like her and she runs the activities of the hostel and teaches the older kids computer skills. In my opinion, she is definitely a highlight of this project. Many kids currently in the school mentioned that they want to be teachers on growing up; I definitely think she is influencing the kids in a positive way.
2. **Prem Kumar:** Prem Kumar also grew up in Bhadravati hostel and is now in the 12th standard. On asking what he wants to do later on in life, he is quick to respond that he wants to pursue Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and will to join the trust.
3. **Santosh:** Santosh grew up in the KKS sponsored hostel and just completed his 12th standard and a course on electrical fittings. On Mr. Cleatas request and recommendation, he recently got a job at the Dharamasthala Trust.

And so the journey ends...

I was in a rush to get back the next day to a certain place, so I was dropped off by Mr. Cleatas at around 8:30 in the night at Shimoga. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the employees of Vikasana and all volunteers at Asha UFlorida for giving me this opportunity to have such an educational and value adding visit. Please feel free to contact me for more information about the visit and for documents about our project and the trust.



*Asha for Education*TM

UFlorida Chapter

Gators for Asha, 300-9 J W Reitz Union, P.O Box 118505, Gainesville, FL 32601

www.ashanet.org/uflorida

Requests from the project partner:

1. Since the children from the Asha schools are now successfully passing their 10th and 12th grades, the trust wants us to consider providing scholarship for children who want to pursue higher studies.
2. The project partner wants to extensively document and video record their activities related to children so that organizations working on similar lines can learn from their experience. The video of their water harvesting and shedding activities acts as an example

Recommendations from the site visitor:

1. I personally think the requests 1. and 2. are reasonable and Asha should consider funding both the aspects.
2. Vikasana trust and its employees seem to have a good experience in organic farming, documenting and book keeping related activities. I noticed that the motivation level to serve is pretty high. Hence, I think we should go ahead with the pilot self sustainability proposal. One of the major concerns of Asha UFlorida was related to book-keeping. As mentioned before the trust has published various books related to natural farming and herbal medicines and has published, distributed and annually inspects the book-keeping of the farmers as required for organic farming certification, I think the trust can maintain records of farming as per Asha UFlorida's expectations.

Disclaimer: All facts, figures and numbers quoted are to the best of my knowledge and there is no intention of distorting facts. For more information please contact me. I was given an exhaustive set of documents, books and diaries related to the trust activities. Please have a look at the site visit photographs to better understand the events as seen by me on the day.