

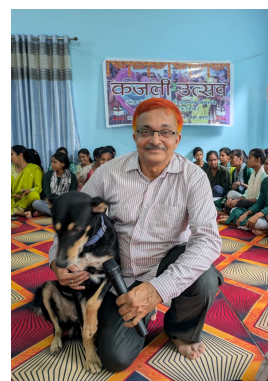
Site visit report of Asha Kaithi

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Asha Kaithi is doing much work towards educating children from marginalised communities. They have been Asha Kaithi also serves as the headquarters of Asha Trust where auditing of all project takes place. In addition to this mammoth task, Asha Kaithi is also running many intervention programs (advocacy, scholarships, social awareness campaigns, education of the marginalized, constitutional rights and duties, mobile libraries, etc.). Several of these initiatives at Asha Kaithi are being coordinated or spearheaded by Vallabh bhaiya. Some of the initiatives of Asha Kaithi that I got to observe are as follows:



1. **E-library and study centre for girls:**

During my visit to the remote locations around Varanasi, I observed that many challenges are faced by the village students (especially girls), such as a lack of access to books, educational resources, internet connectivity, etc. In order to address this, Asha Kaithi has been establishing e-libraries (libraries with digital infrastructure) in these remote locations for girls. These libraries promote inclusiveness by giving girls from underserved communities get increased access to academic resources.

The intent is to provide the girls in a remote location with a resourceful and peaceful place to prepare for their study and entrance exam. A range of books (approx. 500 in total) could be found in Asha libraries to support the joy of reading in children and assist graduates' ambitions. Further, the books in the library are also obtained in consultation with the girls. The study centre over time, has become a safe space where girls from the village come to study.

Gudiya and Purnima regularly visit Asha e-library and study centre in Kaithi village. Both girls are preparing for different entrance examinations. The safe and resourceful space of the e-library provides them with the means to pursue their ambitions. The e-library has sufficient books purchased in consultation with the girls themselves. If the library does not have a particular book, then there is also a provision to submit a request.

Moreover, the availability of adequate desktops and internet gives them access to several online resources and lectures. Similarly, 45 other girls from neighbouring villages are also judiciously using the space, books, desktop and internet connectivity to fulfil their dreams. Around 20 girls come to e-library regularly. The study centre gives the girls a break from their house chores and provides them with an environment with peer learning.

Similar libraries equipped with digital infrastructure have been set up at Bhandaha Kala (Varanasi), Dhanapur (Varanasi), Kanaila (Azamgarh), and Reoti (Balai). I have visited All of these libraries last year May, 2024 too to understand the work done by Kaithi.

Over the years the library has become the centre for social change which is evident at the Kaithi centre. The years of work have led to:

- **Educational Support:** Access to books, reference materials, and educational programs.
- **Cultural Enrichment:** Promoting local culture and heritage through literature and community events.
- **Digital Literacy:** Providing access to computers and the internet for research and learning.

- **Community Cohesion:** A space for residents to gather, interact, and share knowledge.



E-library at Kaithi (Varanasi)



Setting Wall-library in Ramchandarpur



Children at Ramchandarpur



Cultural activities at e-library (Kaithi)

2. Library facilitation in government schools and the community

Asha Kaithi also conducts library sessions (book reading, storytelling, etc.) in government schools and in the community. Each facilitator has also recently been equipped with a laptop for improved facilitation. It was really heartening to see the wall libraries established by Asha Kaithi and the creative sessions being conducted by the facilitators. I visited one of the schools and had earlier visited the community library session in progress, where the facilitator carried books and conducted a session (filled with poetry, story and games) under a tree.



A library session in progress in a government school



3. Educator training programs

Asha Kaithi has been organizing a number of training workshops for the capacity building of its facilitators. I got the opportunity to observe 3 of such amazing workshops. One was based on language by Karthik from Eklavya. Then Diganter from Rajasthan conducted a workshop on pedagogy, language and mathematics. These training sessions become important for the learning and facilitation of the educators.



Diganter workshop



Puppet workshop for children



School session by Karthik, Eklavya

4. Asha Social Education Centre:

Asha Trust is running Asha Social Education Centres in which two hours of supportive classes are provided to boys and girls aged 4 to 14 years after school. These children mostly come from underprivileged sections who need additional support with their education. During this time, sports and other non-academic activities are also conducted for personality development. I got to observe these centres at Bhagwanpur, Kaithi, and Mirzamurad.



Asha social education centre at Mirzamurad

5. Dialogue with young girls (on education, health, safety and respect):

I was not able to attend the session but got an opportunity to interact with Dr. Indu Pandey [MA (Sociology), M. Phil, Ph.D] who conducts and facilitates the program.

She informed that in the program they hold dialogue sessions with girl students from class 6 to graduation. The sessions include 5-6 interactions at fixed intervals with identified groups (of 40-50 girl students) from pre-secondary school to college level. During the sessions, dialogue is held on their physical structure, health, nutrition, issues, women's rights etc.. There is usually little discussion on these topics at the school or family level, hence there are many misconceptions due to which they face many problems in life. This programme aims to make girls and young women aware of their physiology, health, nutrition and rights. The target of this programme is to reach 800 girls every year.

To maintain long-term relations with girls and women involved in various programs of schools and groups, a group named Pakhi Organization was formed, whose regular meetings discuss contemporary issues, and possibilities of solutions. Pakhi Organization takes the initiative to intervene in incidents of violence against women by creating awareness about women's rights.



Pictures provided by Indu

6. Women's self-reliance program:

Training programs are conducted to increase household income and impart skills to the identified groups. At present, beautician and sewing training programs are offered at different centres. Last year, I visited one such course in progress (refer photos) near the railway station. This time, a continuous sessions is happening in batches at Kaithi centre itself. In future, efforts will be made to give it a more comprehensive form so that women and adolescents in need can generate their own income and become self-reliant. The target of this program is to train 120-150 adolescents/women every year.



Pictures provided by Indu

7. Samvidhan Jagrukta (constitution awareness program):

This program is designed for children from classes 8 to 12 of higher secondary level schools. In this program, Asha Trust collaborates with school management and, with proper consent, distributes specifically designed pamphlets based on articles, rights, duties etc. of the Constitution of India to the students. After, 3-4 days, a multiple-choice test (consisting of 25 questions) based on the pamphlet is conducted. Further, the top three students performing in the test from each class are given a certificate and a book. The program's purpose is to make the children aware of the constitutional values so that they become responsible citizens. The program also prepares the students for competitive exams by covering their civics curriculum. This program, reaches about 12000 children from about 60 -70 schools annually.



Picture provide by Vallabh bhaiya

8. Workshops on safe and unsafe touch:

Dr. Indu organises Workshops to empower children about their protection and safety. The children of classes 3 to 5 of government primary schools are made aware of their personal space, safety and support network. Every year 8-10 schools are selected where 4 to 5 sessions are held. Children are introduced to good and bad touch through short films, posters, games etc. and also about gender equality and child violence. The target is to reach 2000 children every year through this program.



Pic provided by Indu

9. Asha Social Education Centre at brick kilns (seasonal)

Asha Kaithi also runs education centres at brick kilns. Though, the centres were not operational due to monsoon, I did get to visit a few last year. This time, I interacted with the centre facilitators who teach the children at the brick kiln during the training session at Kaithi centre.

The construction industry depends heavily on brick-making, built on the hard labour of migrant workers from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh. Entire families migrate seasonally, with workers toiling from sunrise to sunset in harsh conditions. Tragically, this includes their children.

An estimated **60–80% of children, aged 5–14 years**, in brick kilns work 10-hour daily alongside their parents. These children miss out on education, health, and nutrition. Hence, Asha Kaithi runs the following **11 centres** (Asha Samajik Shikshan Kendra), facilitating around **440 children**. These centres' safe spaces offer education, care, and dignity to children who would otherwise get trapped in labour.

The details of the learning centres at different brick kilns are as follows:

S. No.	Brick kiln	Address	Facilitator	Children facilitated	Migrated from
1	RIP	Bhandhan Kala, Varanasi	Vidya Devi	36	Bihar, Jharkhand and Bihar
2	Rudra Brick Field	Varanasi	Ramesh Kumar	45	Jharkhad and Bihar
3	Aastha	Rajwari, Varanasi	Kumari Anchal	22	Rajwari and Ghazipur
4	Krishna Brick Field	Bhandhan Kala, Varanasi	Anchal Kumari	35	Ghazipur and Ranchi
5	R B Brick Field	Varanasi	Anita Gond	52	Ranchi, Varansi
6	Mahendra Brick Fields	Bhawanipur, Mirzapur	Neelam Pradhan	48	Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Bihar
7	Gold Brick Field	Rohaniya, Varanasi	Arun Kumar	42	Bihar and Ranchi
8	Harsh Brick Field	Varanasi	Manisha Patel	38	Bihar and Jharkhand
9	Vimla Brick Field	Dhanapur, Varanasi	Sheela Devi	35	Jharkhand
10	Sagar Brick Field	Mahnag, Varanasi	Shashi Kala	48	Varanasi and Bhadhoi
11	Vijay Brick Field	Mirzamurad, Varanasi	Lalmani	39	Bihar





Pics provided by Deen Dayal bhaiya

10. Social welfare awareness programs

Asha Kaithi also facilitates a number of programs that enrich and benefit the community at large. Some of the programs that I witnessed were invited interactions/lectures by people from different fields of life (musicians, artists, academicians, agriculturists, researchers, etc.). There were also programs to help community through blood donation camp, eye relief camp, career counselling etc. organised at the Kaithi centre.

Suggestions

The breath of work being done at Asha Kaithi is humungous. There are numerous other awareness programs and advocacy initiatives they do with schools and the community. The whole experience has been humbling. The attempt appears to facilitate holistic education for the children. Some of my suggestions in the same context would be:

- a) An activity-based approach and providing reference notes could be explored for the sessions with school adolescents.
- b) The training of the facilitators has started, and it is appreciable that now digital training is also being provided to all. A structured digital literacy course could be introduced for the facilitators and the children.
- c) I observed an over-dependence on YouTube classes rather than studying from textbooks at libraries with a digital system. A conscious effort to introduce the children to various books would be beneficial.
- d) A number of programs keep happening throughout the year. It would be helpful if a tentative planner could be prepared for anyone interested in participating.
- e) The girls were mainly preparing for government jobs. I feel conducting some career counselling sessions will broaden the girls' perspective. It needs mentioning that this month, four girls from Kaithi library have gone to Pune to study programming.