

## Site visit to SES, Vidyanagar

By Giri (Asha Hyderabad) on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2008

I went to the school just before noon time. That day is the last day of the school before summer holidays. All the children were writing their last final examination. Some classes (higher classes) has Social Sciences examination and for lower classes it is General Knowledge (GK). I looked at the GK examination paper for lower classes (3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> std), it seemed to be tough exam (I felt that way). Most of the lower classes children were done with their examination and were sitting idle. The way children were arranged is there are 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> std student sitting in that order on a bench so that there will not be any possibility of cheating.

I asked few general questions to the students and they were very shy and hesitant to answer. May be because I am a stranger to them. When the teachers there started prompting and supporting me in my questions, the children started talking to me well. I started asking questions in simple mathematics after asking what lessons or chapters they have in mathematics. They said additions, subtractions etc. I asked a simple question in addition. I wrote on board to add two numbers, but with mismatched with respect to units, tens, hundreds places like:

2391  
+162

And the answer they gave (all the children unanimously) was 4011. I said it is wrong and they argued that it is not. Then I put an extra zero after 162 and made it 1620 and asked them to add. The answer was still 4011. Then I asked how the answers could be the same even though the numbers changed. Then they started thinking. They still could not answer the reason. Then I told the concept of addition or subtraction that the numbers should be added or subtracted after matching their units, tens, hundreds etc places. So, the first question was wrong. I was expecting somebody could correct the same. I wanted to tell the children that they should ask teachers any question that they have. They should not be hesitant even in asking any kind of question even if they think that it is silly. They should keep asking why, how and what for whatever they are being taught. This way they will learn basics.

After this, I realized that these children are missing basics but are being taught big things. They are being made to 'by heart' whatever being taught and simply mug up. This is definitely not good way of learning. I guess the teachers there also are not so educated (in terms of how to educate children). This is one of the observation that I have.

I then went to higher std classes (6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>) and asked them few basic questions on geography, by starting with what does geography teaches us? No student could answer any of the questions. Then I asked them to show some cities in India in India map. I got 50% correct answers. Here also the problem is the same. No basics were taught. The teachers were following simply whatever is there in the formal text books and making students mug up.

In the mean time, Mr. Kanakaraju, founder of the school came and talked to me for some time about the school and how has it been running etc. He looks like have been trying hard not to make children drop out from the school. He told that most of the children are first generation literates and most (75%) of them are from muslim community. Most of the girl children when they come to 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> standard, their parents get them married and make them work at home. Kanakaraju quoted that one such incident happened just last week and girl was not even allowed to write her final exams after studying 8<sup>th</sup> std. He said they have now started music classes and also are planning for computer classes from the next academic year. There have been some issue with customs for the computers sent by Asha SV for them and other Asha Hyderabad projects. Once this gets sorted out, they will have two computers. They are expecting few volunteers to teach the children computers. He also said that he insisted on full day school even in summer (which is unusual in other schools) because if the children are let out, they will just go home and work or play on the streets. So, it is better for them to stay in the school as long as they can.

I then took about four kids with me to talk to them personally (away from school and teachers) and asked them if they are comfortable with the school. I also clarified that since teachers were carrying sticks in their hands and asked if they are using them to beat or spank them. They said no, but only to scare them and it seems the teachers do give them small punishments if they misbehave or do not do home work etc. Overall they seem to be happy with the school because they said its free education for them and teachers are nice to them.

My overall visit went well. I could see the growth in the organization in terms of growing the number of children, teachers as well as the infrastructure. The new building has about 8 to 10 class rooms compared to just 3 or 4 in the old premises. The only observation I have is that there could be some teacher training and make them teach the students from basics instead of going through purely text book oriented teaching.

The project website is not updated with new address and phone numbers. Here are the new details:

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Hyderabad

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Students from various classes (4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>) just finished writing their last exam.