

### **Visit to Parner Schools run by Masum:**

**Date:** 6<sup>th</sup> March 2010

Visit done by Giri and his colleague (Chandu) from Asha Hyderabad

We started from Pune at around 7:30 AM from Yerwada junction, and reached Shirur at around 9:30 AM. We then called up Dr. Ramesh Awasthi and told that we were coming on that day. I did not realize that I should have called him a day earlier since I was also not so sure of my travel/visit. But then after calling him and at the end of the day, I realized that visiting schools even from Parner is not so easy. Dr. Awasthi gave me the contact of Mr. Dilip, who is the local coordinator for the schools. When we called him, he suggested us to take a bus to Parner, and get down at a place called "Raligan" (if I recollect the name correct). Parner is 30 km from Shirur and Raligan is halfway through that. We took a bus as suggested and got down at Raligan. There was absolutely no signal to call from our mobiles! We then found one local phone booth and called up Dilip from there. He then received us from there. In fact, his office was just beside from the phone booth where we called from.

He made an arrangement for a car to go the schools in couple of villages. We went to the first school, which is about 70 km from Raligan. We had been through rough roads initially, and I wondered how a vehicle, even a 2 wheeler could go through these roads, and when we went further, there were no roads even. We had to somehow make a way to some place on one mountain and go trekking down to a valley for about 0.5 km. We could see randomly distributed houses and I could see one concrete house, which I learnt that belongs to a landlord, who owns 5 trucks and uses them for transportation of goods produced. Rest of the houses are either huts or thatched roof, including this school. The school is basically a one room and adjacent to that there is another school run by another organization, which is from primary to 4<sup>th</sup> std. This school is for pre primary and there were 13 children present on the day we were there out of 16. There were couple of teachers and one of them is pretty new and getting trained by the other. I asked several questions to Mr. Dilip like the teaching methodologies, materials used etc. I could not talk to teachers and children since they do know neither Hindi nor English. So, to talk to the teachers, Dilip was the only translator that we had in Hindi. Their answers to our queries were:

1. The teachers do get training (for informal education) in Pune once or twice in a year.
2. The teaching methodology is totally play and learn and they make children make lot of creative stuff like art, painting, articles with paper etc.
3. They teach through singing, make children learn singing etc.
4. The children are children of the local village(s) and are all from tribal community and their parents are mostly daily wage labors. There is no good farming there since there is not much rainfall or enough water resources there.
5. The teachers also come from local village and usually pick the students from respective places and come to school.
6. The teachers go to nearest govt school (about 2 km), and get lunch for all the children from the govt school supply. They have requested the Govt School to make little more food for their school as well.

Dilip picked up few sticks, chalk pieces, and asked children to pick up few and put back few etc and then asked how many they picked, how many left etc to make them understand on how to do addition and subtraction. He took few sketch pens and asked the children to identify colors and match them with what they see in their daily life. I thought this way, the children could learn pretty fast. This children were initially little shy looking at strangers and also since we could not speak their language. But the children were very playful and seem to have been enjoying in the school. They were also asked to sing along and couple of children also sang on their own. Few videos from the first school we visited:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k74GEIQerwI>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cq\\_gTT5Q0oo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cq_gTT5Q0oo)

I realized from Dilip that Asha funds for the teacher's salaries, their training expenses including travel and play/education material. If this is the case, I personally think that they are doing very good justice to that.

We then went to another school and this one is also about 60 km from there. This route is much worse than the previous one. We had to cross ghatty roads (several mountains) and then finally reached this village and fortunately there is no trekking this time. There was one teacher there. This school also resembled very similar to the other one and very similar kind of children and education. The children were really having fun. They sat outside their class room where there was nice weather and breeze that day since the school was surrounded by mountains.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08-KOqLaMsY>

We then asked how many such schools are run by Masum. Dilip said it used to 5 and now there are only 3 being run. There used to be around 125 children being benefited, and now only 50 and since two bigger schools (about 40 and 30) were dropped either because the teacher left or because of non availability of teachers. This is one of the concerns that I thought should be addressed immediately. I then asked why would there be a problem of finding teachers and teachers quitting. He said that the teachers hardly get a salary of 1100 to 1300 per month. But by working as a daily wage labor, they get Rs. 100 per day. Even if there is no work for 50% of the days, they end up earning Rs. 1500 per month. I asked the teacher there if she would also do the same. But this teacher said that she feels happy working and interacting with children. In fact this teacher comes from about 4 km from the school walking and picks up lunch in the morning itself from a Govt school somewhere in the middle of her way to school. I asked what do the children end up after this school (pre primary)? The answer was that most of them go to Govt school after that and then most of them discontinue after 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> std. But then, the children would have received some ground level education, which may be helpful for their living or for those who continue their further education.

We then got back to Raligan at around 6:30 PM and on the way back, Dilip showed us third school and it was closed by the time we were there. We then paid off the taxi driver and headed back to Pune. It was a really good visit and was a good experience learning that these people including the teachers are doing commendable job. I personally think

that Asha should continue supporting this project and if possible (after taking the consent from the partner NGO), should think of a strategy to make teachers not to quit or try to find teachers who show better commitment.

Photos of our visit:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/kolanupaka/ParnerSiteVisit6Mar2010>