

October 6,7,8 2003

Site Visit to Vishwamandal Sevashram, Dhule

Dates: Oct 6,7,8 2003

Site Visitors: Shanmuga, Subashree

We arrived at VishwaMandal Sevashram by an overnight bus from Bombay. VS is situated in Shirpur Taluk of Dhule. The Sevashram has been running for the last 20 years or so, with Fr. Godfrey D'Lima being there for the last 16 years. In and around the remote hills of Dhule are tribal populations of Pawra / Bhil communities. Largely inaccessible, except for a 1-2 day hike up the mountains, the tribal populations in these areas are largely cut off from the plains, and have little or no access to schools and no access to medical care. The few tribal settlements, closer to the plains had a few zilla parishad schools up to Class 4. The teacher attendance is largely at the discretion of the teacher. Most of the hill settlements had only empty buildings for schools. The community is agricultural and grows jowar. Mainly subsistence farmers, who grow for their own consumption and the more "prosperous" ones may have something to sell in the market. The more prosperous families have 1 or maximum 2 cows, the milk being used for home consumption. The language spoken is Pawra. Fr. Godfrey and the sisters of Anand Sadan have been introducing women's savings schemes, tuition classes / re-starting schools in empty Govt school buildings, introducing village health care and training village medical practitioners, and introducing organic farming techniques and implemented a water shed. They have been doing this work diligently and with tremendous care, over the last 16 years. The govt has built a few buildings here and there, mostly empty, and called them Zilla Parishad schools. The govt also has teachers on it's payroll, sometimes 2 to a school, and paid at Rs. 6000 / month. These teachers are on payroll only.

Oct 6th: We went with Fr. Godfrey and Sister Mary to Bandarapada to attend a routine meeting of the self help group. Sister Mary has started very successful savings schemes, and each participant from the village was contributing Rs. 20 / month. Some of the older schemes had around 1 lakh with them and Sister Mary has been able to use the savings to generate loans from the govt for other employment generation schemes: one particularly successful self help group was able to get a loan of 2 ½ lakhs for a goat rearing programme with Sister Mary's help. In this meeting, there were around 17 women, and Sister Mary and the village coordinator, a very dynamic lady, was kind of selling the attendants on the value of being in the program and narrating success stories from other villages in order to keep up the morale. This SHG was only around 4 months old. This was also a village in which Father Godfrey had started a school, but had stopped it 4 months back because of lack of attendance. Interestingly, a majority of the village folk dropped in on the meeting to request Fr. Godfrey to re-start the school. Fr. Godfrey made them commit to paying 4 months fees in advance (Rs. 20 / child) and also made them re-commit to the children showing up and attending class. He then explained that he was finding it hard to make teachers stay, especially if the school has to shut down for lack of interest etc. Fr. Godfrey typically goes into a tribal village where there is no school..he uses the zilla parishad school building which is normally empty and starts a multi age

class room there with a non-formal syllabus from Class 1 – 4. This sometimes results in pressure on the govt school teacher to show up for the classes or eventually the govt appoints a teacher if there is none. Once the govt school teacher starts coming in regularly, the Sevashram teacher moves out and Fr. Godfrey finds another empty building in another tribal colony to start this work again. In a few cases, for example, where we visited, the classes continue, even after the Govt school teacher starts showing up, because they show up infrequently. So, typically, the Sevashram teacher is there from 8 – 10 and the Govt school teacher is expected to come in around 10:00. But the day we were there, the old gentleman who was the govt school teacher walked in around noon, and came straight to the Gram Mukhya's house for a chat and chai. He most likely went for the school after that. The govt school is an excuse for a school. The Sevashram village coordinator was also the village medical practitioner appointed by Fr. Godfrey. She regularly goes in to the villages with medicines and treats common ailments. The Sevashram used to have a mobile dispensary and a clinic, but now they only have a dispensary from which they sell subsidized medicines.

After the Mahila Mandal meeting, we went back to the Mission House. There was an interesting stop at the local vet to get a declaration saying a goat had died. This declaration was key to getting insurance for the dead goat – the govt employment generation program in goat rearing also had a insurance scheme which will give the farmer Rs. 2000 for a goat that died. Sister Mary provided the requisite proof on behalf of the farmer and the vet provided the certificate. After that we went to Anand Sadan, which is the home the Sisters run for tribal girls. This home allows the girls to live close to the govt school, which runs up to Class 10. Around 100 girls were living there and attending the local govt school. The Mission House where Fr. Godfrey lives houses tribal boys, again who attend the local govt school. The education system is present in some skeletal fashion – technically, if the tribal child attends the Class 1 – 4 either run by the Sevashram or the zilla parishad school, the child can get admission into the Ashram Shalas run by the govt. These Ashram Shalas are residential schools run for tribal children from Class 5 – 10. However, seats are limited and it is hard to get entry into these Ashram Shalas. Also, the schools beyond Class 4 are in the plains and are inaccessible to the families on the hills. Hence, if not for the Sevashram's schools, the tribal colonies would have practically no access to education or health care. This is an ingenious system of continuing education practically guaranteed to generate drop-outs. The service provided by running the residential center, just to provide simple lodging for children who want to continue studies at the local govt school – this is the most brilliant intervention that could have been provided by Fr. Godfrey.

Oct 7^h: The next day, we set out to visit Ambaduk and Kulchapani. Ambaduk was the site of a school (Class 1 – 4) and Kulchapani, one site of the watershed development area. The jeep took us a certain distance into the hills and then it was a walk through fields and gently sloping terrain and over small streams. Describing it as a “walk through the fields” brings up visions of a pleasant walk in the park. On a hot day, we trekked through thorn ridden 5 foot high brush and jowar fields, through one field after another. The lone farmer ploughing his field gave a brilliant smile and came up for a chat. If we managed to pass a village, all the children in the village rushed up and stood on their hill and waved

till we had passed on. The stream alluded to was swirling dark over slippery, moss ridden rocks, and we had to plot strategy and routes to get across without landing up knee deep in wet slush. The gently sloping terrain was dry and hot rock winding deceptively long distances ahead. To be fair to Fr. Godfrey, he took us only to the closest schools. There were 3 settlements of huts that we could see far away up the hills – beyond the hills there were more settlements, which had the Sevashram schools, classes 1 – 4 again. Fr. Godfrey looks at every hill, wonders how the folks there are faring without medical care and education, and draws up his plans for sending someone there to make contact and see if the village can get someone trained locally to serve as the medical practitioner. Social justice is Fr. Godfrey's driving passion. Combining a gentle, charming sense of humor, with old world manners and a love of language, he goes about his work every day with joy simmering just below the surface and understated zeal. A gentle, kind and elderly man, who worries about other people's health and worries that children are coughing. Fr. Godfrey's pleasant demeanor hides an over-riding passion for his work – his constant worry is that he wants someone to take over his work after him.. He was quietly trying to recruit Shanmuga to take up this work! Folks who show up, are unwilling to do the hill visits, they want to stay in the plain and receive reports that everything is fine. He needs someone who will be out on the hills at 6:00 am everyday, through the monsoons and the summer. BTW, we managed to get out on the hills only at a comfortable 9:00 am. And got to hike up and down in the blistering sun. The supervisors who monitor the VSM school hike the hills every day – covering maybe 1 school a day. These visits are important to ensure that the schools run regularly, otherwise, these schools will be no different from the Zilla Parishad schools. We reached the Ambaduk school. The VSM school was being held in the govt school building. It was a 1 room pucca building with 2 windows, with a fantastic view of rolling fields as far as the eye can see, surrounded by a ring of hazy hills. The teacher was Mr. Toba – he was a tribal youth, studied up to Class 3. The class was in session. Mr. Toba was an earnest teacher, who had done most of his learning with the children. There were around 17 – 18 children. It was around 11:00 am and even though the VSM class was from 8 – 10:00 am, since the govt teacher had not arrived, Toba was continuing the session. The syllabus was non-formal – the aim is to supplement whatever coaching is provided by the govt school teacher, to achieve basic literacy – reading / writing skills in Marati and basic arithmetic. The children had reached up to a point where they could read and write simple words and do basic mathematics. They had not yet learned how to string sentences together. However, they were able to point to different parts of a nature scene that we drew on the board and write down everything they saw – for example, cloud, mountains, birds, sun, house, etc. So, basic reading and writing of common words had been learnt by most. (Interestingly, we had drawn an arrow on the board, to serve as a pointer to the different parts of the drawing – it got translated to the word “arrow”, as they had taken it to resemble the traditional arrow – a classic case of Bhil vs Bill!)

The govt school teacher came in around noon. In fact, there were 2 govt teachers appointed for this school and the village head was telling us one or the other should show up. He did not seem to mind that both teachers were getting paid Rs. 6000 by the govt to show up every day and hold regular classes. The govt teacher showed up at the house we were at and we met him and took leave.

We then wanted to see the watershed development area. So we hiked up some more hills to see the trenches which had been dug in circles around the hills. Rev Singh, a tribal youth from the local village, who headed the watershed development program asked Fr. Godfrey to undertake more watershed development in the area, as he maintained that the water retention in the soil was better after the construction. We saw trenches dug at regular intervals up to the top of the hill, along with large catchment areas at the bottom of the hill. However, Fr. Godfrey was trying to figure out whether this was a request aimed at generating more employment for the village, or whether digging more trenches would really add to the existing water shed. Considering half the village can get employment through this program, he felt that the motive for the request was a little unclear. Fr. Godfrey, having been in the area for 16 years, is also very pragmatic about work he undertakes. First, he undertakes no work which is not initiated / or actively endorsed by the villages themselves. If they request a school, and actively send their children and ensure regular attendance, he will start a school. He will close the school if there is no participation. He will not send an outside medical practitioner. He will request that a local person is trained, who lives in the village herself. This kind of community participation / community initiated programmes, is the factor which ensures the continuation of this work. After seeing all the trenches, we came down and had lunch at Rev Singh's house, another thatched structure with mud walls but slightly more spacious and with a cow outside. There was a brilliant patch of bright red and gold corn drying outside. Lunch was a kind of chappati made out of jowar, in addition to curds. Rev Singh's mother Nachli Bai was the leader of one of VSM's self help groups. It was late evening by the time we came back to the Mission House. We then met with Sister Rosalyn, who runs the dispensary for the tribal villages. Sister Rosalyn explained the village health programme to us. This is a very successful and sorely needed program. The way it works is as follows: they typically train one person from every 2 – 3 villages in basic health care. This person (mostly a lady) will come down to the dispensary once a month and buy medicines, with money provided by the village. She will then diagnose common ailments and dispense medication. The dispensary deals with a lot of TB in the area.

Oct 8th: Visit to Saikiyapada school and Kuyakundi school

We went to see a school which was run in a tribal village where there was no govt school. It was a recently started school. One of the village leaders had given their house for use for the classroom. It was a cramped 1 room thatched structure with mud walls, and there were 17 – 18 children along with the teacher, Deepak Master. The one thing we noticed right away was how sick all the children were. There was some kind of an illness going around and there was non-stop coughing among both the children and the older people. Fr. Godfrey was concerned and told them he would send the village medical practitioner up to the village and explained the program to them – that they would need to find someone within their village to get trained and they would have to come down to the dispensary and get the medications. He said he would send Sr. Mary to start the program for them. Lack of access to medical care is a cause for serious concern. Another area of serious concern is the prevalence of TB, yet another is the completely unsafe drinking

water – just for curiosity, I walked up to see the source of drinking water, and saw that it was from one of the same muddied streams we had waded through. And, the daily intake of food is not sufficient in quantity or quality. The meal was provided to us with tremendous pride, but we were also acutely aware that we should not eat too much and leave them without sufficient food for that day – we would never know and they would never tell us. The value of Fr. Godfrey’s intervention in these villages, in the areas of elementary education and basic health care and water and employment generation is immeasurable.

Considering that every one of our school visits were unannounced and every one of the schools were fairly remote, it was surprising that there was so much attendance, even in spite of a clear illness that was going around. Deepak Master was an experienced teacher and he was the one who was going to re-start the school in the 1st village we attended. There was no govt school in the village. The focus was on basic literacy and arithmetic. The children had come as far as reading and writing simple words and doing simple arithmetic.

In addition to the work in the villages, Fr. Godfrey has done excellent work in developing socially relevant curriculum. He has been part of several state level initiatives in this regard and the material that is being used in the VSM schools are those he has developed. Fr. Godfrey considers himself somewhat of an artist. So we saw painstakingly created posters, each depicting one scene relating to say, hygiene, another relating to health, another relating to voting etc. These form a part of the teaching aids that they use in their schools. There is an effort to standardize this into a curriculum and this is also Fr. Godfrey’s on-going work. Overall, every effort that Fr. Godfrey gets into, be it health, the schools, the water shed work, the agricultural training, or the savings schemes, has his full and personal involvement.

The Vishwamandal Sevashram proposal follows:

Name and address of legal holder

The Director
The Shirpur Vishwamandal Sevashram
Dhule District, Shirpur – 425405
India 02563-255561

Help required for the Shikshu Vikas Shikshan Kendra, Shirpur

We cover 400 tribal children with the services of 25 tribal teachers

* Note from Subashree: I have marked with an asterisk, what I feel are essential items.

1. * Teacher’s stipends

25 teachers at Rs. 525 / month for 12 months. Teachers are part time since they have to work on their fields as well. So do the children

Rs. 1,57,500

** 2 full time supervisors moving from center to center throughout the month @ Rs 2000 / mo for 12 months

Rs. 48,000

** The area is vast and hilly, only portions of it accessible by jeep. So the 2 coordinators spend close to 6 hours a day just hiking up and down hills to reach remote hut settlements. From 1 settlement to the next, it could take 3 hours of a rough hike – so then they stay the night there. Also, with such remote villages, it is essential to have the supervisors making these regular visits, as they want to make sure that the classes are held regularly.

* 1 Coordinator for organizing trainings, village meetings, motivating and facilitating other community development programs like self help groups and health, women's development, etc @ Rs. 2000 / mo for 12 months

Rs. 24,000

Some of the tribal villages in the area have no access to the local schools in the plains. Hence, the population is almost completely illiterate, save for the intervention of Fr. Godfrey and team. There are also these clusters of small 10-15 hut settlements on every remote hill, which have no school, no medical care and practically no contact with the plains people except for the occasional market visit. Hence, it is important to have a coordinator (most likely, this will be Fr. Godfrey) who will tour the villages, make contact with the Gram Mukhya, and slowly introduce the education program and the health program and the savings scheme etc.

* 1 service assistant helping coordinator on daily village visits, preparation of teaching aids, office maintenance @Rs. 2000 / mo for 12 months

Rs. 24,000

Each village visit takes 1 – 2 days and hence the travel itself is quite time consuming, hence 1 additional helper is required to take care of attendant tasks, otherwise Fr. Godfrey will not have bandwidth to do both the village visits and also the follow up etc. Fr. Godfrey makes a minimum of 1 village visit a day starting at 6:30 am in the morning.

*Accountant @ Rs. 250 / mo for 12 months

Rs.3000

Total Staff stipends

Rs. 2,56,500

2. Educational workshops

2 A. Teacher's in-service training

**Averaging 2 days / month. Annually 24 days / teacher @ Rs. 40 / day including board, lodge and learning materials. 25 teachers for 24 days annually @ Rs. 40 / - Rs. 24,000

One of the teachers Mr. Toba was literate only up to Class 3. He was practically learning along with the children, and was the most dedicated and earnest teacher we saw. The other teachers were more literate, probably Class 8, but they are all local tribal youth. It is very difficult, near impossible to get teachers in these remote areas and hence Fr. Godfrey just picks the most literate, interested youth and trains them. Hence these training sessions are key.

Resource person's service @ Rs. 200 / day for 24 training days	Rs. 4,800
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Annual teacher's exposure trip to industrial and / or historic centers for gaining perspectives	Rs. 20,000
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* The teachers and the community is fairly isolated from mainstream and hence these exposure trips are important to even understand why education is relevant. But if the chapter wants to cut cost, you can probably cut out this line item.

Total staff training	Rs. 48,800
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Note: Teachers being semi-literate local tribal youth, they need continuous support if they have to function with average effectiveness. Otherwise they will lapse into inaction like many teachers of state schools.

*** 2B. 6 Workshops / year on agricultural development:

Purpose: familiarize participants with better agricultural practices based on sustainable technology. Example: fertilizer and pest control: to use vermicompost and to use neem as a pesticide

(We saw in practice, the effectiveness of these workshops. They have good watershed development throughout the area. Fr. Godfrey has implemented several innovative agricultural practices – he has managed to provide neem based fertilizers at highly subsidized costs and has managed to convert a few communities into using this instead of regular pesticides. He has introduced vermi – composting. He has also recruited the villages in watershed development throughout the area.

** Resource person	Rs. 2000 / workshop
** Food and Travel	Rs. 3000 / workshop

(For all participants – teachers, women village health workers and representatives of village communities – approximately 40 participants)

** Total for 6 workshops	Rs. 30,000
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3. Teaching aids

These include blackboards (to be replaced from the current program, as they are often worn to rust!), chalk, paints, charts, posters, AV software, reference books, handbooks, etc. @ Rs. 1000 / class * 25 classes Rs. 25,000

Children's camps including board and lodge and travel @ Rs. 50 / child Rs. 20,000

Total teaching aids	Rs. 45,000
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4. ** Supervision of learning center and community mobilization – Jeep expenses

This includes regular daily visits by the coordinator and assistant to the 25 widely spread and remote villages and hamlets. A jeep is to be used for the purpose in the absence of public transport. Learning and teaching materials have to be ferried to the classes. Regular surprise monitoring is carried out to prevent “staged classes”. The cost of diesel and maintenance is worked out at Rs. 4.50 km. Daily average of 60 kms of supervision travel for 250 working days / year.

** 250 working days with 60 kms / day at Rs. 4.50 / km Rs. 67,500

**This item is very important to the success of this program – with such remote, hilly areas, the jeep was like a Hummer driving through streams and up hilly terrain.. even then, we had to leave the jeep and walk for around 3 – 4 km to a fairly accessible village. So, in order to cover 25 remote villages, the jeep and maintenance is essential.

Office center (including postage, stationary, electricity, maintenance, etc. annually)
Rs. 18,000

Total administrative cost with travel and transport	Rs. 85,500
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Total expenses:

Teacher's stipends	Rs. 2,56,500
Teacher's in-service training	Rs. 48,800
Educational workshops	Rs. 30,000
Teaching aids	Rs. 45,000
Supervision of learning centers and community mobilization	Rs. 85,500

Total	Rs. 4,65,800
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Total in dollars	\$10,351
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We need Rs. 4,65,800 / annum for the next 3 years.

In addition to these costs, the tribal villages contribute the following sums to the project:

CONTRIBUTION OF THE TRIBAL BENEFICIARIES TO THE PROJECT

In promoting a contribution from tribal beneficiaries in running of the project, it must be borne in mind that this practice runs contrary to general expectations among the tribals that education should be provided free by the state and even other organizations. However, motivating the community to contribute what they can afford helps the tribal community's self image and sense of responsibility for effective working of the program. It also places the teacher in a relationship of greater accountability to the community.

The community (beneficiaries) contribute to the program in 4 ways:

1. Contribution towards learning materials

Each learner is provided with a slate, a primer book (when required), a colour box, slate pencils, whose cost works out to Rs. 20 / head. Such learning materials need to be purchased once in the course of the program.

Contribution of 400 children to purchase of learning materials @ Rs. 20 * 400 children
Rs. 8,000

2. Contribution towards teacher's stipends

Each learner pays at least Rs. 3 / month for 10 months. Over a period of 3 years the contribution works out per learner @ Rs. 3 * 10 * 3 = Rs. 90
400 learners would be contributing Rs. 90 * 400 Rs. 36,000

3. Community's contribution of rent-free premises to hold classes

4. Community's contribution to housing of teachers

As in the past, if a teacher needs to reside in an otherwise difficult to access village, the community provides rent-free accommodation to the teacher.

Total monetary contribution of community beneficiaries Rs. 44,000

Maintenance & Running cost of the institution

This expense is taken care of from donations and well wishers

Availability of qualified personnel:

Father Godfrey D'Lima, S.J., Director

He has a Bachelor's degree in Education, besides studies in philosophy / theology and more than 15 years experience working for tribal education.

Father Wendell D' Cruz, S.J. Assistant
He works for the savings and self help groups.

Sisters of Anand Sadan
They are experienced in health and women's development. They are available to the programs.

Summary: In conclusion, we can ask, the classic "metric" questions: how will you measure "progress" ? Will these children continue to Class 5? Will they remember how to read, how to write? Can they string sentences together? Will they become better farmers? From a middle class, school is everything, philosophy, we naively imagine Class 10 board and college and wonder if these children sitting in a little hut tucked away on a far away hill will make Class 8. After sharing a meal with Nachli Bai in a small little thatched hut and after being surrounded by sick, coughing children with watery eyes carrying even sicker little infants in their hands.. I feel these are irrelevant questions. The important thing is medical attention, the important thing is the first contact with learning for a community of first generation learners, the important thing is a sense of pride and community on having all the children of the village sit together for 3 hours and learn how to write their name. Yes, defining progress in the most prevalent sense, a small portion of the children we met will probably go down to the Ashram Shalas, live with the Sisters and Fr. Godfrey's mission house and go on to Class 10 and possibly beyond. But for the child left on that hill, we need to send up a doctor and a teacher.