

Kalyania Prayas Center

Site Visit Report

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November 29th, 2018

This has been my third time visiting Kalyania in the small town of Kalyani, a 2 hour train ride from Kolkata. Kalyania is a non-governmental organization working for the education of the children of the underprivileged in the locality and providing vocational training for women to become financially independent. Since its inception in **1998**, Kalyania has grown from being a free clinic for the elderly to including the following divisions:

1. **Suhasini Shishu Niketan** – A school for the underprivileged children in the locality up to class IV
2. **Classmate Educator Program** – An after school coaching center that focuses on providing extra training to promising girl students
3. **Home nurse training center** – Training of local women in basic physiology and healthcare to create a workforce of knowledgeable home nurses expert in geriatric care
4. **Sewing training center** – Training local women in sewing so that they can become financially independent
5. **Free clinic and old-age home**

In this site visit report, I will touch on the major changes/improvements that have been made to Kalyania in the past year. For a detailed report on the workings of the various components of Kalyania, please refer to the site visit reports of 2016-2017 and 2015-2016.

I reached Kalyania for my site visit on the 29th of November, 2018, along with my mother and cousin. This time when I got off the train I was greeted by Smt. Gayatri Chatterjee, who is the joint

secretary of Kalyania. At almost 90 years of age, the vigor and passion that she brings to Kalyania is inspirational, and it definitely left an impression on all of us, especially my mother.

Suhasini Shishu Niketan: The first part of the project that we visited is Suhashini Shishu Niketan (SSN), which is a school that is being run by Kalyania for students from class I to IV. Kalyania has always done a fantastic job of keeping this school operational and working at its best capacity, and this time was no different. The teachers are reasonably young, which bodes well for the sustainability of the school. However as I learned from discussion with Gayatri di and later Dr. Partha Pratim Dhar, it is always challenging to keep young enthusiastic teachers for a long period of time, since other private and government schools offer more competitive salaries compared to Kalyania. The fact that Asha's contribution to Kalyania is volatile means that Kalyania uses Asha's funds as more of an incentive than as base salary, which adds an extra layer of complexity. On top of this the average age of Kalyania's residents is increasing due to a migration of the young population to larger cities in search of jobs, a phenomenon that will only make it harder to find young recruits for teaching positions at SSN.



As always, when I interacted with the students and teachers, there was an air of enthusiasm among the kids that was intoxicating. The students seemed to be relaxed among the teachers, and were excited about reciting the poems they have learned in class. I asked them a few questions about their classes and what they were learning and the students, especially the grade III and IV students responded with enthusiasm. Talking with Dr. Dhar, I came to know that the focus on mental health initiatives have been going strong, with quite a few plays having been organized already. The reception to the plays have been very positive among both parents and teachers. Dr. Dhar provided me with a video of one of the plays and invited my mother and cousin to come and attend one of these plays in the future.

Classmate Educator Program: This is a new initiative by Kalyania that has seen very good success. The idea behind this after school coaching center is to follow up with promising girl students in the locality, between class V-XII, who otherwise are at the risk of dropping out of school or having their potential destroyed. Kalyania has received more requests to accommodate students than the number of seats, and it unfortunately is having to turn down some students. As the program becomes mature, they plan to take in more students, potentially even taking in promising boy students as well.

Home Nurse Training Center: This flagship program of Kalyania has recently been scaled down significantly and Asha for Education will no longer be funding this program. This has happened since the market has become flooded with private institutions that are providing home nursing training and offering higher starting salaries to the women who are undergoing the training. According to Dr. Dhar, the quality of training that is being offered by these institutions is not up to par with that offered by Kalyania, but Kalyania has not been able to compete with the starting salaries. Kalyania has instead decided on expanding their Sewing Center Training program which has seen an upsurge in demand during the past few year.

Sewing Center Training: The sewing center training started out in a small shed beside a house, but is being expanded to accommodate an Advanced Sewing Center course. This has been prompted by a recent surge in demand by local tailoring shops for skilled artisans. While the previous classes focused on basic sewing techniques like sewing shirts and pants, the new program will teach more advanced techniques that will make the students competitive enough to get good jobs at tailoring shops. A part of the non-recurring expenses for starting the advanced module has

been provided already last year by Asha for Education for buying new sewing machines and constructing a new area for accommodating the advanced course students. I was happy to find that the funds have been utilized well and the advanced classes have already started with all the new equipment in place. The teacher for both the courses are really enthusiastic and talking to them I came to know that they also have a new motorized sewing machine which is the same as that used in shops. Although the machines that the women practice with are all manual sewing machines, they get exposure to the motorized machine as part of their curriculum, in order to get a feel for what they will be working with in the real world. This is a small but significant touch, I believe, that will prepare the students better for their jobs.



Free clinic and old-age home: This is another aspect of Kalyania that is not funded by Asha for Education but is an important part of the organization, especially considering that Kalyania was started by doctors who came together to give back to the community. I got to visit the old age home and the clinics which I have always found to be really clean and hygienic.



I will conclude by saying that Kalyania has continued to do what they are excellent at, and also expanded significantly in many areas. What I like most about Kalyania is their sensitivity to the job market and adjusting their programs so that their students are prepared as possible to enter the job market with a competitive skill set. This has been reflected in them pulling the plug on the home nursing program and investing on expanding the Sewing Center Training program. Their Classmate Educator Program is also an excellent initiative that is seeing great success and should be implemented, if possible, by other NGOs that offer formal schooling. One more thing that I should mention is that Kalyania is always actively looking out for private donors, since they are aware that they rely heavily on Asha for Education at the moment. I will recommend that we keep funding Kalyania so that the great job that they are doing is not affected while they look to become (hopefully fully) sustainable in the near future.



