

Kalyania Prayas Center

Site Visit Report 2023

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It was a chilly morning in February when I stepped out of the car in front of Kalyania Suhasini Shishu Niketan. This was the first time I was visiting Kalyania ever since the COVID-19 pandemic forced them to go into a remote teaching model. Since then, Kalyania had slowly switched back to a more regular schedule and method of teaching. I was excited to see whether Kalyania was operating at full capacity again and whether/how much the COVID-19 pandemic had affected their operations.

Kalyania is a multi-pronged operation that encompasses four areas of community service. Asha for Education provides support to the first three operations.

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. **Sewing training center** – Training local women in sewing so that they can become financially independent.
4. **Free clinic and old-age home.**

It was apparent the moment I looked around that things were different. This was not surprising given that today was the International Mother Language Day which commemorates the struggles of the Bangladeshi people in securing their right to have Bengali as their official language. However, I did not expect the atmosphere to be this electric and filled with palpable excitement. The entire school was out in the field adjoining the building – students, teachers, and parents alike. I had brought some candies for the kids which we distributed to them before the program started. The kids were extremely disciplined and passed the candies around to their friends before keeping one for themselves. No one tried to keep more than one. It was very heartening to see that the

children were not only being taught bookishly but also being instilled with a good sense of morality. Soon after, the main event started, where the children went up on stage and performed a variety of dances, songs, and recitation. It was clear that the children were getting a more holistic education that encompasses art, science, and language. The teachers and parents were glowing with pride as the children performed.

After the event was over, the children were shepherded by the teachers inside the school building, and we soon followed. After a quick chat with the teachers, I went inside and interacted with the children. The children seemed confident and quick to answer, especially in the upper classes. We went ahead to the sewing center next, which is part of the vocational training program from Kalyania. The sewing center was buzzing with activity as the students were busy learning how to make blouses. Dr. Partha Pratim Dhar, the director of Kalyania, informed me that the advanced sewing center classes, which had been suspended during COVID-19 due to a lack of funds, were going to start back up again from April.

We then proceeded to the main office building of Kalyania where the upper management of the organization were waiting to speak with me. We discussed about the finances and operations of Kalyania that primarily centered on the following themes:

1. *Financial struggles* – Asha for Education was unable to fund Kalyania the full budget amount during the last year due to fundraising constraints. However, Kalyania did not want to scale their operations down too significantly and hence decided to dip into their corpus funds (a large sum of money that they keep in a fixed deposit and fund their yearly operations using the interest accrued). However, this will have a negative repercussion going forward since it will reduce their yearly interests.
2. *Sustainability* – The reduction in corpus funds will mean less interests accrued and hence Kalyania will need to ask local donors and Asha for Education for more funds. However, this will not be sustainable from Asha's viewpoint since our fundraising is also extremely variable. I made sure Kalyania knew about the situation from Asha for Education's side so that they are not blindsided if we have a bad fundraising year. Apart from that they have a new volunteer who was a former bank manager for a State Bank of India (SBI) branch. He is helping Kalyania apply for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds through SBI.

The CSR funds will mostly focus on installing solar power panels to reduce Kalyania's electricity costs – this is a step towards energy and financial sustainability that Kalyania expects will start paying dividends in the next 7 years.

3. *Fundraising* – Kalyania has been struggling to grow their local donor base in recent years. I suggested that they reach out through local schools and colleges and try to find recurring donors from among the parents and teachers. Getting long term recurring donors are a problem that both Kalyania and Asha for Education had been struggling with.
4. *Volunteer recruitment* – Kalyania has been having trouble recruiting teachers and administrative staff, since the salaries they are providing are not competitive compared to local private and government schools. However, this compounded with lower fundraising is making it increasingly difficult for Kalyania to recruit high quality teachers.

Overall, I got the impression that Kalyania has rebounded from the pandemic completely and is now operating at full capacity. However, they have had to pay a cost to get there, including a significant hit to their finances and scaling down some aspects of their programs. The next few years will tell whether Kalyania can progress further in their quest to sustainability or must make significant cutbacks to their operation. I have the impression that the Kalyania management will soon need to make some hard decisions about which parts of their operation have the highest priority and scale down or cut down the other parts to make sure they can provide the same quality of social service that they are capable of now.









