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## EDUCATION

It would be foolish to expect, and a perfidy to tell others that we expect that people's economic life can be changed in any considerable way by what a small NGO like Swanirvar chooses to do. We do make some efforts to see that more income is generated and distributed among more people in our project area (these will be detailed in the section "Small savings and income generation") but our emphasis is on improving the quality of life, a term that encompasses intangible indices as well as the usual ones' subject to statistical tabulation: Education obviously comes high on this list.

We ran eleven coaching centres for children studying at the Government primary schools and four pre-primary schools for those below the age of 4. Our goal was to impart some formal education certainly but principally we wished to bring the children together to enjoy the various opportunities we provided to cater to the- diverse creative urges growing—children always have but which their underprivileged condition manages to suppress brutally: I know you share with me our immense joy that we have really been able to give the children this chance; Some of them have excelled while some have not, but all have joined most enthusiastically in everything, be it dramatics, be it song and dance, be it athletics, be it yoga, be it painting.

I shall enumerate our activities in this area in more detail a little later but before that I must admit to a major failure. The coaching schools did not quite live up to our expectations, in the matter of formal teaching. Those who are publicly concerned about the state of our education, those who write reports, and those who implement policy on the basis of those reports, appear to be totally ignorant of the rural reality, or it may be that they know but do not care. This affected us in two ways. First, the children who do go to primary school learn so little and so lazily there that the pressure on our coaching centres turned out to be more than we had envisaged; second, the quality of most of our teachers, themselves the product of this indulgent and ineffective system, was not on a par with our expectations and requirements. We have thus decided to close down four of our eleven coaching centres; however, they will continue to be centres for extracurricular activities:

These eleven schools—two each at Bajitpur, Kolsur and Chandalati, four at Fatullyapur and one at Andharmanik—each had one teacher and altogether 198 students, 69 in Class I, 42 in Class II, 40 in Class III, 42 again in Class IV, and five in Class V. Average daily attendance was 61.2%. The teachers attended 13 internal workshops during the year where the average attendance was 10.

CRY (Child Relief and You) has fully financed our pre-primary education project. It has also helped us with our primary schools, and our health programme covering children which worked through four schools at Bajitpur, Fatullyapur, Andharmanik and Chandalati, each with two teachers. The teachers attended 12 internal workshops where average attendance was seven, and also went to three refresher trainings organised by CRY and Vikramshila in Calcutta.

The schools sat for five days in a week, and were closed for brief periods during summer and autumn. The table below gives a brief summary.

Village	Total school days	Average attendance	Students		Grading after evaluation			
			Total	M	F	(A)	(B)	(C)
Bajitpur	228	84	22	6	16	9	11	2
Fatullyapur	236	76	28	10	18	18	6	4
Andharmanik	243	63	30	16	14	12	14	4
Chandalati	247	86	30	16	14	17	7	6
Total		77.25%	110	48	62	56	38	16

The children were taught 17 nursery rhymes which they can recite with appropriate movement of the limbs and 18 songs which they present with dances. The older children learnt 4 Kulattam-a folk dance from Andhra Pradesh which uses short sticks - numbers. They can perform three plays-Gujab ("Rumour"), which is about the futility of communalism; Swarthapar Daitya (adapted from Oscar Wilde's "The Selfish Giant"); and Ganyer Katha ("A village story"), which is about health care and public hygiene-and can do this so well that they have been invited to other villages to perform there. This is most satisfactory, for since all three plays are basically educational, the more the message is spread, the better.

A well-qualified and competent trainer from Calcutta is in charge of the children's physical education. He comes every Monday and visits each village by rotation. At every place he trains the local children, and also the young men who are in charge of their respective village's physical education programme. Until the end of March, the children could perform 20 Yogic asanas, and nine mass drill/gymnastic numbers. This is one of our most successful programmes and altogether 543 children in the five villages took part in the training and practice sessions. There were seven public performances in four villages where 169 children took part.

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Sports meets were held in the winter at two places. The one at Chandalati was open to children from that village, Kolsur and Andharmanik, and the one at Bajitpur catered to local children and those from Fatullyapur. There were 11 items for children, one for the teachers, one for women, and "Go as you like" for all.

Many of our visitors have seen these children in action. Often they perform just as they are, as the visitor may have come without any prior information. It does not seem to matter to the young stars. Their indefatigable enthusiasm makes up for any shortcoming that lack of rehearsal might have produced. I am sure children in more fortunate circumstances sing more melodiously, recite with better enunciation, dance with more grace, act with more reassurance, but as all our visitors have noticed, our children most of whom; had not even known what they had to do, let alone how to do it, and had no idea that they had it in themselves to act, or sing, or dance get even with their urban counterparts simply because they do every-thing with an elan, a pristine joy that shames the hardened critic. We admit that there will be very little we can do for these children economically when they grow older, but we dare hope that the messages, of the plays they perform will stay with them, that the joy they are getting as they grow up will survive into manhood, and make them better human beings. All other creatures look down towards the earth, but man was given a face so that he might turn his eyes towards the stars and his gaze upon the sky. We are trying to make sure that some of these 'children can look up for longer than their condition would otherwise have permitted.

A group of amateur astronomers was kind enough to visit Chandalati with their telescope and a slide show on outer space. The latter was a great success, but unfortunately it rained that winter evening and made the telescope viewing, spread over the best part of the night, very uncomfortable. We would like to invite more such shows to the villages.

We have a children's library at Andharmanik. About 60 children use it. As soon as the other villages can provide space, we shall send some of the books there by rotation.