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## Education

We ran five pre-primary schools, one in each of our core villages. Altogether there were 151 children, 92 of them girls. The average number of working days for these schools was, 230, and average attendance was 71.8%. The supervisor held ten monthly meetings with all the teachers, and there were two internal workshops for them. Altogether 36 meetings were held with the parents, and average attendance of parents was 22.

When we started these schools, there was pardonable uncertainty among parents about the efficacy of "bookless" education. They did send their children, but this was because of their faith in Swanivar and not because they favoured the method, but soon they realised that their fears had been baseless, that children learnt more here than in the traditional system. Now in every village we have to turn down applicants because we do not favour a teacher handling more than 15 children, and every school has two teachers. One fortunate by product of this rush for admission has been that at Chandalati the local group is extracting assurances from parents that they cannot have more than three children if they want our school, and in cases where there are already more than three, they would not have any more.

We opened three primary schools, at Andharmanik, Chandalati, and Fatullyapur, this year and the total enrolment in Class I was 71. The schools worked on an average for 220 days, and average attendance of the pupils was 83%. Towards the end of the year we received the happy news that the Human Resources Development Ministry at the Centre was to fund a certain number of primary schools all over India, to be run on experimental and innovative lines. West Bengal was to have 10 such schools of which Swanivar now runs three. Our existing three schools were put under this scheme at almost the very end of the year.

We have gradually been closing down our non-formal schools or, more appropriately, coaching centres, and this was the last year for the last three such schools; two at Kolsur and one at Bajitpur. The three together took care of 47 children from particularly underprivileged families. The average attendance was 75%. These coaching centres were among the very first things that Swanivar had set up and so a bit of our past died with this decision to abandon the project totally, but these centres had indeed outlived their purpose. They had been our rallying points for children of the village, and had everywhere been our nucleus for all activities to do with children.

We lost more than these centres this year. One pre-primary teacher died at childbirth, a great loss to us. Our cultural supervisor, who was primarily responsible for building up our children's cultural troupes, one of our most successful achievements, also left Swanivar for personal

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reasons. We were also sorry to put an end to our programme for yoga and gymnastics for children. The instructor who used to come once a week from Calcutta was a most conscientious man and it was no fault of his that the children began to find the programme somewhat uninteresting. We have arranged for Bratachari training in place of what he used to do, and a music teacher now travels around the villages. The children were as before invited to perform in a number of villages, where they put up plays on health problems, ecology, and also demonstrated many other skills they had learnt. A major addition to their repertoire has been puppetry. In March children from every village were taken on separate educational trips. A number of books was added to the library and, more important, Kolsur, Chandalati Fatullyapur, and Bajitpur all now have their own library. In none of them does the number of books exceed 100, but the books may rotate from place to place and the number can always be supplemented with books from the central library at Andharmanik. For the sake of truth it must also be said that the reading habit has not spread as much as we expected.

One reason why our schools run so well is that there is very regular supervision. Another is that our teachers are not happy to feel complacent; they go for regular refresher training courses. Pre-primary teachers attended a two-phase training in Calcutta, and so did the primary teachers. The latter were accompanied by the supervisor. Two teachers, the supervisor, and another worker attended an educational leadership training.

Trainings are of course without use if what is taught cannot be put into practice. To make sure that this is being done, people from both CRY (Child Relief and You), which funds our education project, and Vikramshila, which trains our teachers, visit our schools regularly and meetings are also held at their Calcutta offices between their representatives and our supervisor and at times our secretary.

Apart from these CRY-funded schools, pre-primary schools have been opened at another place in Andharmanik, and in the seven villages of Gokulpur, Punra, Bhojpara, Dweep Media, Bagjola, Haiderpur, and Beliyakhali. We are not yet sure what financial help we shall provide these schools, and we are also not sure whether the youth groups in these villages can run these schools without such help, but we have so far provided help in other ways. We have trained their teachers in two phases, have ourselves made all the teaching aids they will need in the first year, and we also held meetings with parents both before and after the start of the schools.