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## YOUTH AND CULTURE

THIS section has two principal areas of work, the first covering mainly children in our schools but not closed to those outside them, and the second somewhat older children, those in high schools of the area, those who form our Kishor Kishori Bahini. In the first altogether 1749 children learnt 28 Bratachari items, 24 Yoga asanas, 35 dances with rhymes, 28 songs, 14 folk and 10 general dance numbers, and 34 small games. They also practised puppetry and mime. Our basic intention remains the same; we would like all children to be creative, and also to develop a love; for and acquire proficiency in 'traditional modes so' as not to be swept away by standardised and, if we may say so, "imported" (not necessarily from a foreign country, but perhaps from parts of our own country's society. which are as foreign to them) forms of entertainment. Spontaneity or a smiling face is not unique to our children; but the joy that emanates from them when they perform with abandon, these underprivileged-in-every-which-way children, makes us feel their future may not be as bleak as economics would have us believe. Their elders in the area love what they do, as is shown by the fact that we received 23 formal invitations in the year for these children to mount a show on some occasion or the other, occasions that drew more than 12000 spectators. On a number of times we could not accept an invitation as either the children had some centralised training or school examinations coming up, or the trainers had a workshop or refresher course to attend.

Nine special Days were observed in our schools, all secular celebrations to which we append some task of social commitment, and 14566 children took part in these, watched by 13709 persons. Our 15 villages were divided into five zones, and every zone held its own athletic sports meet. There were prizes for each of the 2379 children who participated. Members of our women's self-help groups, farmers' clubs, and women involved with kitchen gardens also took part.

Members of our Vishor Kishod Bahini, who are high-school-going children between 10 and 16, continue to enthuse us with hope. We give below a brief resume of what they have done in the course of the year in their respective villages. All this makes them different from their schoolmates in many ways; for example, they develop life and vocational skills; they improve their educational competence by actually doing things mentioned in their school books, what we call "real learning". Their strength is now 250 in 8 villages and though naturally and obviously not everybody has the same involvement, they did the following. rendered first aid; vaccinated 6854 poultry birds; vaccinated, with assistance from the Government's Animal

Resource Development Department,

762 cattle and 600 goats; they could also diagnose and treat some bovine diseases; prepared fruit and flower tree nurseries, distributed 3525 saplings, helped with grafting to improve the quality of fruits;

\* designed and maintained 120 intensive kitchen gardens in 8 villages;

\* popularised and prescribed herbals for the treatment of common diseases;

\* disinfected tubewells with bleaching powder;

• learnt to make household water filters; recorded the daily maximum and minimum rainfall and temperature; made 5000 "rakhis" as part of our programme for joint celebration of Rakhi Bandhan with students of 6 Government schools;

\* surveyed the following and then presented the data through charts incidence of diarrhoea, worm infestation; number, location and use of tubewells and latrines; vaccination of animals and birds; rainfall and temperature;

\* prepared detailed land use maps of their respective villages;

• helped in the publicity and other build-up work before a blood donation camp, and then looked after those who had donated blood and were resting;

• helped in road repair and cleaning;

• in three villages that were flooded they worked alongside staff of the Government Health Department on providing hygienic shelters for those who had to leave home.

We organized the following trainings for KKB members

Subject	Total participants	Boys	Girls
General health	32	17	15
Nutrition	46	27	19
Kitchen garden	148	71	77
Herbal medicine	133	N.A.	N.A.
Reproductive health	27	17	10

These interactions, coupled with their practical work, have given them enough confidence to talk about the relevance of their work in many spheres. They can hold their own when they talk with Government officials, panchayat members, village elders about actual development needs and priorities as opposed to standard Government programmes. Some are articulate enough to talk about their future role in panchayats. No mean contribution is made to their self confidence by their ever increasing cultural performance skills. Recognition in the form of invitations to perform at outside high schools, Melas, Government offices, Block youth festivals, community

programmes, etc., extend their horizons.

Parents are also impressed. They are proud that their children have learnt useful skills, have got crucial inputs which schools and private tutors do not provide. We met parents and guardians in 5 villages to discuss with them what exactly we wanted from these children and how the family could help. At Bajitpur the enthusiasm generated by KKB work has led to the activation of a primary school and a panchayat beneficiary committee.

To supplement the information they get from text books, we have asked KKB members to study the following and keep notes: source, use, filtration and conservation of water; life cycle, habitat and habits of certain insects; birth, growth, conservation, destruction, use and utility of trees. Altogether 80 members of KKB were asked to come for an annual evaluation of their work in two central workshops. We try to mix work with pleasure and 120 children were taken to Calcutta to see the Birla Industrial and Technological Museum.

Service Centre, Calcutta has formed a State-level network of organizations working in this fashion with older children and the environment. As one of its first members we have taken an active part in all its three meetings. Two of our workers visited an NGO in Medinipur to train 60 children in two areas. Locally two high schools asked us to take one period a week on herbal medicine, to supplement what the text book says. News of the students' interest has travelled, and a few more schools have approached us to see what we can do together. Many teachers also want their schools and students to be involved in the villages cleaning activities carried out by KKB.

All this is not quite unexpected, so more gratifying to us has been the response of Government officials, with a reputation of being unsympathetic towards innovation. Not merely are the veterinary staff of 3 blocks enlisting the cooperation of KKB members when they have to conduct animal vaccination and treatment camps, but when the veterinary department of Baduria block received a prize for treating the most number of animals in the district, it publicly acknowledged the contribution of Swanirvars KKB to its success.