

# Sambrama

A Bandhavi newsletter  
Issue 4, February 2008

## Towards inclusive communities

This editorial will walk you through significant dates and themes. To say the least this has been an incredible journey of learning.

At the 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary celebration, Carol, a former colleague and friend of Bandhavi brought greetings. The focus was on 'remembering our days in Egypt.' We were reminded that on the 09<sup>th</sup> of Dec 2006 even as the girls and mothers came in waves and the campus was flooded with colours, we had money to cover only 2 weeks of the projected expenses. We are grateful to individuals, churches and organizations; chiefly KNH, who have journeyed with the children. We can assure you, that your efforts have not been in vain.

At every given opportunity David's constant reminder to the girls is about *freedom* - "You can never be free unless you make others like you free". And to give substance to this lofty idea, Visthar and Bandhavi produced the desktop calendar for 2008. From handmade recycled paper, produced by the girls and their craft teacher, to the art work the calendar was a unique Bandhavi project. With KNH facilitating a South - South network, the proceeds from the calendar has been shared with Starehe Girls' Centre in Nairobi. More importantly we are in the process of enabling *girls from different continents to meet, touch and heal each other.*





Along with freedom, the girls are constantly being encouraged to fashion *inclusive communities*. One expression of this is the children's participation at the World AIDS Day and World Disabled Day. Infact the girls performed a short theatrical piece at Dodda Gubbi village with a focus on "AIDS Awareness." Bandhavi also organized a week long programme on child rights in the neighbouring schools, culminating on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2007 carrying the banner, *Child Rights are Human Rights*.

Faced with the imminent threat of the land (Visthar campus) being taken over by the state, Bandhavi girls chipped in and joined the people's protest; a lesson on displacement within the country but also a class on people's participation within a democratic framework. And the journey continues.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of February 08, a team member from Visthar attempted to explain the significance of *Ash Wednesday* to a group of intellectually curious girls at Bandhavi. The subject of sin, repentance and forgiveness featured in the explanation. Pat came a question from one of the girls "why do you do this only on one day?" Such incisive gems continue to keep us focused on life and work.

Bandhavi and Visthar invite you to be part of our incredible journey, one of fashioning *inclusive communities*.

"We celebrated Republic Day in a different way - we visited Home of Hope (a home for destitutes) There we sang songs and also danced for them. They danced too. They shared their poignant life stories with us and from that we were able to experience and empathise with them."

Renuka, 15 years

## The Bandhavi Journey

### Festivals and celebrations

Most of the festivals are celebrated with enthusiasm and gusto at Bandhavi. We do try our best to be as close to the particular traditions of each festival but a common thread that runs through every celebration is the wholehearted participation of the children. *Onam, Independence Day, Ganesha Chathurti, Republic Day, Dassara, Deepavali, Christmas and Sankranti* were celebrated with equal fervor and an awareness of the significance of each festival and occasion. For instance on *Gandhi Jayanthi* the children viewed a Kannada version of an autobiographical documentary titled *Mahatma - his life story*. This was followed by a talk and discussion on the relevance of Gandhi today.

### Children's Day festival

Children's day was celebrated in-house on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 2007. It had a creative and colourful start with a community painting (in which adults and children participated) reflecting childhood. Though the plan was to leave the onus of the programme with the children our overzealous staff in their commitment to help, influenced the children. Thus while the children put on 'a show' the evaluation that followed raised many questions about adult behaviour and influences that took away from the childlike character of the event. Apart from speeches, mime and mimicry the main draw of the day was a theatrical performance by the children which was a play with five acts. The children performed in groups of five with each group dealing with 5 different phases of a woman namely *The little girl, The young woman, The woman, The Ideal woman and The old woman*. Costume, props, direction, screenplay and even the plot were all developed by the children providing them not just a platform to exhibit their innate creative spirit but also to showcase their various learnings.

### Child Rights are Human Rights: Anniversary celebration

The 10<sup>th</sup> of December marked the 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of Bandhavi. In the midst of the celebration, the event marked the determination of the girls and Visthar to be part of a *journey*. A journey of *hope in the midst of struggles*. A new life had begun and yet it was fraught with uncertainties. The girls love to return home: their

mothers, brothers and sisters, but they also know that some of their friends will not return. This is the power of the system but also the story of the courage and faith of the girls to sustain their journey at and through Bandhavi.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of Bandhavi was celebrated on December 10<sup>th</sup> 2007: Human Right's Day. As such the programme was designed with the theme of 'Child Rights as Human Rights.'

As the girls readied themselves for the event, they remembered with gratitude the first day they arrived at Visthar frail, frightened and curious. Adults who had journeyed with them over the last two years were in awe of the development in each child and the spirit of companionship. The journey had just begun and it was already rich.

The day itself was a culmination of several sessions on Child Rights for our children as well as students from four neighbouring schools. The sessions were more than mere orientation programmes on child rights but it tried to delve deeper into the issues of exclusion. This was followed by a series of competitions for the children on the theme: *The importance of child rights in the formation of inclusive communities.*

Besides prizes for those who performed exceptionally, all participants were presented with certificates of participation and gifts. The day included messages from Dr Subramaniam "our doctor," senior personnel from the Karnataka Open School, Spastic Society of India and fellow civil society organisations. The day ended on a note of cultural affirmation and experiences with mime and theatre.



The icing on the cake however was the launch of the student's newsletter. Titled *Inchara* (Bird's melodies) the paper is a student initiative and has promises to inspire several to take up writing seriously.

The children are my greatest teachers, I am learning new lessons from my class rooms every day. Understanding 65 individuals, getting to know their memories, comprehending their experiences, identifying with their aspirations...and dreaming their dreams as they carve out their identities is to me more than a learning. It is life itself. These flowers these buds, blossoming towards a conscious community is a *Songline*. I am a proud part of this *Songline*.

Nazar, Educational Coordinator, Bandhavi



In a garden there was a competition of flowers and all the flowers were showing off their beauty. Among these flowers one small white flower (the Thumba flower) was very arrogant and boasting of its pure white colour. But in the end the judges decided that no colour is special. From this we learn that - all are equal and that we should not tease others.

M. Eramma, 12 years

## The Three 'R's and beyond

An extensive in-house evaluation and review of the educational programme at Bandhavi was carried out. One of the major consequences of this review was that it was felt that life skills for the girls should be strengthened as this would help in the overall development of the child.

Alongside regular classroom learning it was felt that the children should be more involved in individual research and observation. This, combined with future financial sustainability in mind, several new projects were introduced in this academic year and existing projects were revamped.

### My School

In my home we are very poor. I left school in the second standard to go to work. Even if I worked hard from morning to evening I would get only twenty-five rupees. We didn't have enough to eat. We didn't have proper clothes to wear. Then I came here and my life is different. I wear good clothes and go to school. Here we have no problem for food. In my school they teach us about many different things. Along with our studies, we also have many training courses that will help us in our lives.

I used to feel bad to go to school when I was in my village. When we don't have enough to eat, how can we go? I had so many worries. But here it is not like that. I used to go to a Telugu medium school. Here for the past one and a half years I have been learning Kannada. I am learning to read and write in Kannada. In school I also learn Maths, Science, Social Studies and English. Also in pottery class, they taught us how to make the statue of Ganesha with clay. At the paper unit I learned how to make baskets in paper, boxes, covers, and greeting cards.

In my tailoring class I learn to stitch clothes, and also learn drawing.

I go to Indiranagar to the Spastics Society of Karnataka to learn baking. I learned to bake sweet biscuits, spicy biscuits, salt biscuits and coconut biscuits. I learn gardening at school and I really like to grow pomegranates. In cookery class, I have learned to make different kinds of tasty food.

We have many cultural activities. I take part in the singing and dancing. I also learn yoga. In my village I used to go to work, but after coming here I am learning how to live life. I want to be independent; I don't want to ask anybody for help. I want to stand on my own feet. This is my wish.

Lakshmi T, 13 years

## Projects

While some of the many initiatives were introduced earlier they are being given renewed attention. Herbal Gardening, Agricultural Projects, Pottery, Recycled Paper Products, Baking, Animation and Natural Medicine – research, preparation and application (extended to the community).



In an effort to create better interpersonal relationships that will overcome the barriers of caste, class and race in the mind of the child, the children were introduced to another project of interviewing persons, visiting neighbours and documenting the process.

I learnt a lot from the children and life at Bandhavi, I have become a more creative person and this has helped me to become a conscious individual and I am very happy to be a part of Bandhavi.

Ms Radha, Kannada teacher

### Study tour

The children were very excited (on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2008) as they boarded their school van onto their study tour cum picnic. This was a welcome diversion from their regular schedule and the children made the most of it. After taking in the sights at Lalbagh Botanical Garden - the Glass house, the fountains, and the exhibition of plants, saplings, seeds and books it was time for a picnic. The tour did not end in the garden, they then headed out to the Jawaharlal Nehru Planetarium in Bangalore city for a scintillating display of the solar system, its history and formation. Needless to say the tour left the students tired but happy and enthused, wanting more.

When we saw a variety of flowers and plants at Lalbagh, we were reminded of our own campus and we bought seeds and saplings and we planted those in our garden. I want all our dreams to blossom just like this.

Nimbamma N., 13 years



### Yoga

Yoga classes continue for the children. The focus of the yoga classes continues to be the unity of the mind, body and inner spirit.

### Animal husbandry

The new cow is an important part of the animal husbandry programme under the girls vocational training and is maintained by the senior girls. This provides the girls vital hands on training for future community co-operatives in maintenance and marketing.



A gift from a group of American students from Gustavus Adolphus College and Concordia College, USA who visited us in 2007, our cow is aptly named "007."

### Theatre

Theatre, because of the wealth of talent, among resource persons and teachers, has become a mainstay at Visthar. The goal of these theatre activities with the children was the Understanding of the Self – Strengths and Aspirations. The children were invited through games and activities like mirror image, tableaux etc. to explore their inner self and share their innermost thoughts and aspirations. It was an opportunity for them to articulate their inner feelings and dreams.

### My young guru at Bandhavi

Even though it appears to be topsy turvy, I was very happy to be at the receiving end in my interaction with a nine year old Bandhavi child. As a 61 year 'young' person, a participant in the joint Bandhavi theatre presentation I was at the rehearsals. The language did seem a barrier to me, as I do not know Kannada.

During a break I turned to the girl near me and asked her in my best Kannada *nina hersaru endha?* Pat came the reply “*adu hersaru illa sir*” “*hesaru*” she went on to correct me “*endha illa enu*” and proceeded to teach me to say *Nina esaru enu?*” (What is your name?) After sometime, I wanted to replace a property of the skit in the shelf. I told her “*Avvada bittu ba*” she laughed and corrected me to say “*Alli ittu baa*” and I...I duly obeyed.

I have found a young Kannada teacher in Jyothi from Bandhavi.

Francis, Assistant Director – Finance, Visthar

## Dreams and exploration

For years we have made a critique of programmes that offer institutional care. And today Visthar are supporting a residential school. A contradiction! Perhaps. However we also believe today that there is a need to have a differentiated position recognising the multiple identities and vulnerabilities that children experience. *But what about the links to the community?* We have attempted to do this during the vacation, when the children visit mothers and other siblings. This is always a risk but believing in the value of maintaining links with the family we facilitate the process. It is this thinking and process (encouraged by KNH, our donor partners) that led us to establishing a base at Koppal a neighbouring district of Raichur in North Karnataka .

Extensive surveys in taluks of Koppal district enabled us to see the concentration of women in the devadasis system alongside children in bonded labour. Today we have established a base with minimal staff and are in



the process of extending our work to Koppal responding to both issues of children in the devadasi system and the children in bonded labour. And with the mothers of the above two categories we have begun a process of collectivizing them and preparing them for political participation.

## Deep Sadness ( Looking back)

A little girl, my life was hell in my village,  
Study was only a dream for me,  
Taking care of the rich man’s cows was my duty.  
Under the scorching sun,  
Dragging my bare feet,  
I had to run behind the cows.  
In the heat I used to sweat,  
Thorns pricked my feet,  
Still I carried on in tears.

On an empty stomach I’d leave the cows,  
I used to run home hungry for food,  
And wait without a morsel for my mother’s return.  
My mother who went to work in the fields,  
Would return, somehow bringing some rice to cook,  
One day she could not bear the fever and died.  
I myself am little,  
I had to carry my younger sister and play with her,  
We lived with our grandmother and life pulled on.

*Sri Devi, 11 Years*

## Companions in our Journey

For us saying thank you is more than showing our gratitude, it is an affirmation of the feeling of fellowship that we share with those who journey with us. We are grateful to those who have shared our conviction and extended their financial contribution helping us to continue in our challenging passage – our institutional donor KNH who kept us going through this year and Edukans who made a one time grant last year.

We also remember those individuals, institutions and organisations who have extended a helping hand through the year with their presence and generosity and have comforted and guided us. Rebekah, Bala Asha Fathima, Mary, Mabel, Karen, Martha, Annimma and family, Prof. Hasnath Mansur, Mrs Augusta Paul, Mrs Vimala



Samuel, Dr S.K Subraminam, Mrs Indu Mani, Ms Chacko, Ms J.K Kurian, Ms Trupthi, Ms Elizabeth Sumithra, Mr. Basavsaraj, Pawan Provision Stores, Mr Sathyanarayan, Mr. Dharashmi Patel and Mr. Bijo Kappan from Bangalore, Supara Janchitfah from Bangkok, Mr Jonathan, Ms Usha Mulayil and Max Ediger from the USA. The students of Gustavus Adolphus and Concordia College, USA and their Professor Douglas Huff. A special mention of thank you to the J term students from Gustavus Adolphus College, USA and their Professor Barbara Simpson who have opened new worlds for the children with the donation of a brand new television.

An extra special mention of gratitude to Lillie Hollingsworth who as a student with Visthar returned to her college and single handedly inspired fellow students to contribute. Well done and God bless Lillie! Another beautiful expression was the initiative of Ms Waltraud Heckendorf, who not only decided to spend her Christmas with the girls but taught them to make a quilt with material she bought with her all the way from Germany. Thanking also David and Mary Selvaraj, Rathi Shetty, Nathan, Parthibhan, Nazar, Shafi and Francis from Visthar.

Besides the above individuals from India and overseas, the following organisations like Prerana from Raichur, Kutumba, Liza's Home and Spastic Society of India in Bangalore have journeyed with us and we wish to say thank you.

### My Sister's Wedding

When I went home for the holidays everyone was preparing for my sister's wedding. My family and the people of my village were very happy when they saw me. Everyone at home had got new clothes. Even I got new clothes. They had brought beautiful sarees and jewelry for my sister.

The day of the wedding a big lorry came and stopped in front of our house. They decorated the lorry with coconut leaves and flowers. They took my sister who was to be married to the temple for pooja. Then my family, and the people from my village all got into the lorry and went to the boy's village.

When we reached the boy's village it was night. We parked the lorry on one side of the village, and along with the bride, we waited there. In a little while the groom's side came beating drums, holding the *kalasa* (traditional decorated brass pot, with mango leaves and coconut placed on the mouth of the pot). They met the bride's family and asked about our journey. We had a *pooja* and then they took all of us to a house where they had made arrangements for us to stay.

Early in the morning the groom had to have bath, also the bride. After this they made a picture with paddy. Then the bride and groom had to sit opposite each other. But relatives held a white cloth between them so they can't see each other. Then the relatives sang songs and people were given rice to throw on the bride and groom.

After a little while the priest came and made the boy and girl to stand and exchange garlands. Then the priest conducted the *thali* tying ceremony. When tying the *thali* he made the bride and groom to say something. The girl said that she will never leave her husband. And the groom said that he will take care of her even better than her mother has taken care of her.

Then there was celebration in the whole village. Everyone ate the food and sweets made for the wedding. In the morning everyone came to the girl's village. The couple did not come directly to the girl's house. They waited near the school and were brought home by playing drums and carrying the *kalasa*. Then at the doorstep, they kept the measuring cup filled with rice and jaggery. The bride kicked it and then the couple entered the house. Then everyone had a meal together. After the wedding I came back to Bandhavi.

Chinna Renukamma, 12 years



### An invitation to partnership

*The bond that links your true family is not one of blood, but of respect and joy in each other's life.*

- Enroll as a friend of Bandhavi paying a minimum of Rs.1200 per annum.
- Enroll as a volunteer of Bandhavi and assist in teaching, health care, fundraising and documentation.
- Enroll as a one time donor and contribute towards an endowment fund or capital fund.
- Buy the calendar produced by the children.



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