

Sambrama

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A Bandhavi Newsletter



Bandhavi: *the 2nd Innings*

By popular demand, we return to this format of communicating stories and information of life at Bandhavi. 'Sambrama', the name of the newsletter is reflective of the core experience at Bandhavi, one of 'celebration'. It is our conviction that children, irrespective of caste, class or religion, should celebrate their childhood. Seventy stories, each special and unique. A common thread is one of constantly fighting internalized oppression and simultaneously shaping better futures. The year 2010 marks five full years of the journey we have made.

Schooling, Uniforms and Education

Was it wrong on our part to fight the system of uniforms, based on our logic that it was an attempt to make students conform? A pseudo poser of unity! On the contrary our girls who have joined public schools in the neighbourhood are thrilled to wear their dark blue skirts and white shirts, not forgetting shoes and socks. Was it wrong to suggest that children ought not to be overloaded with books which as research suggests, affects the spine? Our children love the back packs and to be one with other children. So, they are off to school, turning their backs on Samagara Shikshana Shale, the integrated learning experience, that Visthar offered. Mind you it was not just the children, we as 'care givers' also exercised the logic of 'mainstreaming' our girls. We also argued that we must make the state responsible and focus on initiating reform from within. Only time, careful monitoring and documentation will tell whether this has been a right decision. The children are excited and that is a start. From our end we remind our girls, ourselves, the mothers and the teachers in the school that there is a huge difference between



schooling and education. Schools can play an effective role in the formation of the child. However, there exists a gap between the vision and the reality.

Community: Illusion, Risks and Possibilities

Having made a critique of institutional care for over two decades, it was a very minced analysis that led us to initiate Bandhavi. Right at the outset we ensured a high priority for children to relate to their mothers. From year one we have had at least one or more young ones being kept back. Our efforts through partner organizations or directly has initiated the process but there is always the risk. This summer, Sunita and Shruti from Halvi and Umadevi from Karnati Nagar were detained by their mothers. An obvious reason is work but it could also be marriage. What can we do? Work with the field based partner groups to keep track of the children, strengthen the field based groups in their efforts to resist practice of child labour, bonded labour or early child marriage. Resistance at one level but simultaneously the effort to fashion an alternative community at Visthar. And, the journey continues.

Visitors, Sisters and Life on Campus

Through out the year, Visthar have guests and participants from around the world. Almost all of them, visit at Bandhavi, some times with sweets, stories from other countries, songs and smiles. Some stay for longer periods and help with teaching english or computers. This year we had girls from the villages in Koppal district. Another 'Bandhavi like' initiative. Strangely (or not so strangely), it was difficult for our girls to relate to these little ones. Bangalore and Visthar had

influenced the original Bandhavi children to a pseudo sophistication that deterred them from relating to their sisters. Does this not count for failure on our part? Our inability to inculcate in them the fact that they should always '*remember their days in Egypt*'. As part of being community our girls are encouraged to participate in chores related to cooking, cleaning and gardening. Is this child labour? We do not think so. We try to engage the children in dialogue, reminding them of responsibilities in the house and community. More importantly, celebration of childhood does not excuse one for taking responsibility in the household. As far as the children are concerned, not all enjoy it. Laziness and a manipulative spirit raise its head often. We continue to encourage and at times enforce. The children and we as care givers are learning together.

A Promise of a Steady 'Knock'

Cricket has been the lasting legacy of the colonial powers. A legacy we happily received internalized and mastered. So in the Sambrama 2nd innings, we hope to play a steady knock, keep you informed with our stories and encourage you to write back. After all we do need two players at the crease.

Look forward to hearing from you



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