

NEWSLETTER OF MAY, 2007

Hi Friends :-)

Saksham has completed nearly three and a half years since its formal registration and it is almost a year since Saksham Vidhyalaya shifted to the new premises in Nithari. We have come a long way from the time when this project began as informal evening classes. As many of you may be aware, we now run the school in two shifts covering around 350 children in all age groups from 3 to 16. Many of the students have been streamlined into the other schools in the neighbourhood so that they can continue their education beyond the level Saksham is able to cater to. They however continue to attend the classes at Saksham and these supplementary classes have strengthened their base and helped them to perform well in their respective schools.

One must say that the past year has been quite an eventful one for the children at Saksham. The school has now closed down for the summer break. The kids have been regular in attendance in spite of the soaring temperatures, but the electricity has been playing truant and because the size of the rooms are not commensurate with the space required for the number of children, the heat in the closely packed classrooms does become difficult to bear. So the classes will now be resumed only in the first week of July. In the meanwhile, it would be a good idea for each one of us involved with Saksham, to get to know about the others in the family, who have extended help towards our efforts. This letter is therefore also to introduce all of you to each other as also to recapitulate all that has been going on at Saksham in the preceding months.

Smita Jain, our most committed volunteer, roped in her parents first and through them, many of their family friends who have contributed their time, and helped in other ways. I will briefly introduce them all.

Shri B.K.Jain, father of Smita Jain

Smt. Lata Jain, mother of Smita Jain

Shri P.C.Jain, who has since been co-opted as one of the trustees of Saksham

Shri M.I. Khan, DIG/BSF

Dr.J.K. Jain, retired C.G.H.S doctor

Smita's sisters Sarika and Monika are also staunch supporters of Saksham.

The above team, have between themselves, contributed in cash and in kind. A lot of clothes have been collected and distributed.

Medical check-up of the children, their parents as well as others in the neighbourhood is now being held regularly with the kind help of Dr. J.K.Jain and the others in the group.



Dr. J.K.Jain, lighting the lamp on the occasion of Diwali

On one occasion Shri P.C. Jain had arranged for breakfast packets for all the children, while Shri Khan had distributed a large number of clothes including new shirts and T-shirts, as also a sacksful each of basmati rice and pulses. Shri Khan had also invited some of the children to be present at an event of the BSF which they thoroughly enjoyed.



Children of Saksham at the BSF event, seen along with Shri M.I.Khan, DIG/BSF

Lata Jain has been getting many of her friends to pitch in, who have come forward with help in cash as also by way of clothes, stationery, ceiling fans etc.



Sincere thanks to Shri A.C.Peter, Assistant Governor, Rotary International District, 3010 and Dr. Nishchal Pandey, in charge of the "Gift of Life "programme of the Rotary Club, who sponsored and facilitated the heart surgery of Pooja Kumari, a student of Saksham Vidhyalaya. Financial aid for this surgery was extended by Rotarian Shri Sushil Gupta of Hyatt Regency Hotel. The operation was performed successfully by the cardiac team in "Fortis" hospital in Vasant Kunj. The surgery involved the removal of a muscular obstruction in the pulmonary artery and closure of a hole in the ventricular septum. Pooja's family is extremely poor. They live in a shack and her parents eke out a living selling tea and snacks on the roadside. If it was not for the help of the above named people, it is doubtful whether the child may have been able to survive this congenital heart problem beyond a limited life span. Saksham sincerely appreciates this project of Rotary and the people behind it. Thanks to Shri Peter, Dr. Nischal Pandey, Shri Sushil Gupta and the doctors and management of Fortis Hospital, Pooja is now growing healthier and more active by the day.



Pooja, outside the pavement hut, where she lives with her parents and siblings. Pooja's mother may be seen in the background.



Pooja recovering after her open-heart surgery in the Fortis Hospital, Vasant Kunj with Dr. Nischal Pandey and the nurses who attended on her.

Many officers and staff of Railway Board, Ministry of Railways have been consistently contributing financially to the efforts of Saksham. In fact, one could say that the regularity of their assistance, has gone a long way in sustaining and furthering the work of Saksham. Clothes, books and items of stationery also been collected and distributed by them. I would like to use this opportunity, to gratefully acknowledge their co-operation, as also to express the hope that they would continue to be part of this endeavour.

"For the People" group is an association of youngsters working for "Conexant" in Noida. Priya Modi, Pranav Jadhav and the others in this group had borne all the expenses for a picnic trip for all the children of Saksham to Indraprastha Park. They have also donated books, durries and stationery etc. We look forward to their continued support.

Some contacts, have with time, evolved into strong associations. From a reference received from a friend and neighbour, a group of youngsters, who had done M.B.A from the same Alma Mater and now doing their bit for community development was got in touch with. Ankita, Paurush, Deepak, Alok, Amod and others in this group have now become friends and supporters of Saksham. This group have made a commitment to supply all the notebooks and stationery required for a year and towards this they have already supplied the first lot of the same. More importantly, they have committed to bear the expenditure for a similar project that we will be launching in Morna village, adjoining Nithari village. We will be taking one room on rent, to start with and engaging a teacher from the locality and then take it from there. The room that has been identified and for the hiring of which the necessary contacts have been made, is just next to a juggi cluster and we hope that our classes will benefit the children of this basti. We propose to launch this project in the first week of June.

The 9th and 10th of April, this year was celebrity time for many of the children at Saksham school☺ As a finale to the theatre workshop that was being conducted in the school by the "Pandies" since May 2006, sixty children of Saksham gave a stage performance in the amphitheatre of the India Habitat Centre on these two evenings. It was also a time for catharsis as the plays were scripted around the gruesome murders of children in the same urban village that had shocked the nation.

<http://www.ibnlive.com/videos/full/india/nithari-kids-enact-their-gory-past-262881.html>

"Pandies", a theatre group formed by Shri Sanjay Kumar, English Lecturer in Hansraj College and his group of students, have been interacting with the kids at Saksham on every alternate Saturday, teaching them the basics of acting, script writing, direction, the works...all this, in an atmosphere that was effusive with the warmth , genuine encouragement and understanding . One hopes that the Pandies group have also benefited in some way from this interaction.



It goes without saying that the whole experience has been very beneficial for the children in terms of recognition extended to them as individuals in their own right, recognition of their talents and creativity, building up of their confidence and in holding on to their own views, perspectives and reactions to the different issues around them, as also in expressing them without the fear of condescension or ridicule. Children, I would hold, can see through affectations and can recognize genuineness more easily than the conditioned adult world. The manner in which a rapport and bond and real affection has developed between "Sanjay Bhaiyya", and the youngsters in the "Pandies" group and the children of Saksham, speaks volumes of the intentions and sincerity of this group. We at Saksham express our thanks to "Pandies" and to Smita Jain, who forged this association.

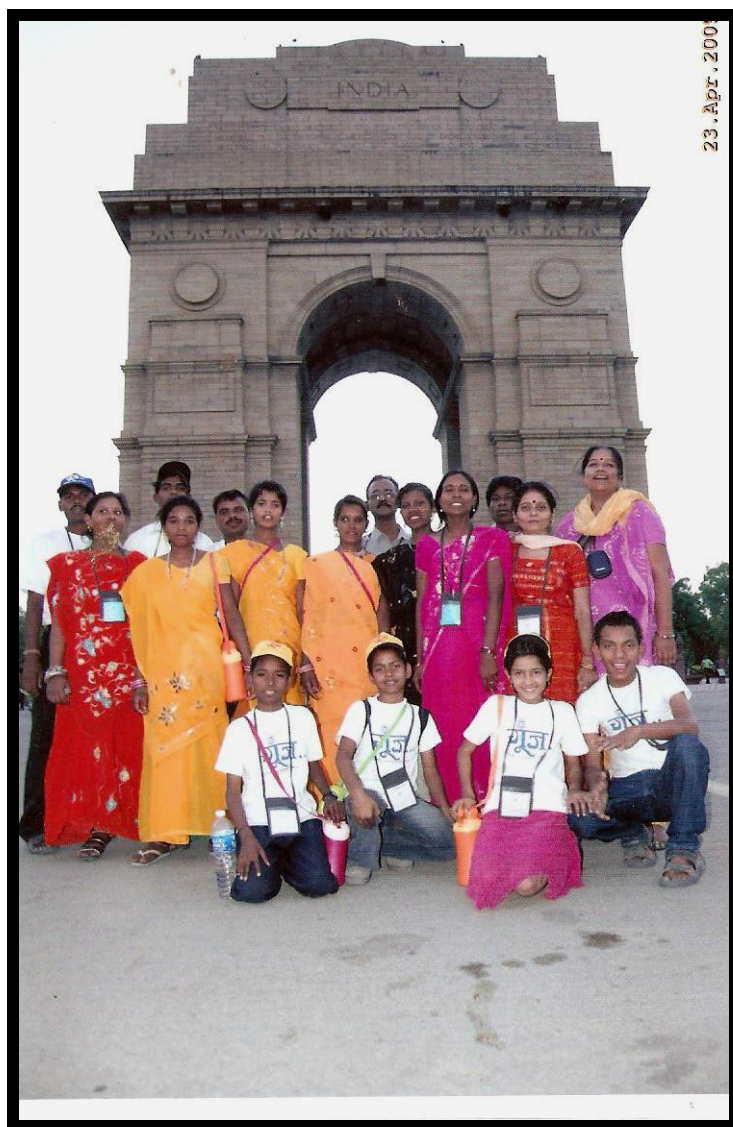
Dr. Venugopal, Senior Anaesthetist from Swami Dayanand Hospital, Shahdara, has been extremely helpful in the cases of a number of children, who required detailed medical investigation and treatment for their illnesses. A big thank you to you Dr.Venu.



Some students of Saksham attending an exhibition in one of the Public schools in the neighbourhood.

A big Hi to Juliana of "Mothers Acting Up", whom was introduced through one of the petition sites on the internet. We had exchanged mails about our common visions and this was happily followed by a meeting in person, when Juliana visited India. She had gone back to Colorado and spoken about Saksham to her friend Eliza Woloson who is the founder of an NGO named Global Education Fund. This NGO collects books and sends them across to schools and orphanages supporting the education of the less privileged children. Eliza send us a very good collection of English books for the primary level. She brought more of them, when she subsequently visited Delhi. Eliza had also come to the school and spent a few happy hours with the children. Do log on to the websites of Mothers Acting Up and the Global Education Fund to know more about their work.

Anshu Gupta of Goonj has been supporting us with clothes for the children, books collected from the "well to do" schools, toys and stationery and durries etc. Last April, eight children of Saksham had also participated in "Pratibimb", an event organized by Goonj to encourage interaction between the children of rural schools and the schools catering to the children of the urban elite. The children had hugely enjoyed this camp. Unfortunately, Saksham could not participate in this event this April, as many of the senior children, now going to regular schools were having their final exams. Log on to the website of Goonj to know more about their work and the "School to School" programme.



Some of the children from Saksham who participated in the Pratibimbh event organized by Goonj.

Thanks from Saksham to Mrs. Balachandran, Principal, Ramjas School and Deepa Rai, in charge of the Interact Club, Ramjas School for all the help they have rendered by way of collecting and donating books stationery etc.

Thanks to Elsie Mathews, Teacher in St. Michael's School, Pusa Road, who encouraged her students to collect and donate textbooks, notebooks, other items of stationery and a large quantity of clothes .

Saksham is grateful to Dr. Indu Jain of Life Care Centre for holding an anaemia detection camp and supply of iron tablets.



Also to the members of the Rotaract Club for organizing a Dental camp and the donation of a pedestal fan, clothes etc.

A big thanks to Shri Ashit Saxena, who besides rendering continuous financial support has been a source of huge moral support in this venture.

Thanks to Smita Jain and Alka Arya for their articles in the Hindu and Jansatta respectively, about the work of Saksham. We are also grateful for the media coverage of the stage performance at IHC. Thanks to NDTV, CNN/IBN, ZEE NEWS, KAIRALI T.V, and other TV channels as also to the Indian Express, Times of India, Hindu, Metro News, Economic Times in this regard. The media coverage apart from making the children feel that they "had arrived", is sure to lend more credence to the work of Saksham. This event would not have been possible if it was not for the co-operation of Priyanka Gupta of India Habitat Centre who arranged for the venue, free of cost.

Sunil, working with BHEL had come to Saksham with the group "Friends across Borders", who it may be recalled had been collecting letters of friendship from the schoolchildren in various states of India for carrying them along to the children of Pakistan in an attempt to forge friendship between them. Recently Sunil has introduced some of his other friends, Mukesh, Prashant and Dinesh to Saksham. We hope you will continue the association.

Ashar came to Saksham with a reporter from a French News Magazine who was covering the events of D-5, Nithari. One would not want to dwell on the horror of those crimes. For the children at Saksham, Ashar's subsequent visit along with his friend gave them a few hours of great delight as these musicians sang to them accompanied by the strumming of their guitars. Thanks for the impromptu concert in the humble venue of Saksham Vidhyalaya. :-) Do look us up again. The kids and you could work on that song for the school that you said you could compose the music for.

Gail, is a friend introduced to Saksham by Smita Jain. Gail's parents had been visiting her and the family came to Saksham with lots of stuff for the kids including notebooks, stationery and clothes. We are happy to think of all of you as part of the Saksham family.

Vivek, another one of Smita Jain's friends and a photojournalist, took some wonderful photographs of the children. We hope he will allow us to use some of those photographs on our website when we eventually register one.

Sincere apologies if inadvertently any of our benefactors have not found mention in this letter. Surely, the rest of us in our group can point out any such omissions and set the scene right with follow up mails to all the addressees.

It would be nice if each of you associated with Saksham can tell us more about yourselves, as the intro that has been given in this mail is obviously rudimentary. Also your reactions to this project and views/suggestions for improvement.

Our immediate focus will now be on starting the project in Morna and towards getting accreditation under the OPEN BASIC EDUCATION programme of the National Open School. This will enable us to give the children a Government recognized certificate for their having completed education up to the 3rd/5th standard. We will also try to get some of the senior children admitted to the Govt. Senior Secondary School in Sector-12 Noida this academic session starting in July.

Importantly, this work cannot be sustained without money coming in regularly. Details of moneys received during the last financial year and the expenditure incurred has been given in the attachment to this letter. This is pre-audited version of our accounts and has to be verified finally with the receipt books and vouchers. Those who have contributed, to whom this letter will also be mailed, do inform Saksham if there are any any discrepancies.

Recurring expenditure is mainly towards the rent of the premises and the salary of the teachers. We have tried to evolve a system where the senior students of Saksham who attend regular school in the mornings, help with the literacy of the smaller age groups. We recognize their help with a small honorarium of Rs.300/pm at present. The senior teachers are being paid Rs.1100/ p.m. at present. We have bought textbooks for the main subjects covering the syllabus up to the Vth standard. The text books are used in the classroom only and are got bound so that they can be used by subsequent batches of students without incurring further expenditure, except for the re-binding, when damaged by use.

Our accounts have been audited up to the financial year ending 31.3.2006. We have applied for exemption under the Income Tax Act and have already presented ourselves before the Officer with all the documents, required to be submitted by them. Hopefully the exemption will be granted in the next month or two.

Please spread the word around amongst your friends and acquaintances who may be willing to join Saksham as volunteers or otherwise help us with their ideas, time, and funds or in any other way. Saksham has made a successful beginning in bringing education to many underprivileged children. There is ample scope for doing more. Let's all join hands and take this forward.

Warmly,

Nadira, Genl. Secy, Saksham