

We have broken a habit, and broken a jinx, too, we hope, in the process. This is the first time in Swanirvar's history that two successive annual general meetings are being held at the same venue. It seems our days of uncertainty are over. As you know, we now have got some land at Andharmanik, and if we can build something there in the next twelve months, we shall be holding all our subsequent AGMs at the same place. But let us not anticipate. . As exemplified by this occupation of a semi-permanent abode, our days of consolidation have begun, though it never does for an NGO to feel secure. We at Swanirvar must always remember that our success is not, as some other NGOs feel, to be judged by how much funding we are able to obtain. Our task is to use that money wisely and well, on providing a better life to those in whose name we asked for the funds.

We at Swanirvar do not intend to ever lose sight of this goal, but this is hard work. It is far easier to erect a few visible, tangible, symbols of progress to impress undiscerning people as well as to feel self satisfied. But these expressions of apparent achievement are just that, and nothing more. We would like to accomplish things more permanent, for which it is essential to have the enthusiastic participation in our work of those for and among whom we work, and which entails building from the bottommost. We presume to believe that we are doing this, and that is why much of what we do is not visible to the casual observer. By the time we reach his eye level, we shall be on a firm and unassailable base.

We have stuck to our decision of not enlarging our work area and also of not adding to our membership without substantial reason. What we have tried to do throughout the year is consolidate our position, to strengthen our ongoing projects instead of spreading ourselves too thin, and to decentralise both our decision making process and our implementation mechanism so that to people at the grassroots level

Swanirvar does not stand as a distant organization - which provides for them, but as a close associate which works with them.

I shall now report on our activities between April 1992 and March 1993.

For the sake of convenience I describe these under certain heads, even though they may sometimes not have, such a compartmentalised character.

## **Organization**

We have not added to our three fully functioning youth groups, Palli Unnayan Kendra at Chandalati; Gram Unnayan Kendra at Patullyapur, and Netaji Saagha at Bajitpur. All three groups receive Rs. 150 every month from Swanirvar to meet their office and incidental expenses. We have

bought a small plot of land at both Chandalad and Fatullyapur and hope to be able to build on them during the course of next year. At both places the groups need much more room than is now available to them.

At Andharmanik we bought land in four instalments. Happily the plots are contiguous. We shall have to decide on how to use the land and the ponds most effectively.

There is a mothers' group which interacts regularly with our health worker at Chandalati, and there are guardians' groups, where also women are more numerous and more active at Andharmanik, Fatullyapur, Chandalati, and Bajitpur which sit with , our teachers in their respective villages, but we have not made much headway in forming women's groups with well-defined goals and identity. This is a failure which we cannot afford but the task continues to be difficult.

## Education

### *Supplementary schools*

We ran eight of them in six villages. The table below gives details of location and enrolment.

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Village	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV (K. G., V etc)	Others
	M F T	M F T	M F T	M F T	M F T
Fatullyapur	3 3 6	1 3 4	0 4 4	1 0 1	1 2 3
Fatullyapur	4 4 8	3 2 5	5 2 7	-	-
Fatullyapur	7 5 12	2 6 8	1 2 3	-	-
Bajitpur	2 6 8	1 1 2	2 2 4	3 3 6	-
Audharmanik	2 2 4	0 1 1	3 3 6	0 3 3	2 4 6
Koslur	3 3 6	4 1 5	3 2 5	3 3 6	-
Chandalati	1 4 5	4 2 6	4 1 5	1 0 1	4 5 9
Kurulgachha	4 1 5	2 1 3	2 1 3	0 2 2	3 1 4
	26 28 54	17 17 34	20 17 37	8 11 19	10 12 22

The three schools at Patullyapur have a total enrolment of 18, 20, and 23 respectively, that at Bajitpur 20, at Andharmanik 20, at Kolsur 22, at Chandalati 26, and the one at Kurulgachha 17. Of the total 166 'iitudents in these schools 81 are boys and 85 girls.

None of the schools has a permanent— structure and they sit on verandas or rooms provided by local people. All schools have blackboards and various materials with which to make educational aids.

Four whole-day workshops were held for the eight teachers in which they discussed various experiments stemming from the prescribed lessons, and also learnt to make aids to make teaching more effective - and meaningful.

Our education supervisor makes a weekly visit to every school and his reports are discussed at a monthly meeting at Swanirvar which all teachers attend. It /was found early in the year that no teacher could give full attention to individual needs with so many students from four or more classes under his or her charge, and it was then decided that, depending on the teacher's convenience the students would be divided °into two groups comprising two classes each, and each group will attend school on alternate days. There was strong opposition from guardians and finally a compromise was reached that the teacher would attend to one group on any day, while the other would study by itself.

3 An evaluation format was designed by a Calcutta based special educator and when we had finished the work we found our doubts were valid; the children were not learning very much. The main reasons were two; first, we had intended these schools to "supplement" the teaching imparted at the Government primary schools, which all our students attended, but since these teach almost nothing, our teachers were saddled with the job of teaching everything from scratch; their work was made all the more difficult by the fact that they had to teach students from three, four, or more classes simultaneously.

We have not been able to find a way out of these, end so have to reconcile ourselves to the disappointment that as far at the 3 R's are concerned, we are not doing anything spectacular. There was, however, another purpose behind our starting these schools. We wished to bring out the latent creativity in every child, and to make the process of growing up fun: We dare say we have succeeded in both to a certain extent.

The children are taught how to sing how to recite and sing rhymes, and they, have performed plays before a general audience. In October an evening of a variety performance by children of the local school was presented at Andharmanik. In January, two-day festivals were held at both Chandalati and Fatullyapur, complete with sports meets, plays, physical exercise, songs and dances. An expert from Calcutta visits Chandalati, Fatullyapur and Bajitpur in successive weeks to train children in mass physical exercise, yoga, etc. Through all these cultural and physical activities we are trying to inculcate certain human values. For example, a short play on communal harmony has won great praise wherever the children have presented it.

Pre-primary schools : Four such schools, for children between 3 and 5 years of age, have been running at Bajitpur, Chandalati, Andharmanik, and Fatullyapur since July 1992. The teachers were trained in Calcutta in a system adapted from the Montessori method. Surveys were made of prospective students and a number of meetings with guardians were held. This was found necessary to popularise the idea of a “school” for so small children, and to explain the concept of learning without books. We must confess that even though at every centre the children have made good progress in development of initiative through individual freedom of action, improvement of sense perception, and development of coordination through exercises and games, many parents are still not reconciled to “bookless” learning.

The schools at Chandalati, Bajitpur and Fatullyapur started with 30 children each, and the one at Andharmanik had 28. A few children later left to join the Government primary school-pre-school children ‘ often go with their elder siblings-but we did not take in any replacements as we did not wish to disturb the tenor of the progress. With two teachers for every school, individual monitoring is a feature of these schools.

- 4 The teachers attended a second course of training in February 1993. The schools sit for 2 hours or a little more and besides Montessori kits, various locally made aids, using locally available material are used by the teachers. The children are taught in addition to the usual Montessori package, songs about personal hygiene, action recitations, etc.

Our own evaluation is that this project is a mixed success. The method we have adopted cannot yield best results if the teachers are not imaginative and innovative. Unfortunately not all our teachers can be said to be either or both, but we have to do with what we have. A young man or woman may be competent in all ways, but may still lack the vital spark with which to ignite the enthusiasm of small children. An exaggerated sense of discipline so ingrained in some of our teachers that they fail to transmit a sense of joy to the students. I wonder if any amount of training can alter this personality profile.

Guardians’ meetings are held in every village, but they are not as regular in the other three centres as at Chandalati where the parents pay a regular monthly fee, however nominal, and the villagers donate money to provide biscuits to the children.

Cultural activities : We now have a group which presents plays in a manner approximating to the third theatre methodology. We have also popularised a very athletic form of traditional dance from Andhra Pradesh.

## Health

This year we sent two more women for training, and so we now have four health workers, all trained in the basics of health care and public hygiene. Their work in the three villages is coordinated by a health supervisor, who has been trained at a more advanced level, and at more than one place.

Surveys and tables ; Our first task was to make a household to household survey. Fatullyapur with 707 families is such a large village that even two health workers cannot cover all of it, so they chose as many "paras" as they could. At Bajitpur, too, covering the entire village is beyond our only worker, so she too chose a part of it. At Chandalati; which is a much smaller village, our worker has taken responsibility for almost all the "paras".

In these three villages a base line survey has been completed in all the areas where we work and all families have been listed "para" wise. Tables have been made of the reproductive record of all women of child bearing age, of their immunization history, of children's Immunization, one for those under 2 and another for those between, 2 and 6, of infant mortality, of all births and deaths, with causes for the latter of the various contraceptive methods used, of sanitation facilities, and of cooking and drinking water facilities. Naturally, the records are constantly updated.

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Immunization: It seems our health workers' hard and painstaking work of explaining to all mothers and pregnant women the absolute necessity to go for their children's and their own immunization has borne fruit. "Special" camps, where the health worker shepherded her wards, are no longer necessary. In all three, villages, everyone to immunized now visits the regular camps at the government health sub-centres on her own. Our health workers check their records to remind everybody when she should go, but such reminders are not needed except in rare cases.

Our survey shows that immunization coverage around the time we began work was less than 50%; our target is to raise it to 90% in two years. Popular response is very encouraging, barring the odd instance of the mother who just cannot be persuaded that her child's later chest cold had nothing to do with the polio vaccine it had taken a fortnight before, but the problem is that the supply of vaccines to health centres is often erratic.

Family planning: This is an area where we perforce have to tread softly, but we have made some progress. Contrary to belief held and authoritatively expressed in certain urban drawing rooms, village women, even from very poor Muslim families, are keen on adopting some measure, and are not averse to sterilization also, with or without the mother-in-law's knowledge. It is unfair to claim that all who went in for family planning did so at our behest, but a conservative estimate shows that

our health workers were certainly responsible for motivating 116 of them. A village-wise, sex-wise, and method-wise break-up says that of this 116, 16 women at Chandalati, 22 at Fatullyapur, and 42 at Balitpur are on oral pills, 2 men at Chandalad, 18 at Fatullyapur and none at Bajitpur use condoms, one woman at Chandalati and six at Fatullyapur had an abortion, seven women at Fatullyapur were sterilized, two women at Chandalati were fitted with an ICUD but both developed problems leading to their withdrawal.

The problem here is not the people's apathy so much as the Government's. From February onwards there has been no supply of any family planning devices to any health centre in our project area, and no sterilization camps have been held. This state of affairs is likely to continue. We realise that this means the previous months' efforts will all go in vain, but we are in no position to supply pills and condoms free; and very few of the users are in a position to buy them at cost price from us.

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Sanitation : Some years ago a Government survey revealed that 97% of Indian families do not have their own toilet and the situation cannot have changed much since then. Community toilets are the obvious answer, but they have failed everywhere. The Government of India initiated a scheme some years ago to construct, through various agencies, toilets costing around Rs. 2000 each. The user had to pay one-third of the cost. We consider this well-intentioned scheme to have little use in solving the problem. The total cost means that only a limited number can be built, and there will be few families in a village who can afford to pay Rs. 650. We decided to go in for an absolutely basic model, which will serve the purpose of public health and have no frills whatsoever, and would cost around Rs. 35. We dug a 5'X5' pit, arranged for it to be covered, constructed the foot rests, fitted a pan and a siphon. The user would arrange for his privacy in any way he thought fit, and for the roof if he wanted one. We constructed 51 of these at Chandalati, then stopped to see how they would survive the monsoon. Since no damage was seen, we went ahead and finished with 94 such toilets, all of which are in use except one which was found to have been constructed partly on land that does not belong to the user. At Fatullyapur, some parts of the village have firm soil which would not subside when a pit is dug, and we constructed 20 a toilets there, too. Unfortunately this is as far as we have been able to go. For one thing, the soil in the rest of our project area is not so firm, and the more "sandy it is the more the need for the pit to have a brick and/or cement lining. This adds considerably to the cost. For another, in certain areas, the Government has built a few of the Rs. 2000 toilets, and people are not willing to settle for less. They would rather wait indefinitely than ask for one of our totally glamourless outfits. At places all that the Government has done is dig the pit and attach the pan the walls and the roof were to come later and even after three years the user is happier to wait than agree to use one of our model.

Such warped logic exasperates but we must not allow this to dishearten us.

Health clinics : Bajitpur, Chandalati, and Fatullyapur are all villages which have no health centre nearby, but this very remoteness of theirs is also making it difficult for us to find a doctor who will attend a clinic there once a week or so. While the search goes on, we have arranged certain basic medicines for common diseases to be distributed at cost price. These clinics also have a weighing machine for adults, and a blood pressure measuring device.

Herbal medicine : No matter what arrangements we can make for medicines it will always be cheaper, more convenient, and less harmful the physical system if traditional medicines from herbs and plants could be used. All our health workers attended a three-day training on herbal medicine. They are now working out ways-of persuading people go back to the old methods, not an easy job, which entails identifying available herbs in the village, and making them quickly usable.

Antenatal care : The majority of mothers of malnourished children have no way of knowing when anything is wrong. Most malnutrition is invisible but the use of growth charts, along with regular weighing, can make that malnutrition visible and drastically reduce its incidence.

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We have made arrangements for both. For slightly older children we prepare cheap nutrition packets and sell them at cost price.

Diarrhoea among children continues to be endemic, and since it will take time for us to significantly reduce the causes, we have to concentrate on the remedy. We are always ready with our oral rehydration solution (ORS), a mixture of salt, sugar and water, to make up for the dehydration caused by a diarrhoeal infection. We intend to expand our child care activities. When confidence in child survival grows people generally begin to have fewer children. In the long run therefore a child health revolution would help reduce the rate of population growth. In no country has there been a significant fall in birth rates which has not been preceded by a significant fall in child death rate.

The health supervisor visits all villages regularly and he and all the health workers meet once in every month at Swanirvar where progress and prospects are discussed. There is considerable popular involvement in our health work, aided to a certain extent by our publicity efforts.

Posters obtained from Mass Media, Government of West Bengal, have been displayed at the village organizations and at tea shops, etc. Walls at strategic points of villages have been covered with health slogans and with writings and pictures on health problems and issues. We have a slide projector, and have obtained some slides also. There are health committees in the villages, comprising mainly women.

## Savings and income generation

Palli Sanchay Samabay (PSS) or Small Savings Cooperatives These are running in four villages.

The table below gives details.

Village	No. of depositors	Total amount deposited	No. of loans	Total amount lent out
Fatullyapur	312	Rs.39,894	20	Rs. 6,850
Bajitpur	94	Rs. 2,239	4	Rs. 600
(from 1.8.92)				
Andbarmanik	71	Rs. 4,946.65	3	Rs. 1,100
Chandalati	202	Rs. 13,324.55	16	Rs. 3,070
Total	679	Rs.60,404.20	43	Rs.11,620

The loans were for purposes as varied as agriculture, buying a sewing machine, medical emergency, house building, buying a van or a cycle, setting up a small trade; buying animals, and others. Repayment of loans is generally on schedule, because of the social pressures inherent in our system of running the PSSs.

8 Ground spices: This unit at Chandalati sold spices worth over Rs. 102,000 to make a gross profit of approximately Rs. 14,000. There was a steep increase in prices during the year, and that explains the sales proceeds. The quantity of spices sold has not gone up since last year, mainly because we have lost a major bulk customer, because of internal dissension there. Also, we have not been able to find either any marketing outlet or a dependable group of salesmen working for a commission. With sales almost totally dependent on a few individuals, it is unlikely the business will expand, but more disappointing is the fact that with sales of over Rs. one lakh, the wages bill for the five women and a male supervisor involved in the project came to only Rs. 6,610. This makes it an unsuccessful activity as far as generating income is concerned.

Honey processing: This unit at Andharmanik did brisk business, selling around 650 kg of honey in the year. Here too, the lack of a marketing outlet in Calcutta is a major constraint on expansion.

Beekeeping: The main problem with commercial bee keeping in West Bengal is that barring spring and early summer, there is very little food for the bees in the other seasons. Our area fortunately grows a lot of mustard and sesame and coriander in winter and thus has great potential for beekeeping. With this in mind, we organized a training course on scientific beekeeping. Beginning with a 10 day theoretical training at Andhatmanik in November 1992, the course will continue till October 1993, meeting every month for two days in one of the villages for practical training. The Andharmanik course was attended by 30 people, including eight from sister organizations: Of the 22 from Swanirvar, one dropped out early. The remaining 21 people were all given, as free grant; two boxes with frames full of Apis cerena, the variety of bee traditionally kept in eastern India. We



also offered, again as a free grant, two boxes of five frames each of *Apis mellifera*, a larger variety imported from Europe and only recently gaining popularity in West Bengal, but only 14 of the 21 felt bold enough to take up the challenge. The total cost of the bees and boxes given to these 14 was Rs. 43,050, while the other seven received help worth Rs. 2,905. In addition every trainee was given a mask, gloves, a net, etc. and equipment like extractors, queen excluders were given to trainees from the same village on a group basis.

It is too early to know for certain, but if the trainees are serious after the first year they should all earn good money from their apiaries. We shall pay for their migration to some flower-bearing area later in the -year to allow them to learn firsthand what to do, but they will have to travel around with their boxes on their own from next November.

Animal husbandry: A survey has shown us that people in our area engage in as many as 83 types of work to earn money. We have not been able to propose any new ways of generating income that might benefit a sizable number of people. After much discussion we decided to help women do something traditional. We offered them money to buy animals, to be reared and then sold for a good profit. Some women wanted a bit of capital to begin trading in paddy and rice in a small way and some wanted sewing machines. With money from us 60 women have bought 50 goats, 28 calves, and 8 pigs one woman has bought a sewing machine, and another trades in paddy. Altogether Rs. 31,440 has been spent on this project.

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### **Agriculture**

This year we joined a permaculture network which has four other members, one in North 24 Parganas, one in South 24 Parganas, one in Midnapur and Service Centre, in Calcutta, which also acts as coordinator of the network. The network members regularly visit one another's area to discuss the progress of work, and this year we sent -three people to Pondicherry for intensive training.

Our basic goal, to make agriculture economically and ecologically sustainable, seems simple but "chemical" agriculture is very hard to replace, despite the farmers' clear realization that it is damaging in the long run. But in the long run, said Keynes, we shall all be dead, and until and unless abort-term alternatives are found the farms will persist with what he knows is damaging the sail, adding to his costs, it's and it will finally turn out to be counter-productive. Unfortunately we are in no position to offer hind anything right now. We are experimenting with various things, and it would be foolhardy to claim any success in farming after only two seasons results. All we can do is to keep detailed records of our experiments, in the form of input-output data, periodic soil tests, photographs etc. We do keep in touch with local farmers, but do not wish to involve them in our

experiments just as yet, for we do not have the means to compensate them for any loss- they might suffer by opting to do as we do.

I shall very briefly explain a few of our experiments. First, crop rotation. The principal aims are, to eliminate the use of chemical fertilizer to facilitate regeneration of the soil; to stop use of chemical pesticides or weedicides and to replace them, if necessary, with botanical pesticides ; to find the most appropriate crops that can be grown together , as mutually beneficial and to optimise production. Then, permanently raised beds and circles, covered with mulch, to grow a variety of vegetables. The principal aims are, to eliminate tilling or ploughing, to conserve soil and water with the help of the mulch, to mix the crops on each bed and circle so that they can grow to be mutually beneficial, to totally forgo use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, to try botanical pesticides when necessary, to plant various pest-repellent or pest-trapping plants, to plant trees on boundaries which will supply green leaf manure and mulch material.

We have continued with our work of improving the quality of fruits by budding various trees. We have distributed betel nut saplings from our nursery to more than 100 households. My report this year does not contain the names of individuals and organizations who have helped us. One reason is that they are too numerous and the second, stemming from the first, is that it is unwise to risk unwitting omissions. We do remember all of them with gratitude and hope that in the coming years, too, they will find- our work worthy of support. We on our part intend to remain true to our commitment.

A brief summary of expenses during the year,  
Extracted from the audited accounts

1. Village organizations: (Office and stationery expenses, newspapers, furniture, utensil)	Rs.13,921.25
2. Savings and loan cooperatives (Stationery, publicity meetings, inauguration functions)	Rs.1,751.00
3. Income generation projects: (Spices-Rs. 13,000 ; Honey processing-Rs. 18,000 ; Bee keepers' training-Rs. 120,202 ; Women entrepreneurs-Rs. 35,887)	Rs. 187,089.00
4. Education : (8 supplementary primary schools ; 4 pre-primary schools ; Cultural training and shows, Sports meets ; Yoga)	Rs. 112,794.00
5. Health : (Surveys and tables, Immunization, Family planning, Sanitation, Treatment of simple diseases, Herbal medicine, Antenatal care, Children's nutrition packets)	Rs.31,455.00
6. Agriculture (Crop rotation; vegetable plots, Bio-fertilizers, Bio-pesticides, Pedal pump, Training, workshops, and study trips, Nursery, Fruit tree budding, Soil testing)	Rs.66, 847.0
7. Capital expenses ; (Furniture-Rs. 8,081 ; Land-Rs. 309,533)	Rs. 317,614.00
8. Administration and overheads :	Rs. 40,715.00
Total	Rs.772,186.25