

At last year's general meeting I expressed the hope that when we met next it might be in our own building. This has not happened. Work on the building has, begun but we have not yet reached the stage when all of us can sit and meet there to transact serious business. The foundation has been laid, and it is a firm one but we still do not have a cover to protect us from the uncertain inclemencies of the elements. I was speaking literally, but this is also a metaphor for Swanirvar's present condition. We dare believe our base is well entrenched and capable of withstanding the sundry pressures that are endemic to Ngos, but we still need time and work to provide ourselves with a safety shield against onslaughts from uncertain quarters. These do not have to be from outside, from areas beyond our control, like uncertainty about funding, or imperfect interaction with Government agencies or political and/or other, amore local vested interests. They may as well be from within ourselves self-complacence, a false sense of superiority, the mistaken notion that we are distant distributors of largesse and advice and not active participants in the process of permanent and sustainable change, a replacement of commitment with technique, and a banishment of idealism from our attitude to work.

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We have not expanded our work area, nor, very broadly speaking have we taken up too marry new project. What we have done instead is to make sure that what we are already doing we do better and with more depth and understanding, to that the work may be carried on in future, near or far, without our participation but by the people themselves. The most visible addition to our work has been at Kolsur, the village where we have had a very weak presence for long, but no longer.

I shall now place my formal report on our activities between April 11 1993 and March 31,1994. As in the past years, I have arranged them under five heads Organization, Health, Education, Savings and Income Generation and Agriculture. This can be misleading at times, for there is quite some overlapping, and rightly so, for our goal is integrated development which cannot permit strict compartmentalization.

ORGANISATION

With our youth group at Kolsur active throughout the year, we now have full-fledged groups in four villages. It is they who plan and execute all work in their respective villages and since Swanirvar favours decentralization there is little interference in their work. There is, however, constant and regular supervision by the working committee of Swanirvar, and this year we formed a project committee, which has representatives from all 5 villages, to evaluate work done, to monitor work going on and to plan: work, to be taken up.

Andharmanik is the only village not to have a functioning youth group. This is largely because our work here is much less that in the other 4 villages and is also restricted to an extended "para".

Here is a “para” committee which meets once a month and it has been a pleasant surprise to us to watch this committee, comprising mostly young adults and older people, do its work so earnestly and so effectively.

All the four groups get Rs 156 a month for their incidental expenses and Swanirvar also provides them with a daily newspaper of their choice. A four room building at Chandalati was formally inaugurated on 15 August and this now houses the school, the spices unit, the health clinic, the office of Palli Sanchay Samabay, etc. and can accommodate guests also. The family of Ashok Mandal, one of our earliest workers at Fatullyapur, donated two cottahs of land contiguous to what we had bought earlier in the village and we should be able to build a small structure there the next year. Land was bought at Bajitpur and while we did not have funds to build on it the existing school-cum-office room has been enlarged and renovated. At Kolsur, too, we built a school room but this is a temporary structure and meant to be so. Construction of our main office-cum-training centre at Andharmanik began on 20 January; and unless the monsoon ruins all our calculations, it should be ready for occupation by October 1994.

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We held village meetings regularly to discuss our projects with those who, we think, will benefit from them. “There were altogether 28 such meetings in 4 villages, with about 1,000 enthusiastic - attendance is strictly a matter of choice- participants.

EDUCATION

It would be foolish to expect, and a perfidy to tell others that we expect that people’s economic life can be changed in any considerable way by what a small NGO like Swanirvar chooses to do. We do make some efforts to see that more income is generated and distributed among more people in our project area (these will be detailed in the section “Small savings and income generation”) but our emphasis is on improving the quality of life, a term that encompasses intangible indices as well as the usual ones’ subject to statistical tabulation: Education obviously comes high on this list. We ran eleven coaching centres for children studying at the Government primary schools and four pre-primary schools for those below the age of 4. Our goal was to impart some formal education certainly but principally we wished to bring the children together to enjoy the various opportunities we provided to cater to the- diverse creative urges growing—children always have but which their underprivileged condition manages to suppress brutally: I know you share with me our immense joy that we have really been able to give the children this chance; Some of them have excelled while some have not, but all have joined most enthusiastically in everything, be it dramatics, be it song and dance, be it athletics, be it yoga, be it painting.

I shall enumerate our activities in this area in more detail a little later but before that I must admit to

a major failure. The coaching schools did not quite live up to our expectations, in the matter of formal teaching. Those who are publicly concerned about the state of our education, those who write reports, and those who implement policy on the basis of those reports, appear to be totally ignorant of the rural reality, or it may be that they know but do not care. This affected us in two ways. First, the children who do go to primary school learn so little and so lazily there that the pressure on our coaching centres turned out to be more than we had envisaged; second, the quality of most of our teachers, themselves the product of this indulgent and ineffective system, was not on a par with our expectations and requirements. We have thus decided to close down four of our eleven coaching centres; however, they will continue to be centres for extracurricular activities:

These eleven schools—two each at Bajitpur, Kolsur and Chandalati, four at Fatullyapur and one at Andharmanik—each had one teacher and altogether 198 students, 69 in Class I, 42 in Class II, 40 in Class III, 42 again in Class IV, and five in Class V. Average daily attendance was 61.2%. The teachers attended 13 internal workshops during the year where the average attendance was 10.

3 CRY (Child Relief and You) has fully financed our pre-primary education project. It has also helped us with our primary schools, and our health programme covering children which worked through four schools at Bajitpur, Fatullyapur, Andharmanik and Chandalati, each with two teachers. The teachers attended 12 internal workshops where average attendance was seven, and also went to three refresher trainings organised by CRY and Vikramshila in Calcutta.

The schools sat for five days in a week, and were closed for brief periods during summer and autumn. The table below gives a brief summary.

Village	Total school days	Average attendance	Students		Grading after evaluation			
			Total	M	F	(A)	(B)	(C)
Bajitpur	228	84	22	6	16	9	11	2
Fatullyapur	236	76	28	10	18	18	6	4
Andharmanik	243	63	30	16	14	12	14	4
Chandalati	247	86	30	16	14	17	7	6
Total		77.25%	110	48	62	56	38	16.

The children were taught 17 nursery rhymes which they can recite with appropriate movement of the limbs and 18 songs which they present with dances. The older children learnt 4 Kulattam—a folk

dance from Andhra Pradesh which uses short sticks - numbers. They can perform three plays- Gujab ("Rumour"), which is about the futility of communalism; Swarthapar Daitya (adapted from Oscar Wilde's "The Selfish Giant"); and Ganyer Katha ("A village story"), which is about health care and public hygiene-and can do this so well that they have been invited to other villages to perform there. This is most satisfactory, for since all three plays are basically educational, the more the message is spread, the better.

A well-qualified and competent trainer from Calcutta is in charge of the children's physical education. He comes every Monday and visits each village by rotation. At every place he trains the local children, and also the young men who are in charge of their respective village's physical education programme. Until the end of March, the children could perform 20 Yogic asanas, and nine mass drill/gymnastic numbers. This is one of our most successful programmes and altogether 543 children in the five villages took part in the training and practice sessions. There were seven public performances in four villages where 169 children took part.

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Sports meets were held in the winter at two places. The one at Chandalati was open to children from that village, Kolsur and Andharmanik, and the one at Bajitpur catered to local children and those from Fatullyapur. There were 11 items for children, one for the teachers, one for women, and "Go as you like" for all.

Many of our visitors have seen these children in action. Often they perform just as they are, as the visitor may have come without any prior information. It does not seem to matter to the young stars. Their indefatigable enthusiasm makes up for any shortcoming that lack of rehearsal might have produced. I am sure children in more fortunate circumstances sing more melodiously, recite with better enunciation, dance with more grace, act with more reassurance, but as all our visitors have noticed, our children most of whom; had not even known what they had to do, let alone how to do it, and had no idea that they had it in themselves to act, or sing, or dance get even with their urban counterparts simply because they do every-thing with an elan, a pristine joy that shames the hardened critic. We admit that there will be very little we can do for these children economically when they grow older, but we dare hope that the messages, of the plays they perform will stay with them, that the joy they are getting as they grow up will survive into manhood, and make them better human beings. All other creatures look down towards the earth, but man was given a face so that he might turn his eyes towards the stars and his gaze upon the sky. We are trying to make sure that some of these 'children can look up for longer than their condition would otherwise have permitted.

A group of amateur astronomers was kind enough to visit Chandalati with their telescope and a slide show on outer space. The latter was a great success, but unfortunately it rained that winter evening and made the telescope viewing, spread over the best part of the night, very uncomfortable. We would like to invite more such shows to the villages.

We have a children's library at Andharmanik. About 60 children use it. As soon as the other villages can provide space, we shall send some of the books there by rotation.

HEALTH

During the year we had six health workers in three villages. The two at Fatullyapur made 707 home visits, the one at Chandalati made 272, and the three at Bajitpur made 550. The subjects covered during these visits fall into four basic categories. The first, relating to pregnant women, includes food and nutrition, immunization, weight record; and maintaining links with the primary health centre to make sure that all the benefits available there reach the woman in need. The second, relating to child care, includes a record of the baby's weight right from birth, immunization, advice on proper nutrition, and treatment of common diseases. The third relates to kitchen gardens. This is strictly a matter for our agriculture department but since these kitchen gardens are meant to fulfil a family's nutritional needs round the year, we want to make the women in a family responsible for their maintenance and nurture. Our health workers have become close to women in every family and so it was decided that they would be best qualified to motivate a family into growing such a garden under our initial help and supervision. This is also part of our effort to spread the feeling that people who work for us must not be bogged down in "specialisation". The fourth subject covered is advice on family planning. Since the government and other agencies are also active in spreading the message of contraception it is difficult to say exactly how many of those practising family planning are doing so following our health workers' persuasion, but the table below includes mostly people who have been influenced by them.

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		Fatullyapur	Chandalati	Bajitpur
Men	Permanent	0	0	2
	Temporary	149	10	7
Women	Permanent	12	3	10
	Temporary			
	Pill	115	127	34
	Loop	6	1	0
	Copper T		5	

Our health workers continue to motivate women to visit primary health centres for sterilization and often accompany them there on the days when such camps are held. We organized with help from

the Bengal Rural Welfare Service who had trained all our health workers, a sterilization camp of our own at Bajitpur where 8 women underwent tubectomy.

Our workers keep track of when mothers have to take their children to immunization camps and mothers-to-be to go themselves to health centres. This year there were 30 immunization camps in three villages. At Fatullyapur there were 12 camps at the Government health subcentre- where the immunization was done by Government staff. At Bajitpur there were 15 camps, 12 of them at our village centre and three at other points, and at Chandalati all three camps were held in our village centre, At both, Bajitpur and Chandalati the immunization was done jointly by Government staff and our workers.

We are trying to popularise herbal treatment for various common and chronic diseases and; to facilitate the availability of herbs, are trying to popularise the cultivation of medicinal plants: - However, it will take a long time to wean people away from their faith in the allopathic system, and so, anomalous though it appears, we run clinics in three villages where common diseases are diagnosed and allopathic medicines issued at cost price. However, we always try to do "with the least medication, asking people to give the body a chance to heal itself. At Fatullyapur 163 patients were treated and medicine worth Rs 118.50 sold, at Bajitpur the figures were 1,944 and Rs 3907.25 respectively and at Chandalati 834 and Rs 80.05.

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Our health workers incidentally, all of them are women-attended three trainings in use of herbal medicines and three more in primary mother-and-child care, totalling 126 training days. Our health supervisor attended two health network meetings coordinated by BRWS.

Dissemination of information remains a major part of our health programme. This there can be no substitute. For personal interaction and so we held a number of village meetings. There were seven such meetings at Fatullyapur, with 349 participants, and five at Chandalati involving 92 people; the eleven meetings at Bajitpur brought together a total of 452 people. Among the subjects discussed were various health issues, kitchen gardens, family planning, low-cost toilets, education, savings and credit, etc.

We painted one wall at Kolsur, three at Fatullyapur, two at Bajitpur and two at Andharmanik with messages of health and public hygiene. Our most ambitious effort at spreading health awareness was through health "yatras". These were whole-day affairs, beginning with our workers and school-children walking in procession;-carrying posters on various aspects of health and—chanting slogans: As the procession passed through various areas of the village, people joined it and there

wore.-halts-at some points where children presented plays on health problems, The day ended with a sort'-of public meeting -where our workers spoke on health issues facing the village and also on the concept of development followed by Swanirvar. The "yatra" at -Bajitpur was on g(3 January and at one point included 225 people; that at Fatullyapur was on 27 February and drew 346 people. We organised a blood donation camp at Fatullyapur on 22 March where 61 people, many among them women, gave blood.

Most of the low-cost toilets built at Chandalati for less than Rs 35 each are still functioning well, in their third year. However, this needs firm soil conditions, and we appear to have exhausted the possibilities. With their sandy soil Fatullyapur and Bajitpur are totally unsuited to this model, and we devised one, consisting of a cement platform complete with pan and siphon, foot rests, and bamboo walls, costing Rs 705 and installed 15 such units at Bajitpur.

The PD Agarwal Foundation of Jaipur gave us a grant for the purpose

SAVINGS & INCOME GENERATION

All our five villages have their own small savings cooperatives new. The table below gives a summary of how they have fared.

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Village	Number of depositors as on 31.3.84	Average No. of trans- actions in a month	Amount of deposit as on 31.3:64
Chandalati	247	75	Rs 30,346.30
Kolsur (started in July)	30	14	Rs 1,125.75
Andharmanik	82	48	Rs 14,260.611
Fatullyapur	310	80	Rs.28,833.60
Bajitpur	159	56	Rs 5,291.80
Total	928	55	Rs 59,858.65

There is some scope for expansion at Kolsur, but in all the other villages it appears that both the number of depositors and the amount they can save have reached the maximum. One purpose behind the scheme was to give people, particularly women who still forma a majority of depositors, a chance to save safely, for use on a rainy day, and that would seem to have been achieved. The other was to use" a part of the money deposited to issue loans for-productive

This too has made progress, as the following table shows.

Village	No. of loans in 1883-94	Amount disbursed
Chandalati	19	Rs 7,600
Fatullyapur	14	Rs 6,300
Bajitpur	12	Rs 1,780

No loans were given at Kolsur and Andharmanik.

These loans are for various purposes, and though we try hard not to advance any money for non-productive purposes, we cannot at times ignore a plea for some personal loan, for, say, building or repairing a house, or, a visit somewhere. However, since our basic intentions are well known; there are not too many requests for such loans. We have not-yet achieved our goal of setting up committees of depositors to decide on and oversee the disbursement of loans, but at Andharmanik the "para" committee performs this duty to a certain extent and takes an active interest in seeing there is no defaulter, and the moral pressure of peers has been found to be more effective than the words of the agreement.

Our women's income generation programme is doing well. Some of the capital was intact when the year began, and whatever has been repaid has been put back into a revolving fund, thus we have been able to loan out reasonably large sums. Most of the women took money for rearing animals, but there were small entrepreneurs also who wanted to begin or expand their, work of mat weaving; or making paper bags or trading in paddy and/or rice. The table below gives a summary of the progress of the programme.

Village	No. of loans in 1993-94	Amount disbursed
Chandalati	11	Rs 3,730.00
Fatullyapur	26	Rs 14,200.00
Bajitpur	15	Rs 8000.00
Andharmanik	7	Rs 5,400.00
Kolsur	8	Rs 7,000,00
Total	67	Rs 38,330.00

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The 21 people trained in beekeeping last year were this year supplied with wax sheets and sugar during 'the monsoon months. However, despite all our help, eleven of the 21 have given up totally, six are carrying on half-heartedly, and only four-show signs of taking up the job seriously. They migrated with their bee boxes to Baruipur in March: and brought back enough honey to want to go to the Sunderbans in summer. All in all, we would have, liked to see more people more interested in the work.

Our honey processing and bottling unit sold 920 kg of honey worth Rs 55,200.00 and the most heartening development was that about 60 kg of this was sold locally.

The ground spices unit at Chandalati, employing three women and one man, sold seven different spices-turmeric, coriander, cumin, chilli, fenugreek, black pepper, and white mustard for a total of Rs 106,420.00. We are still to find a network to sell these things on a large-scale basis.

AGRICULTURE

We continue to be a member of the permaculture network and this year there was greater, more serious, and more in-depth interaction between the five groups. Our search for methods to lead to sustainable agriculture has drawn the attention of various NGOs. It has been decided -that each present member of the network will act as the training centre for the groups in its area that have expressed a desire to join the network. Once our building is ready for use we hope to operate as the resource and training centre for a large part of the district. The work on our own experimental and demonstration plots with field crop rotation continued. We had four such plots in three villages. We also had two plots for experimenting with vegetables. All data are being meticulously recorded. After a gap of two years we returned to making kitchen gardens and this will be a mayor thrust of ours in the coming months. This year we made 10 such gardens in two villages.

We carried out various experiments with bio-fertilizers Mostly on our own plots Azolla used in the Lice gelds of Andharmanik mul- very well; but it did not do so at Chandalati However azolla growth was uniformly good in the chambers prepared for the purpose in all five villages. Rhizobium was used in moong and masur in two villages. Azotabactor was used with rice in two villages. Dhaincha was used as green manure in three villages.

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Our attempt to grow glyricidia trees- from 140 grafts brought from Chuchura was a failure. We carried out some experiments with vermicompost and local earthworms at Chandalati. Two compost pits were used in two villages. Tobacco leaf solution was tried as pesticide for the eggplant crop with good results. We did "kul" tree grafting on 24 trees. Altogether 0,966 Supari seedlings were grown in our nurseries in five villages.

Interest is being gradually generated among farmers in our alternative ways, and this was the first year we formally discussed our experiments and goals with them. We sat with them thrice in o villages and. helped one of them install a pedal pump for ground water.

Our agricultural workers attended 12 internal workshops at Andharmanik. They also attended various external trainings, totalling 58 training days. Our theatre group performed eight times a play to spread the message of sustainable agriculture. It also took part in six workshops and its plays on blood donation, exploitation of women and health problems ware much appreciated in various villages.

That, then, is a summary of our activities during- the year. I fear there is not much here to thrill the lover of the spectacular, or to interest the chronicler of the sensational. We have thought big but

remained small for that gives us freedom from bureaucratic deadweight and keeps its flexible so that we can take decisions faster and identify mistakes quicker: We have kept our priorities clear our projects -hot be -addressed to the most deprived sections; the goal is to make the, villages— "swanirvar' or self-reliant, and for that it is essential that the villagers feel self-confident, and we provide their the means to and intensify the faith that they -can do most things by themselves; we have: to keep the environment sad the local culture intact and so cannot impose novelty or technology harmful in the long run: we must also not take up any project that is incapable of being replicated, either because it is too expensive .or because it calls for investment of resources not easily available locally. So we proceed slowly, but steadily, not bestowing benefits on the people but working in close co-operation with them.

We have had many visitors to our project area, and would have had more if we had not discouraged weekenders in the country and asked the media to wait a little longer before our work and worth could be placed before a larger jury: We thank all those who took the trouble to come, groin neat 'or far, and hope they enjoyed their visit as much as we enjoyed having them with us. I am mentioning only a few names. Ardhendu Chatterjee and Bharat Manstta, two leading philosophers and practitioners of sustainable development, spent three days with us in November and evaluated our progress thoroughly. They spotted where we were going wrong, and suggested what could make it right. We were enormously benefited by their Visit. Manu Patel came from the Share and Cars foundation of the USA and his words of encouragement were specially valuable for he has the field experience to separate the grain from the chaff.

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As in other years I am not listing our benefactors. So many people have given money, old clothes for distribution, helpful advice, so-many people have been generous with their time and contacts that it would be foolish to try to name them all. A few must be singled out; however, with no fear of being partial Father Schmickler and his parishioners of Heilig Geist at Neuss, Germany, ably persuaded by Renate Banerjea, continued with their generous support. Friends of Swanirvar in the UK with Mr. Tridib Sarkar as their guiding spirit, continue tar be a source of strength, underwriting the entire cost of the building at Andharmanik. The Share and Care Foundation have continued to be very generous with their financial support. We thank Dr. Gulab Shah for his regular generous donations and for having put us in touch with the Share and Care Foundation. We now have about 100 people in the USA who have made a regular commitment to help of or two to three years. I am sure they would not mind if we singled out a few names to whom we are specially grateful. They are Dr. Siddharth and Rati Dasgupta; Dr. Dipankar Mukhopadhyay, and Ranjana and Chinmay Chakrabarty. My sincere apologies to anybody whom I should have remembered but have failed to. To all our donors, we have only one thing to say, they can rest assured their money is being put to

good use. A very small percentage of our income is spent on ourselves (salaries, kitchen expenses etc.) and the rest goes only where it is needed: There is no extravagance and no ostentation. To all workers of Swanirvar, I have similarly one thing to say: Be of good cheer for we are on the right path and shall be so, as long as we remain true to ourselves and humble to those with and for whom we work.

SWANIRVAR

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A N N U A L R E P O R T
1993-1994