

This is Swanirvar's eighth annual report. The first year we were in existence for just a few weeks, so that report may be discounted. Even then seven years of unbroken and actually increasing activities is no mean feat for an NGO. An intrinsic feature of NGO existence is that even as we make plans for the future we can never be certain that we shall be around to implement them. For us there is the added problem that we have very little long-term funding, from, either private individuals or organizations, and this makes it difficult for us to be reassured that we shall survive beyond the next few years. We have already been on the edge a few times, or very near it, but on the whole we have had the money we needed for our projects and since we have kept our overheads low, that money has been well utilized. Maybe it would have been better if there was something of our own, some sort of corpus that would take care of the work when funding will cease, as it inevitably must some day. But maybe it is also not bad to put off worrying about how to cross bridges for the time when we do come to them.

1 As we look back dispassionately the past few years appear to be the crucible and forge in which the potential of Swanirvar has been moulded and shaped into something like a model of its kind. It could as well have been damaged or destroyed. Worse has happened to NGOs which mouthed worthier goats, convinced themselves, if not exactly others, with dazzling showpieces that crumbled on a deceiving base or under the weight of false promises, or treacherous self-complacency. Swanirvar has also had its times of external threat and inner tension, and they will come again, but for the moment, as we end 1996-97, we sit happy. This means that the time has come to re-examine our basis and goals, to work for organizational renewal. There will be various problems from the outside but, as Gandhi said, "there is no such thing as an external enemy", and what we must do is cleanse ourselves, individually and organizationally, internally.

The men and women who work for us - some of them have been with Swanirvar from its very beginning - are almost all overworked and underpaid, and we are in no position to promise an equitable redress of the imbalance in the near future. Their commitment is what holds Swanirvar together, along with the unstinted support of those among whom and for whom we work, and all the many generous individuals and organizations who have supported us in so many ways. Many of these individuals and most of the organizations have had some personal contact with us before entering into a relationship, but there have been surprises from those who got in touch in indirect ways. We are now on the internet and this opens the way for new friends to appear.

CRY (Child Relief and You) continues to fund our education project and part of our health programme; Vikramshila to train our teachers and to oversee the working of our primary schools; Service Centre to pay for all our agricultural work; Friends of Swanirvar in England to provide for all

our infrastructural needs and to offer suggestions; Share and Care, in the USA, to double the funds we collect in North America; ASHA-LA, an Indian students' organization in Los Angeles, and AID (Association for India's Development) in Maryland, USA, have extended helping hands; the Government of India have financed three schools under the scheme NFE 2000 for innovative and experimental primary education; the members of a Catholic church ladies' group in Pulheim Germany, have shown that small towns hold large hearts and there are numerous individuals who have helped. Swanirvar is grateful to all of them and can only reiterate that it is aware of the responsibilities that receiving such kindness thrusts upon it. We do not intend to let them down. Swanirvar means "self-reliant" and that presupposes the inner strength to prove worthy of trust.

Below is a table giving a brief summary of how much we have spent on various heads, how many people are employed for a project and the source of the money.

Project	No. of staff	Total expenses	Source of funds
Education	21	Rs 367,907.35	CRY: Rs 84,948.50 Vikramshila (from Government of India): Rs 225,095.90 Swanirvar: Rs 57,862.95
Culture	10	Rs 143,061.18	CRY: Rs 41,197.80 Vikramshila (from Government of India): Rs 10,804.18 Swanirvar: Rs 91,059.20
Health	6	Rs 93,779.71	CRY: Rs 27,676.46 Vikramshila (from Government of India): Rs 19,712.80 Swanirvar: Rs 46,390.45
IGP/SHG	5	Rs 144,970.05	Swanirvar: the entire sum
Agriculture	12	Rs 248,392.78	Service Centre: Rs 212,000.00 Swanirvar: Rs 36,392.78
Capital (school buildings)		Rs 800,392.42	Swanirvar: the entire sum
General and Admin.	6	Rs 150,901.74	CRY: Rs 20,206.50 Vikramshila (from Government of India): Rs 15,000.00 Swanirvar: Rs 115,695.24

## Village

organisations		Rs 114,430.58	Swanirvar: the entire sum
TOTAL	60	Rs 2,063,796.61	CRY: Rs 173,989.26
			Vikramshila (from Government of. India): Rs 270.612.88
			Service Centre: Rs 21.2,000.00
			Swanirvar: Rs 1,407,193:60

Swanirvar's own funds were made up of the following principal donations and/or grants.

1. Friends of Swanirvar, Worcester, England: Rs 848,433.60
2. Share and Care Foundation, New Jersey, USA: Rs 2.13,319.00 .
3. AID, Madison, USA: Rs 71,251.00
4. Ms. Mary Poplin, USA: Rs 17,631.00
5. Members of the church ladies' group, Pulheim, Germany: Rs 20(3,000.00
- 6, Mr Satya Majumdar, Waiblingen, Germany: Rs 8,000.00
7. Mr P.C.Bandyopadhyay, Hyderabad: Rs 50,000.00

Miscellaneous donations amounted- to Rs 27,086.00 and we sold fish arid farm products worth Rs 42,091.15 during the year.

We now report on tile activities of Swanirvar in 1996-97, divided under five heads as usual. These are Organization, Agriculture, Health, Education, and Income Generation.

## ORGANIZATION

THERE IS not much to report on this aspect of our work. The groups in our five core villages have become stronger, and we are happy that our goal of decentralization has been reasonably achieved. All decisions are taken locally, and certainly implemented locally. The Project Committee of Swanirvar, meeting once a month, reviews all work regularly and all villages and programmes are represented here. The working committee meets about once in two months and sets policy, reviews performance, and generally oversees what the project committee has done.

We are afraid we have not been able to resolve the problem of what to do with the villages that came, and still come, to work with us on the lines they have appreciated in us. Pre-primary schools have been opened in 15 new villages, and our supervisor is in charge of them. In health, too, we have extended our work in new areas, though no new worker has been appointed. In agriculture, of 'course, the work has to spread beyond the core villages and it is doing so. Our commitment to and

responsibility for these new centres of work vary from one village to another. At a place called Metia, about 10 km from Andharmanik, an enterprising young man had opened a school for the children of sex workers. He needed help and towards the very end of the year we agreed to pay his teachers' salaries and train them in our way, and bring the school under our supervision.

## AGRICULTURE

In our last year's report we said agriculture was promising to be the main area of our work in the coming years. That still remains our thinking but this has not been a year when that promise came to be fulfilled. We shall have to wait. This is, of course, not saying that our agriculture work has not progressed. What we are trying to say is that we are still to do anything in this programme that outstrips our work in other fields.

The work for our agricultural staff has taken on a new dimension. We do not farm on our own: There is no model plot and we have given back all our leased plots. Extension work is all that we do. This calls for intensive interaction with local farmers, and preparedness to answer their queries and to open up new horizons for them.

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The use of azolla on paddy fields, minimising the need for urea, has been widespread in four villages. The cultivation of Dhaincha before a paddy crop also grew in popularity. The demand for rock phosphate outstripped our supply. Our laboratory made biofertilizers - azotobacter, rhizobium, PSB - were this year used by more farmers in more villages and in more plots, which leads us to believe that in a few years they would be widely used.

Obviously there is a long way to go before any appreciable impact is felt, given the massive scale of agriculture in our area, but the thing to note and to notify is that our recommended practices in almost every stage of farming have found takers. Their numbers cannot but increase. It would be foolish to expect a radical change in a matter of a few years, but we are for the present content to be slow and steady. We shall win the race for sure, and shall be fast and steady when the need arises.

We are deliberately not giving the details of figures as these mean but little unless the total agricultural atlas is consulted. Briefly, new crops (for this area) like French bean, wheat, khesari, soya bean, sunflower, pulses, maize, etc. have been grown with encouraging results. Mixed cropping has had fewer takers but there was a variety of choices and partner crops on the field. Relay cropping, or Poirā in local parlance, was quite a success in a few plots to start with. In this, just before the rainy season paddy is harvested, the seeds of the next crop there can be a wide

choice but wheat proved most popular with our collaborating farmers are broadcast, thus utilising all the residual moisture in the soil and dispensing with ploughing the field. The good results surprised a number of farmers who had followed the progress of the experiment and we expect quite a few of them to try this in the coming year.

Integrated pest management was practised by around 50 farmers in the Boro season. We want to totally eliminate pesticides, as these kill indiscriminately, with great loss to the ecology because beneficial or at least harmless organisms are also destroyed. Instead we try to popularise pest controllers which, as the name implies, make harmful pests ineffective but kill nothing. Neem and jute seeds, tobacco, garlic plus kerosene - all these have been used as neutralisers with success. Farmacyard manure is being used widely, mulching has struck root.

There have been setbacks, but not anything that can be called a failure. Untimely heavy rain, particularly hailstones, severely damaged the pre-kharif crop. Gram was hit hard by pests. At places soya did not grow well.

5 As we said, our agricultural workers now do a full-time extension job. To spread the new concepts and also to help farmers at all times, it is imperative that they know their subject thoroughly and also keep abreast of recent developments. For this we arrange regular training courses and workshops for them. Some local farmers have also attended certain of these, and then farmers and workers can compare notes. We also arrange exposure visits for both to other districts of West Bengal to familiarise themselves with conditions different from ours. Our agricultural supervisor was part of a team that visited Guntur in Andhra Pradesh. Workers, in both the old villages and the new, meet the supervisor, sometimes other staff of Swanirvar and/or representatives from the State-level sustainable agriculture network of which we are a founder-member, at least once a month for a review of the work done and to plan for the future. Twenty-four such meetings were held in the old villages and eight in the new. Three introductory trainings were held this year. The first was on kitchen garden and herbal medicine, with 20 women from different NGOs listening to three of our workers. Another training on the same subjects was held for 28 women from villages in or near our project area, the difference being that the first was for four days, the second for two. Another four-day training was on different aspects of sustainable agriculture and the participants included 31 workers from NGOs in various districts.

A total of 155 study circles were conducted in 14 villages, with a total participation of 2614 men. The subjects discussed included micro nutrients, rock phosphate, and bio-fertilisers, IPM, budding etc. For women there were 97 such circles in 12 villages, with an attendance of 1349. The topics covered were kitchen gardens, nutrition, herbal medicine, seed conservation, women's groups etc. Awareness camps were held for men in 10 villages and 492 attended the 17 camps that discussed

IPM, PSB, pulses, the Rabi crop etc. Altogether 199 women attended seven such camps in as many villages.

Given the dimension of the problems in agriculture that we intend to tackle we have to reach out to a much larger number of people. This we do by putting up stalls at different village fairs in the area. We display posters, keep pamphlets and books on various aspects of sustainable agriculture, and exhibit various things that might interest a casual visitor. And they usually do, too. Around 5000 people visited our stall in the three fairs we attended this year, two four-day affairs and one for a day less. Our workers are always ready to hold a detailed discussion with any visitor who wants it. We also arranged a stall at the annual function of our Fatullyapur centre where around 600 people came and asked questions. And they do not just ask questions and go away to forget all about the answers. This is borne out by the later demand for the printed matter that we offer for sale, for the various saplings we produce in our nurseries, for the different good-quality seeds for the new crops that we propagate, for rock phosphate and biofertilisers, the latter produced in our laboratory, etc. At the level of mass communication we have distributed 1500 posters on 15 subjects in 10 villages and 100 walls, or what pass for them, in 10 villages now have some agricultural message on them.

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And of course we have our cultural team of adults to present the message of sustainable agriculture, and blood donation. It was invited regularly, at least once a month on an average, to perform in some village, in or near our project area, and once an organisation in Hooghly district called us over. There are usually 300-400 spectators, but at least once the team played before no fewer than 800 people. We are afraid our repertoire has remained stagnant this year but there has been no let-up in our training. There were nine workshops for the cultural workers to hone their skills.

Kitchen gardens, or nutrition gardens as some prefer to call them, fall as much in the agriculture section as in the health, and as a matter of fact and convenience, this year since January we have made it a semi-separate section, as far as holding monthly meetings of those who work for the propagation and maintenance of the gardens is concerned. Four such meetings have been held since then, and earlier the progress of and plans for the gardens used to be reviewed at meetings of the agriculture and health departments.

To persuade families into preparing a kitchen garden following our suggestions, we held 97 study circles with 1347 people attending. Awareness camps were held in 7 villages with a total participation of 199 people. We now have 350 gardens in 10 villages and do not wish to increase the number, as proper supervision then becomes difficult. No chemical is used in these plots and at

least 100 use the “compost tea” popularised by us as fertiliser. There are live hedges, mostly of herbs; the plant types are chosen so that maximum use it made of sunlight and different properties of the soil, and the goal is to keep the plot green and to produce something throughout the year so that the family, often with nothing but the homestead, has something nutritious to eat every day of the year. It is heartening to see that after they have been convinced of the utility and have learnt the techniques of planning and designing the garden, some families are using other plots they can lay their hands on and getting into shape new gardens. We not mollycoddle our beneficiaries and when we see that a family is getting the idea that it does not have to do anything, or much, and that our workers will tend the garden for it, we have a last meeting with it and say good-bye.

The first two years we took the responsibility of procuring good seeds for the vegetables and plants with edible leaves, particularly for the new crops we were introducing. But now most households are keeping their own seeds and some are handing over their excess seeds to us for use elsewhere. We encourage growing at least a few herbs in every such garden, so that dependence on allopathic medicine, carelessly prescribed and expensively used, goes down. Most of these were even not so long ago common in our area but we have introduced some others also. Now common conditions like fever, colds, dysentery, leucorrhoea, some skin diseases, sprains, insect bites, etc. are cured at home. Prophylactic use of certain herbs has also become common. Due to our efforts 200 families in 7 villages grew mushroom in the winter. The first crop was a reason able success but then the spawns proved to be of erratic efficacy and the weather also played hicks.

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## HEALTH

We have been working in three villages since 1990-91 and 15 others joined us in the year under review. The extent of our commitment and the strength of our presence vary from new village to new village. We held a blood donation camp each in four villages with 225 total donors. Certain sections, traditional believers that blood donation is not for them, are now shedding inhibitions, maybe as a result of our efforts to raise awareness. This year 200 smokeless chullahs were built in 8 villages, taking to 1639 the number of chullahs we have so far built in 14 villages.

In the local immunization camps the vaccines are supplied by the Government and the camps are run by its health workers, with major assistance from our people. Our workers bring in the children and the mothers. One village holds weekly camps; four villages have them once a month, while in another we have been able to persuade the Government staff to come only once in two months. There were two special polio vaccine camps as part of an all-India simultaneous effort. We collected 4177 children for the December camp, and 4288 for the January one. There were two

special camps for immunization against diphtheria and tetanus in one centre. There were 87 children in one camp, and the second, restricted to students in our school, saw 73 children.

Last year we had built about 1000 low-cost toilets but this year none at all. This is because we had been led to understand that the Government would extend to our area its sanitary mart project, making our efforts in that direction appear either redundant or competitive. In the event there was no sanitary mart, but by that time it was too late for us to do anything. Fortunately some toilets were built. A man trained in the job by us has set himself up in business and travels in the area, even to distant villages, making such toilets. This year, he found 75 clients. Incidentally, a film was made on him and his work, and Swanirvar's role in this. It is to be shown on national television in the University Grants Commission slot. While he was making his toilets we made sure that those we had built were being used and were in good shape. Two students of a rural development course in an Orissa institution came to us for their fieldwork and, as part of it, surveyed the toilets built by us at Chandalati and found almost all of them in use even after a few monsoons.

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The main problem with improving the drinking water supply is the presence of arsenic in tubewell water, often greatly beyond acceptable limits. We are afraid there is very little we can do about it, except tell people to use alum or to use groundwater as much as possible, but neither is a satisfactory alternative on a large scale. We thus concentrate on trying to free from bacteria the water the people drink or use for cooking. This year chlorine filtration was applied to 1684 tubewells in 14 villages. In cases where people use groundwater or the tubewells are uncooperative, we recommended use of chlorine tablets and 4000 of these were distributed. Our health workers, trained in diagnosing and treating common diseases, received 1787 patients in live villages and gave them basic allopathic medicines at cost price. Last year 2079 patients were similarly treated in four villages. The reason why the number has come down lies in the success of our efforts to gradually de-popularise harmful modern medication practices. We distributed 1065 ORS packets.

Our clinics treated 806 patient% in four villages with herbal and home remedies but this number is inexact as a number of families now have at least a few essential herbs in their kitchen gardens, a concept popularised and nurtured by us, and we cannot keep a record of when they are treating themselves.

Our workers assisted Government staff (after, if we may say so, also motivating them to implement the national programme with more than token interest) in checking health and hygiene indices of 2246 children in 19 Government primary schools in 12 villages. In our own primary schools regular



health check-ups are done. Health workers and teachers jointly take part in this. In one village a doctor from the local primary health centre conducted a camp to train them in the work.

In family planning we could persuade 122 women in 8 villages to go for a tubectomy. For reasons that are not unique to our region, and which we are unable to overcome, men are still not the target of permanent sterilization. In eight villages 77 men use condoms, 178 women are on the pill, and 59 wear the loop. These are through our efforts, which supplement the Government drive. We organized two camps at a primary health centre and altogether 45 women came for tubectomy. This year 48 women chose to medically terminate their pregnancy.

Home visits, with a meticulous record of the medical history and growth factors of all members of the household, especially mothers and children, have always been a major part of our work. However, our health workers are gradually shifting away from their respective villages, where they concentrated their efforts in the last few years, to new ones, six of which are now reasonably covered.

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Before the pulse polio campaign, we identified 3433 children eligible for the vaccination after surveying 11 villages. For family planning, we surveyed 10 villages to discover eligible couples. Of these 1561 had more than two children. Of them 594 have opted for permanent sterilization, and 422 practise some form or other of temporary contraception. Of the 1117 couples who have two children, 402 have chosen permanent sterilization, and 366 adopt temporary measures, and of the 999 couples who have one child or none, 24 have chosen sterilization, and 310 follow temporary measures. We make regular follow-up visits to see that the kitchen gardens and the herbal part of them are flourishing, that the low-cost toilets are in working condition and are being used, to check the depth and pipe conditions of the tubewells. So far 188 people have received some sort of health training from Swanirvar to work on their own in their 15 villages. We have been able to check on only 42 of them in three villages to see how they are doing. Altogether 1444 people participated in 104 awareness camps in 14 villages. For the general people we wrote health slogans and painted appropriate pictures on 64 walls in seven villages. Besides, we have displayed 250 posters, and distributed 300 leaflets and 200 folders in 14 villages. Also we have prepared 250 teaching aids on health matters.

Our health supervisor spent a week in Belgaum at a workshop organized by INSA India. He also attended a watershed development course for a week in Udaipur. Three of our health workers attended a four-day workshop on kitchen garden and herbal medicine in Calcutta. All health workers attended a day's training on school health conducted by the local Block Medical Officer at Andharmanik.

They in their turn conducted nine one-day trainings on nutrition where 240 mothers attended in all. Government medical officers conducted trainings on pulse polio, school health etc. with widespread participation. The Association of Voluntary Blood Donors trained 32 people on how to motivate people into donating blood. At least once a month a meeting is held at Swanirvar where health workers, their supervisor and other Swanirvar staff discuss and review work progress, and make plans, to one village there was a day's camp on diarrhoea. Government doctors and health workers demonstrated to 67 women and 15 men how ORS has to be prepared and administered.

## EDUCATION

WITH THE last coaching centre closed down - a rite of passage – our educational work with children thus year centred on pre-primary and primary schools, the former funded almost entirely by CRY (Child Relief and You) and the latter run by the Central Government as part of its "Non Formal Education 2000" programme.

All live old villages continued with their pre-primary schools and seven new villages started theirs.

We give the attendance and allied figures separately for the two.

First, the old villages:

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	Fat	Baj	And	Cha	Kol	TOTAL
No. of students	55	33	40	45	44	217
No. of boys	23	15	18	25	24	105
No. of girls	32	18	22	20	20	112
Average daily attendance (%)	78	72	70	85	73	76
No. of working days	234	236	238	239	256	241(av)

Fat is for Fatullyapur, Baj for Bajitpur And for Andharmanik , Cho for Chandalati, and Kol for Kolsur.

Then the new villages

	Gok	Pun	Bho	Dweep	Rud	Bag	Bel	TOTAL
No. of students	40	20	32	33	34	25	40	224
No. of boys	20	11	12	10	16	10	24	103
No. of girls	20	9	20	23	18	15	16	121
Average daily attendance (%)	81	63	76	76	65	73	76	73
No. of working Days	257	255	252	254	241	248	232	248(av)

Gok is for Gokulpur, Pun for Punra, Bho for Bhojpara, Dweep for Dweep Media, Rud for Rudrapur, Bag for Bagjola, Bel for Beliyakhali.

Girls outnumber boys almost everywhere but we cannot say if this has any social or economic significance. The number of students could have been greater at a few of these places, particularly at Bajitpur, but we had problems of space. The number of working days also varied, ranging between 234 and 257, because of a number of factors. Local considerations sometimes made for longer vacations, at some; places the “class room” became unusable when it rained hard. But we must overcome these.

The supervisor of our pre-primary programme, joined by local teachers and sometimes along with other Swanirvar star, met guardians regularly. There were 21 such meetings in the old villages, with an average of 25 guardians present, and in the 41 such meetings in the old villages, the average guardian attendance was 22. That the parents came at all is an indication of our success in involving them in their children’s welfare, but mere presence is no guarantee of active participation. For various social reasons, many parents do not open their mouth in such meetings, particularly mothers, and there are of course those who feel shy about sitting at a meeting with, unfamiliar male faces around. To interact with them, our teachers or the supervisor regularly makes home visits. Altogether 845 such visits were made in the old villages and 1148 in the new. These discussions with mothers where they feel uninhibited led to easy solutions to various problems pertaining to individual children, to steady rapport with guardians and to increased fees collection.

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The local organizations decide on how much fees will be charged and on what basis, so the collection varies from school to school. Rs 6786 was collected this year in the old villages and Rs 9910 in the new. Bajitpur, Kolsur, Dweep Media and Gokulpur lag behind the others but since even the pittance that we charge is too much for many families we do not really put any pressure on them. The money is not spent, and is kept in a bank in the name of the local organization for possible use when funding will cease.

The obvious reasons why guardians welcome our staff and are also willing to pay the token fees is that they have realised that our method and system both benefit the children generally and particularly when they have to compete with others for admission to the State-run primary schools. (In the villages where we run primary schools ourselves the children from these pre-primary centres do not have to go to a State-run primary school.) Without competent and dedicated teachers our success would not be possible at all. To provide the first we arrange for trainings when any teacher is first appointed, and then, to keep self-complacency at bay we send them for regular refresher trainings. Dedication is as hard to acquire as it is to impart, but so far we have been reasonably fortunate in our choice of teachers, give or take the odd grey sheep.

There were five workshops this year for pre-primary teachers, with an average participation of 11. Four teachers from the new villages and three from the old underwent a two-phase training conducted by Vikramshila in Calcutta. As a form of on-the-job training we arrange group visits where teachers from various schools visit one school to watch and observe and then compare notes. Four such visits were made in the old villages and two in the new, with an average of 8 and 12 teachers respectively forming the group of visitors.

We hold a meeting every month separately with teachers from the old and the new schools. Here the supervisors discuss and evaluate the monthly reports, make lesson plans for the coming weeks, decide on the teaching aids to be used and made, and solve problems that might crop up. Attendance is compulsory and few, if any, fail to come.

To expose them to conditions elsewhere as also to hone their skills by watching other methods of teaching, we organized two visits to schools in distant areas. In one, 12 teachers from the new villages accompanied the supervisor to an NGO in South 24 Parganas and in the other, 8 teachers from the old schools and the supervisor went to an NGO in Orissa.

Apart from the monthly meetings, the supervisor keeps himself informed about the problems and progress, of both teachers and children, by making regular personal visits. During the year he made 1114 visits to the old schools and 69 to the new.

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We have not been able to get hold of a doctor to run regular health check-ups of children in tile schools, but our health workers and the teachers do form a team to examine every child for personal hygiene and basic health indices. This year 33 such check-ups were conducted in die old schools, and 24 in the new. The second number is low because most of these villages do not have health workers.

These schools are all bookless, and teaching is through the Montessori method, adapted to local conditions. We do provide children with some games and toys and they also learn songs and action recitation. Their repertoire in these last two is quite extensive and while musical purists play not he thrilled with their rendering, we never cease to marvel at tile enthusiasm and joy which these small children, battling with monstrous deprivation all around them, bring to their singing and learning, too. Maybe structural inequity is not as invincible as the doomsayers would have us believe.

The Human Resource Development Ministry of the Government of India chose 50 NGOs spread over the country to run a few primary schools each under its innovative and experimental scheme called Non Formal Education 2000. The Calcutta-based educational resource organization Vikram

shila- to call it by its short name - which is responsible for training our teachers and helping us produce educational aids and such things, was allotted 10 such schools and we are responsible for three of these. The Government stipulates that every class should have 25 students. We had three schools with classes I and 11, so should have had 150 children and did have exactly that. Fatullyapur had 51 children (28 boys and 33 girls). Chandalati 49 (27 and 22), and Andharmanik 5(1(26 and 24).

At Fatullyapur the average daily attendance was 90.3%, at Chandalati 91.8%, and at Andharmanik it was 84.5% making for an average of 88.9%. The figure would have been higher if a number of families at Andharmanik did not have to move with their children during the transplanting and harvesting seasons to distant districts. A migrant labourer's child has inbuilt hurdles to acquiring first-generation education.

One major reason why most rural primary schools perform so desultorily is that there is no interaction between guardians and teachers. We would like to work in a radically different manner. Every parent, including the illiterate, has an obligation and also the right to know how their child is doing at school and also what the school is doing to the child. Thus we hold regular meetings wily guardians. Altogether there were 18 such meetings in the three villages with an average of 29 guardians present at each. The most common subjects that are discussed at these meetings are tile child's attendance, his progress, health and conduct. It is heartening that mothers far outnumber fathers at these meetings.

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As we have said before home visits must supplement these guardians meetings. A mother would be far more articulate about her child in the security of her own home than where other parents are present. Our teachers and/or tile supervisor made 559 home visits in the three villages during the year and these were of great help in solving problems, ironing out misconceptions, and developing trust. Also the child's profile takes shape in the teacher's mind after such feedbacks from home. These visits are good for collecting fees from the defaulters. This year we collected Rs 4200 at Fatullyapur, Rs 5863 at Chandalati, and Rs 1255 at Andharmanik.

The schools had three teachers for two classes, and they worked on an average for 244 days a year, compared to the Government primary schools' 229. We have continued with our practice of sending new teachers for initial training and old ones for refresher courses. We thank Vikramshila for acting as the resource organization for these courses. Seven teachers went for a two-phase training, and four teachers and the supervisor took another two-phase course. There were three workshops at Swanirvar, with all nine teachers attending, to decide on and to make teaching materials, aids, work cards, work sheets, picture cards. After these central workshops teachers at

every school meet among themselves at regular intervals to discuss problems peculiar to their school, and to make materials they will need. The Fatullyapur teachers held 30 such meetings and the corresponding figures for Chandalati and Andharmanik are 28 and 18.

Every month all the teachers and the supervisor meet at Swanirvar for a day-long meeting to review the previous month's progress, and to plan for the next month, and to discuss everything pertaining to the school, the children and their work. Once a year teachers of two schools visit the third school in a group. After watching proceedings for 2 1/2-3 hours they discuss their impressions with the local teachers and the session of constructive criticism that follows has always proved to be very productive. Besides these internal exchanges of experiences and impressions, our teachers went to reasonably distant places to expand their horizon. Eleven teachers visited a school in Midnapur and two teachers and the organizer went to Orissa. Since we do not wish our teachers' work for the village to be confined to the schools only, they took this opportunity to see how those two NGOs worked in other fields also. We in our turn played host to 13 teachers and the secretary of a South 24 Parganas NGO.

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The supervisor visited the Fatullyapur school 42 times, the Chandalati school 27 times, and the Andharmanik school 33 times in the course of the working year. He checks on attendance, of both teachers and students, on-the use of materials, on the proper use of lesson plans, and tries to solve any problem about the students or teaching that may be brought to his notice. If necessary he will place the problem before Swanirvar or Vikramshila. Such scrupulous watchfulness and purposeful cooperation is what ensures that our teachers give of their best.

There are certain problems that have defied any general solution. The most important of these is the presence in every class of every school of a number of children whose performance is markedly and consistently worse than that of the class average. There can be so many reasons behind every child's failure to live up to our expectations. They may be dyslexic, they may be psychologically or cerebrally impaired, they may be late bloomers, their home conditions may be regressive. The possibilities are numerous, but we do not have the resources to make individual diagnoses and take remedial measures. Nor do we have the heart to tell these children or their parents that the rest of the class suffers because of them.

Education is an essential tool to combat the masses' accommodation to their permanent state of deprivation, to motivate them to escape the equilibrium of poverty. But things are more complex than such generalisations, especially in India on the brink of the 21st century. Education should destroy that accommodation, but is unlikely to offer every single beneficiary here an alternative. The absence of aspiration, the refusal to struggle against the almost impossible, the preferring of acquiescence to frustration is not a question of "They do not even try", not a weakness of

character, but, rather, a profoundly rational response, bolstered by instructions of religion. We thus did not see our education project as one linked with economic betterment, solely or primarily. We wanted to give children the scope to realise their latent creative urges, and also to inculcate a sense of values. As part of this we wished to revive local cultural traditions, not using "local" in any parochial sense.

Towards this end we observe various secular "days" in our schools, to celebrate the birthday of notable personalities, days of national historical importance, and modern acquisitions like Children's Day or Teachers' Day. This year 12 such days were observed in the schools, with parents and local people attending in large numbers to encourage the children.

Among the cultural activities the children have access to are Bratachari, puppetry, yoga, athletic dances, exercises with very light equipment, music, recitation, etc. Organized games might be a good addition, but none of our three schools has land of their own that can be used as a football field.

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We receive a number of visitors and enquiries from neighbouring areas and so decided to hold two exhibitions, at Kolsur and Fatullyapur, on what exactly we are trying to do and how. In both places a number of teachers from the local Government high and primary schools came, had a close look at our teaching aids and other educational material, and talked to our children before sitting down for a long exchange of ideas with us. Maybe we presume, but our feeling is that they were impressed favourably by our efforts and methods. As a matter of fact, some of our teachers have been approached by their counterparts in the local schools to apply some of our methods to the traditional learners.

These extra curricular activities have now become such an important part of our work that we now have one of our members working full time to supervise this section. We feel we should give a few more details about some of the observances in our schools. On Independence Day, the national flag was hoisted at all the schools, the children performed some physical exercises, paraded through areas of the village, sang songs suitable to the occasion. Altogether 1100 children were involved. On Children's Day, speakers talked about Jawaharlal Nehru (whose birthday has been so recognized), and about the role and rights of children, and the children themselves sang and danced, and showed their skills in various disciplines. Altogether 1775 children in four villages had a good time, and an educative day. As we have already said there have been other such Days, when similar arrangements were made. The children may be too small to understand the import of some of these occasions, but it is never too early to impart the feeling that independence is something to be treasured, to be felt and valued even if its

ramifications are not clearly understood.

As in other years, the children were invited to many places to perform plays or to present a puppetry show, or just to give a display of Bratachari or other mass exercise. On 44 occasions in 25 villages shows were put up, and in some cases there was more than one performance. Since all our programmes have some message in the entertainment, the children served a two-fold purpose.

### INCOME GENERATION

Our small savings schemes in four villages continue to work to the advantage of depositors. Some of the new villages have also begun to operate such schemes, but since we have nothing to do with these, they form no part of this report. In our four villages, as we said last year, the number of depositors and the amount of deposit both have reached an optimum level. At Chandalati there are 192 depositors, of whom 154 can be called active, at Fatullyapur the figures are 313 and 175 respectively, at Andharmanik 98 and 53, at Bajitpur 179 and 104. The problem with dormant accounts is that the depositor would not agree to take back his very meagre deposit, maybe as low as Re 1, for he (or, more likely, she) does not like the feeling of being out of touch and would always hope for a day when he will have something again to save and keep. This year 17 loans amounting to Rs 12500 were given at Chandalati, at Fatullyapur 29 people borrowed Rs 19400, and the figures for Bajitpur were one and Rs 1200. Repayment has not caused us any worry.

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We confess that Swanirvar now concerns itself very little about these savings schemes. One reason is that the local village organisations are in full charge and need no help any longer. Second, and more important, is the fact that Swanirvar this year launched a big project for loans to women's self-help groups. The need for rural credit is too obvious to call for any discussion here and our project aims to meet that need in our work area to a considerable degree. Each group has five members, all women. Sometimes they do ask for a loan for something they plan to do themselves, but it would be foolish to insist on thus as there just is not so much entrepreneurial material available among rural women. But even if the loan is required for something a man in a family plans to do, the woman has to apply for it, and for thus she has first to prove her suitability as a member of a group. Without her the credit will not be there and this is also empowerment, even if a little indirectly. All the members of a group have to be reasonably close neighbours, in the same age and income group, and our workers see to it that during the period, never too short, when the women learn what it is all about, they form the same concept, which means that by the time a group is ready to receive credit all its members have a clear idea of what they will do with the money and of the imperative to repay the loan on a strict weekly basis.



The four main purposes behind the income generation project are, formation of self-help groups, A visitor from Friends of Swanirvar distributes a loan: empowerment, even if indirect reception of new ideas, developing the savings mentality; and supplementing the family's income. Usually it takes between 3 and 6 months to prepare a group to receive credit. The members have to save a pre-determined weekly sum in this period. However, because of our own resource constraints we could not always give loans in cases even when the members were ready.

And when finally the money is available, two members of a group receive a loan the first week, and two more will be eligible the next week or as soon after that as our resources allow. Repayment begins from the first week after receiving the loan, and every loan is to be repaid in 52 instalments. At Kolsur 30 women received Rs 65000, at Fatullyapur 12 Rs 23500, and at Chandalati Rs 25000 was given to 10. Repayment has been regular, with nobody defaulting even for a week. The maximum loan has been for Rs 2500 and the lowest amount borrowed so far is Rs 700. The purposes have been as diverse as animal husbandry, tailoring, agriculture, trade in vegetables, fisheries etc.

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## CONCLUSION

In previous years we ended the report with some thoughts on the moral component of our attitude to the work we do. Our concern that we run the risk of forgetting the singer for the song has not waned, but what is plausible in conversation may not be permissible in print. However, total silence is impossible. We would just like to recall lines from an unlikely source, Rainer Maria Rilke's "Duino Elegies".

"Earth, isn't this what you want: an invisible re-aring in us?  
...What is your urgent command, if not transformation?"