

HILFE ZUR SELBSTHILFE IN RAJASTHAN E.V.

HELP FOR SELF-HELP IN RAJASTHAN (REG. SOC.)



Newsletter

No. 1, November 2013

HSHR Supports An Upcoming Training Centre for Women

Within the catchment area of Gram Bharati Samiti (GBS), HSHR's partner organization, lies Khawaraniji, a village situated to the east of Amber, 45 minutes away by car. Here the GBS Women's Savings and Credit Bank as well as the multifaceted female Self-Help Groups (SHG) have an organizational stronghold (see pp. 2 ff.). The bank operates from a rented building where the entire equipment is funded by donations.

Sarita Yogi and another officer manage the bank. Besides this important job, Sarita also tours the villages to keep an eye on the Self-Help Groups. She belongs to the group of activists recruited many years ago at a GBS Youth Camp (see pp. 3 ff.).

The GBS's project to establish a Training and Entrepreneurial Centre for Women is of long standing. Its concept is that women clean, package and distribute – through a variety of marketing strategies – spices

produced in the region and famed for their superior quality. The customers of this most basic every-day commodity are shops, restaurants, hotels, etc. To facilitate the women's work, HSHR has initiated that a crèche and kindergarten be attached to the centre. This would enable young women to engage in work outside their homes. Unfortunately the state regulations for providing child-care centres have scarcely materialised in this region.

Given its relatively large scale dimensions, the project can be realized only step by step.

First and foremost, GBS needed an appropriate piece of land, but due to soaring prices, land near the main road of Khawaraniji and in the vicinity of the women's bank, was unaffordable. Through a stroke of good fortune, in mid October 2013, a suitable piece of land in Khawaraniji connected to the road system



Discussion at the bank of Khawaraniji: B. S. Kusum (Founder and 1st Secretary, GBS), K. Jain (2nd Secretary), Sarita Yogi, members of the village council, M. Boehm-Tettelbach (President, HSHR).

was located. It measures 3 *bigha* (1 *bigha* = five-eighths of an acre) and costs 13 lakhs (i.e. €17,000 or less). Benefiting from a government scheme to encourage investment in land and valid up to December 1, 2013 (the day of the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly elections!), GBS, while buying this piece of land, will be free to sell a portion of it (given that it is too extensive for its own use) without incurring tax on property speculation. Therefore, if funds to invest in the building, machines, etc. cannot be raised, these could be generated by selling a portion of the land.

Not only will the centre provide the necessary training for the women, but will also dispense health care for them and their children in a more reliable manner than

hitherto by the sporadically held camps dealing with hygiene education, health care, nutrition, or legal issues. By way of informal training the centre will thus enhance women entrepreneurship and address the notorious health deficit experienced by them and their families.

The HSHR has sponsored GBS's project in timely fashion before the deadline of December 1, 2013 by making an advance payment of €2,000 to secure the execution of the land deed.

Convinced of the centre's benefits for the women and their families, HSHR is committed to helping GBS. To realize this socially beneficial project, it relies on generous donations from the members and friends of HSHR.

Women's Self-Help Groups

Marginalized social groups can only become part of civil society's mainstream once they have achieved agency by gaining a relatively stable livelihood, informal or formal education and after availing themselves of their civil rights. Hence, assisting them entails mobilizing self-help.

The principle of self-help defines the work of Gram Bharati Samiti (GBS) and its German partner HSHR. Both organizations focus mostly on women from landless groups of both Hindu and Muslim origin. Crucial to this endeavour are the Self-Help Groups (SHG) constituted in line with prevalent models. Working in Rajasthan for over three decades, GBS has aimed at establishing primarily female SHGs, for women tend to be home-bound, whereas men are potentially mobile. In search of work, the latter go to urban centres. Yet due to inadequate education and vocational training, they often fail in obtaining viable jobs. Thus, disillusioned, these men often become addicted to alcohol and lead their families to the brink of ruin.

The female SHGs inaugurated by GBS usually comprise 10 women who jointly generate an income or help each other out in other ways and deposit their savings in the Women's Savings and Credit Bank founded by GBS in Khawaraniji, Jamwa Ramgarh tehsil, Jaipur district. They are entitled to draw credits for their individual or joint entrepreneurial

goals, to construct their own homes, or make similar investments. Such credits enable women to establish themselves and their families in village commerce and trade. While the bank's clients are women, men and children, only women are entitled to draw credits. The annual interest on a saving account is 8 percent.

To illustrate the activities of SHGs, it would be insightful to take a look at a SHG cluster at Bhanpur (to the north of Amber; cf. website > home > map of Rajasthan) which has been operating for eight years. It comprises about 70 women in all who originate from landless Hindu groups as well as from poorer sections of the Muslim community. They have formed a cooperative after having received training in quilt making. Being responsible for the marketing of their products, they started with a micro-credit of Rs. 30,000 (at present ca. €400) and until today have drawn an aggregate credit sum of 4 lakhs. Like all other borrowers in the history of the GBS Bank, they have fully repaid all their loans.

A successful example such as the above could be easily multiplied; contrastively, there exist other more modest projects. One of these is the SHG of Maliom ki Dhani, a hamlet of Khawaraniji. The place is inhabited by Malis, gardeners by caste but this designation is not necessarily indicative of their actual occupation. Thanks to their credits, women

enabled their families to plant a huge garden of myrobalan trees whose fruit is nutritionally and medicinally very beneficial. Through its sale, they earn an aggregate of Rs. 25,000 annually. Though this amount scarcely meets their basic needs, it does alleviate the women's hard life. Almost all of them suffer from health problems; anemia is rampant; and the quality of the local drinking water is degraded. Even small children suffer from swellings in their joints, and most of them show signs of malnutrition.

Health care centres are not within easy reach. GBS is concerned with improving the availability of potable water, and addresses the women's health problems by holding health camps. About every second woman suffers from gynecological disorders, and at each camp a few cases of sexually transmitted diseases are identified and treated accordingly.

In the first half of February 2014, the next health camp for women will be held, sponsored mostly by HSHR.

Youth Camp at Gandhivan



On the occasion of Gandhi's birthday

Youth Camp

October 2-3-4, 2013

Gram Bharati Samiti, Gandhivan (Jaipur)
Help for Self-Help in Rajasthan (HSHR), Germany

Banner of the GBS Youth Camp 2013

From October 2, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, until October 4, a Youth Camp was held at Gandhivan. Gram Bharati Samiti holds this kind of camp annually on these three days. It promotes social and political consciousness building and boosts, in the long term, the recruitment of volunteer activists willing to engage in social projects in their local regions. A number of these candidates have joined GBS as professionals.

Gandhivan covers 25 hectares of land at Todalri, bordering on the district of Alwar. The land was acquired by GBS as wasteland, but was afforested during the past three decades. 100,000 trees have been planted and another 5,000 are planted every year. As a watershed area, the land was suitable for building a dam and the subsequent construction of a small lake which provides water for cattle and wild animals (including two tigers!). Over the years Gandhivan has been provided with buildings for training and accommodation. A minimal number of full-time employees and a bunch of young school boy volunteers take care of the maintenance and plant irrigation. The boys come after school, often do their homework here and, well-fed by Gandhivan's kitchen, often stay overnight to head for school the next

morning. It is amazing to watch them run Gandhivan as responsibly as if it were their own family property. For some of them, indeed, Gandhivan has become another home.

Gandhivan provides for free the fodder required annually by the farmers of the neighbourhood.

The main topic of the Youth Camp focused on corruption in India and on the ways in which civil society could resist it in daily life. In this way, a valuable contribution could be made to finding solutions to the all-pervasive corruption, which is a hotly debated issue in view of the upcoming Legislative Assembly elections on December 1, 2013, to be followed



Inauguration of a Gandhi bust by Dr. S.N. Subbarao

by the national elections in 2014. Bribe-money can buy everything, including the ticket for candidature in a political party.

HSHR was represented at the camp by Kirsten Meesmann and her husband Pankaj Bhardwaj from Pushkar, both of whom are friends of HSHR. Kirsten is a graduate of the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University and has been living and working in India for many years. She describes her impression of the camp inauguration as follows:

“After a drive through the desert, we arrived at the marvelously decked out Gandhivan in the late morning. Numerous youth delegates and other guests had already gathered and were sitting in the shade of trees and under colourful tents. There prevailed a mood of joyful expectation. All preparations had been completed on time. The inauguration speeches turned out to be anything but boring. Various aspects of Gandhi’s philosophy were highlighted in the perspective of present-day requirements so that the youth could identify with these.

Speeches were interspersed with musical entertainment, and applauded by the audience. A marble bust of Gandhi was unveiled and garlanded, followed by a ceremonial planting of trees.

Most striking was the authentic atmosphere. You could feel that there was nothing artificial about it, but that the organizers, Bhavaniji and Kusumji (1st and 2nd Secretary of GBS, respectively), as well as the invited speakers, stood for the ideas they articulated. That authenticity was an inspiration for the youth delegates

and the rest of the audience. For us to have been part of the event was a wonderful experience!”

Besides the chief guest, Dr. S. N. Subbarao, Director of the National Youth Project, the representatives of two ashrams, founded by Gandhi himself, were present, namely, from the Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat and the Sevagram Ashram in Maharashtra. The media covered all the three days of the Youth Camp.

There were 92 youth delegates (26 female, 66 male), students and young professionals, ranging in age from 15 to 30. The theme of the

camp was explored by various working groups, whose speakers presented the results of their sessions to the wider audience. A sequel to the youth camp yielded 13 youth who could qualify as suitable candidates for further cooperation with GBS. GBS eagerly expects their feed-back on social issues which they could help

alleviate in their home communities.

Depending on their performance, they may be trained as activists, serving the cause of GBS either informally or formally. They would exemplify societal values informed by Gandhian teaching, albeit adapted to contemporary requirements.



Speakers of various working groups present their results to a wider audience.

Education and Other Requirements of Children

In the dominantly rural catchment area of HSHR, the broad base of the social pyramid comprises numerous landless groups, both Hindu and Muslim. At the most, they have received rudimentary school education; but many have never attended school. Accordingly, Gram Bharati Samiti and hence HSHR emphasize the need for informal education, especially in crafts and small professions. On a limited basis, GBS holds camps to provide functional alphabetization.

As has been empirically proven, women who have managed to generate some income

through small entrepreneurship strive to improve their children’s education.

Rural government-run schools are more often than not dysfunctional. Teachers are usually disinclined to accept a village posting. However, if fated to suffer rural exile, they tend to neglect their task despite reasonable remuneration, especially if they are not locals. Hence, there are cases of children, having completed the fifth standard, who are unable to spell their names correctly! While such educational malfunctioning is rampant, it would be unfair to make sweeping generalizations, given the variety of pedagogic perfor-

mance. Success and failure largely depend on the dedication and imagination of the individual school principals and teachers.

The Government Primary School of Shivpura, a hamlet of Khawarani – the village where SHG activities are coordinated and the GBS women's Bank operates – provides an example of a well-run school. The principal also serves the bank on a voluntary basis, and has ensured that all his school children maintain a savings account. Each and every child, indeed, can tell you the amount of his savings.

The school has about one hundred students (standard 1 to 5). Besides the dedicated principal, there is another equally committed teacher. Some of the children are accompanied by their younger siblings because there are no Anganwaris (crèche-cum-kindergarten), institutions about which the government boasts but whose operation is not consistently enforced. These smaller children play in the school's courtyard, whilst someone keeps an eye on them.

Rajasthan provides school children with a free meal. It is hoped that this provision will boost the students' enrolment rate. In Shivpura, a female cook prepares nutritious food, and the groceries are kept hygienically and pest-free. To save money, the school uniforms are stitched in the school itself. It should be added that school uniforms are by no means an outmoded colonial relic, but significantly enable the children to attend school decently dressed, many of whom may only possess one set of tattered clothes.

In line with the stipulated syllabus, children have to learn another language besides Hindi, which though being the medium of instruction is not their first language since it is quite

distinct from their actual mother-tongue. The second language taught is English, in which, however, the teachers are not sufficiently trained.

What do the children need most, especially now at the beginning of the cold season? During summer, the temperatures may rise up to 40° Celsius, but in winter (December and January) they can sink to almost freezing point. In view of these extreme weather conditions, the children need warm clothes, including caps and mufflers, and so do the adults.

The children would also greatly benefit from interesting picture books and simple illustrated English books, for the available books of that description, even new versions of them, look so uninspiring. It seems obvious that no care was taken in their production to make them interesting for a rural readership. Village children can neither identify with the contents of these books, nor learn anything useful from them, nor do they appeal to their imagination. The same sorry state of affairs concerns didactic toys; for that matter, any sort of toys are a rare commodity. Hence, in Shivpura, the teachers are making valiant efforts to produce didactic toys themselves.

The Protestant Church of Kobe-Osaka in Japan (Evangelische Kirchengemeinde Kobe-Osaka, <www.evkoobe.org/deutsch/hilfe-für-Indien>) has offered to address these needs. These days it is preparing for sending clothes and other appropriate items to Khawarani. This spontaneous and generous help is gratefully acknowledged.

The distribution of the items will be dealt with responsibly by Sarita Yogi, who manages the SHGs and the bank. Her supervision will ensure equitable distribution and prevent any misappropriation.

Position Available

for

1 male intern for ca. two months

(preferably in the months of February/March or October/November 2014)

Job profile: Teaching English at the Government Primary School of Shivpura (Khawarani, Jamwa Ramgarh tehsil, Jaipur district).

Requirements: Functional knowledge of Hindi.

Expenses to be borne by the intern: Travel costs and Rs. 5,000 per month for food and accommodation in the head office of Gram Bharati Samiti, Amber, plus Rs. 200 monthly for the bus ticket from Amber to Shivpura.

Candidates are requested to send their application to Prof. Dr. Monika Boehm-Tettelbach, President, HSHR, Reilsheimer Weg 11, 69251 Gaiberg or via email attachment to <hshrajasthan.gmx.de>.

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HILFE ZUR SELBSTHILFE IN RAJASTHAN E. V. is a registered charitable society. Donations are entitled to tax exemption.

Annual membership fee: €30,-. School and college students and trainees pay an annual membership fee of €15,-.

Membership can be applied for via the website of HSHR, by letter, or email.

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