

With Gratitude

Apart from our institutional donors, KNH and Edukans, many individuals and institutions have supported Bandhavi since it began. We are grateful for your contributions, in cash and kind, big and small. Each gift, each thought and prayer have enabled us to move toward a life of freedom and dignity at Bandhavi. Thank you!

Many thanks to Latha Paul, and Mrs. Shakira Bashir for their donation of sewing machines. Helping us set up the library are Ms. Ranjani Krishnamurthy who donated many books, and the parents of one of our current SJPD students, Mr. and Mrs. Fulner who have donated shelves and books in celebration of their daughter, Lauren's birthday. Thank you to Mrs. Kusum Rappai, who lovingly crocheted little bags for the children. They excitedly carried chocolates home in these bags.

Adding to our list of friends of Bandhavi printed in our April issue we thank: Dr. K.C. Abraham, Prof. C.T. Kurien, Ms. Nirmala Karunan, Dr. Douglas Huff, Mr. Andrew C., Ms. Anamika, Dr. Angelica Rao, Ms. Mary Jerusalina, Mrs. Chandra, Mrs. Sheela Emmanuel, Ms. Innocent Divya, Dr. Gerard D'abreo, Ms. Maria Khalil, Mrs. Joyce Subhash, Mr. John Siddappa, Ms. Poornima C., Mrs. Maria Gomez Tirney, Mr. Yovel David, Mr. Anand Kumar Jaganathan, Col. A. Mani and Mrs. Jean Anandam.

Our SJPD alumni have been busy raising awareness and funds for Bandhavi. Thank you to Ms. Andrea Sorum, Ms. Mary Duvall, and Ms. Lindsay Fox. Many thanks to Ms. Rachel Mathison, batch of 1999, who brought many school supplies with her on her visit. We also thank the SJPD batch of 1999 and Ms. Lynn Hoffman, the SJPD batch of 2005, their parents and Ms. Megan Richards. Many thanks to the School of Peace batch of 2006, Gordon College, The Holy Cross Sisters, and the Kowloon Union Church, Hong Kong.



An invitation to partnership

The power of change lies within each one of us. The children of this land deserve to live in freedom and dignity. Help the children from Bandhavi live their dream. Here are some ways you can be involved.

- Enroll as a *Friend of Bandhavi* paying a minimum of Rs. 1200 per annum.
- Enroll as a *Volunteer of Bandhavi* and assist in teaching, health care, fundraising and documentation.
- Enroll as a *one time donor* and contribute towards an endowment fund, or capital fund.
- Buy the calendar produced by the children.



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Sambrama

A Bandhavi newsletter
Issue 2, December 2006



Living a dream

They stunned 'the audience' at an informal 'event'. During the visit of Christian Caspar and Dietmar Roller (from KNH) the children from Bandhavi performed their first theatrical production titled 'Seeds of Hope'. Given the last minute change in location, and the fact that seventeen American students and professor decided to sit in, one would have imagined stage fright setting in. They proved us utterly wrong. And it was not just the theatre production. When queried about life in the village or at Visthar they not only spoke with clarity but with a vision of an alternate society akin to the paradigm of "the new heaven and new earth". When informed about the life of children in parts of Africa their compassion brought tears to the audience and their final words to the guests from Europe was a benediction to all who assembled.

Come December Bandhavi will be a year old. Fifty one girls have made a change in the course of their lives and look forward to living their dreams.

Children of devadasis, they have made a definitive shift from their homes in North Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh to Visthar in Bangalore. They have been attending the Samagra Shikshana Shaale (SSS) and interacting with the children from the villages who also attend the school. Friendships have been built and already we see how the laughter and energy of the girls has enriched the lives of all who meet with them.

At the time of preparing our second issue of Sambrama the children have just returned from their vacation with their family members. Team members who accompanied the children to their respective villages tell us about the warmth and generosity of the poor and more importantly of the increasing numbers who wish to be part of the Bandhavi journey.

Celebrating life and events

An average day at Bandhavi is a celebration. A new flower, the sprouting of the seed, the first pumpkin in the kitchen garden, every hot meal, participating in dance class, every new English word, discovering continents on the map and simply walking around the campus with gratitude for the fresh air and water from a tap.

The last couple of months have also been a time for festivals. The children were encouraged to celebrate. In the celebration of festivals was the scope to keep the children rooted in their cultural traditions and to remind the rest of the Visthar community of the alternate world views, intrinsic in several subaltern cultures, most certainly the culture of the rural poor and those from Dalit communities. The children reminded us of the symbiotic relationship that exists between people and the land, the continuity in life and the respect of the elder. Above all else, through their very simple celebration they made a scathing critique of the materialism that marks the dominant style of participating in festivals.



We will fly!

My dream

My life's goal is to use the opportunities that I have, study hard and come up in life. I want to do my Pre-University Course and become a police officer because I want to stop people from fighting. I want to take good care of my parents.

I want to catch thieves and educate them to follow the right path. I will also help alcoholics to stop drinking by counseling them and will close the liquor shops. I want to do this because children watch the grown ups drinking and start drinking themselves. I will catch the men who cheat women and I will teach them the right way.

If people in my community send their children to work instead of school, I will remove the children from work and convince the parents to send them to school. And I will bring justice to my people.

Indira, 13 years old

Our partners in the journey

We are grateful to Kindernothilfe (KNH) Germany and Edukans, The Netherlands, for their support and contribution to the programme. It is their partnership that gives us the strength to look ahead with hope for our children.

It was such a good and blessed time being with Visthar. I am impressed with the empowerment and self - esteem of the girls.

Dietmar Roller, Member of Board of Directors, KNH Germany, in his email dated 19th September 2006

Our NGO partners at Raichur, Adoni and Bijapur continue to work with the mothers of the children in the community. The Nava Jeevana Mahila Okkuta, SABALA, AARDIP and READ Anthyodaya share responsibility in sustaining the Bandhavi project. Through their experience and base in the community they have identified the children and support us in this much needed initiative.



Children with soft toys they received as gifts from Ms. Ulrike Jebesen who made them for the girls. Thank you aunty!

My visit to KNH, Germany was enriching. I felt a sense of true partnership and a spirit of oneness as we discussed the problems and possibilities of the programme. The presentations made on Visthar and Bandhavi were greatly appreciated and a healthy discussion revealed the interest and concern of those involved. My thanks to KNH for their hospitality and we look forward to a strong and valuable partnership.

*Mercy Kappen
Associate Director, Programmes*



Bandhavi children in their garden

Calendar 2007

Bandhavi presents its first calendar produced by the children at Bandhavi and SSS. The theme of the calendar chosen by the children is The Environment to which they have contributed the art work and helped with the making of paper. The Calendar is on sale and the proceeds will go towards the Bandhavi project.

The Bandhavi team

Recognising the importance of committed and competent staff Visthar were able to recruit and appoint people, thanks in part to the partnership with KNH. Mary Jerusalina is now the Project head for Bandhavi and her background in counselling is certainly a bonus. Rathi as houseparent has held a similar job and has good experience working with children on child right issues. Shailaja comes to us with considerable experience in the field of community development and women's rights. She has been given the responsibility to Co-ordinate the SSS. The fact that she lives on campus is an additional support. Carol in her new avatar is in charge of communications and fundraising. Sham remains as the Project Administrator and Mercy as Associate Director of programmes at Visthar ensures an overall co-ordination.



Akshaya's Rangoli design

The Rangoli is a colorful and often elaborate design that adorns the front of Indian homes. Drawn on the ground with white or coloured powder, the rangoli is considered a traditional Indian art form. Our children are quite adept at making rangolis and the above is an example.

My Village

My village is called Nilagol. It is in Lingasur Taluk in Raichur. There are 800 people in my village. My village is very beautiful. The sky is black. In that black sky, like rangloi spilled across the darkness, are the stars, the sun and the moon. When I sleep and wake up, I feel like the stars are in my eyes. We have wells. In one well there will always be water because there is a god there. We have both tar roads and mud roads. But there are no bathrooms and very few hospitals.

My brother, sister and I used to play near our home and our parents used to work in the green fields. In the fields, the corn and wheat look like pearls. When I am by the fields I feel like I want to be there forever. I wish that I could be there now. When my little sister used to cry, sometimes I used to get angry. Then I would put her in her cradle and make her sleep. When there is a festival in my village, my brothers, sisters, friends and I would celebrate it together.

In my village there are rich people who use the poor people for their work because they cannot collect the cow dung themselves. The poor people suffer much. They collect the rice in their homes and take it to the shop to sell. The shopkeepers treat them badly and make sure they spill some rice so they don't have to pay them for it. This affects their stomachs and their children don't have enough to eat.

In the past few years there have been some changes. Some people have taps and some have television sets. But there are still liquor shops. The women from the sangha had closed the shop down earlier but they have opened it again. The women have made a sangha to fight against the differences made by caste and poverty. I want to study and stop people from drinking. There is joy and sadness in my village and we share both and keep living.

Nimbamma, 13 years old

The children's perceptions seemed to fit in perfectly with the spirit of Onam – a festival from Kerala. A festival to celebrate memories: and the hope of a return to just relationships and prosperity.



Making the flower carpet for Onam

Celebrating a spate of festivals was not the only way of learning. The children were keen to 'celebrate' Independence day. On the 15th of August for the first time in sixteen years Visthar hoisted the national flag. It was a crucial expression of the celebration, as far as the children were concerned. For David the thrill was to work with the children in their second theatrical presentation. After the success of 'Seeds of Hope' the children put together (with a little help) *Swathanthra Yaarigey?* Translated in English, "Freedom for whom?" The discerning theatre enthusiast could clearly see

I was very impressed by the tradition of giving banni leaves to the elders and seeking their blessings at the children's Dusserah celebration. I was overwhelmed as they individually touched the feet of the elders in the gathering. The children created a space for all of us to participate and enjoy moments of togetherness and celebration.

E. Sham Khalil, Co-ordinator Projects

the display of histrionic talent coming through as the actors made a critique of the existing system biased in favor of the rich and heavily loaded against the poor. The hope, of course, lay in the climax of 'the oppressed' joining hands to challenge the existing structure but more importantly inviting the audience to journey with them in the struggle for freedom for all.

Actions such as the above go hand in hand with formal learning. Yes indeed, that too is part of the learning experience. In fact it is when we relate the different aspects of learning that the excitement and joy of discovery is heightened. With the association of professionals in the field of educational psychology we have completed an educational assessment of most of our children. Even as we send this off to the press our curriculum for the school is being finalized.



At Carol's wedding

Finally talking about events, the 'big one' for the kids was the wedding of Carol. Oh for days the kids waited for the special evening. Sham and others were getting new clothes tailored, information was being shared on what the reception would be like and you can imagine there was much excitement. The day arrived and the kids were beautiful in their clothes and as dignified ladies sat in the space allotted them. And when Carol arrived they cheered, threw confetti, trooped up the steps to greet her and were photographed. But more special was when Carol returned to Visthar. Thank you aunty Carol!



At school

Learning at Samagra Shikshana Shaale

The Samagra Shikshana Shaale(SSS) was inaugurated on the 3rd of July. The campus was buzzing with the sound of children's laughter and talk, and relationships slowly being built. The alternative school for the children of Bandhavi and girls who have dropped out of school from the neighbouring villages offers the children a unique learning experience. Along with the subjects they learn for the Karnataka Open School (KOS) examinations, they also learn art, music, dance and drama. They are trained in agriculture, herbal gardening and medicine, recycling paper, and production of paper products. We hope to send our first batch of children for the KOS examinations in 2007.



Vijaylakshmi's drawing of her village

I am happy to be with the SSS team. I believe teaching is a noble profession and there is much to learn from the children. Once again I can become a child when I am with the children at SSS. They have many expectations of us and we are constantly trying to fulfill these.

Sailaja Kamal Gopinath,
Programme Head, SSS



Performing a Kolaatam learned at School

When I grow up...

I want to become a teacher and teach poor and orphaned children to read and write. I want them to have opportunities in their lives. I want to teach them not just their school subjects but also agricultural work, singing and mathematics. I want to teach the children mathematics well and they should be happy in everything that they do. This is my dream which should not die out. I will study hard to reach my goal. Now I want to be the best student in my school and make my parents and teachers proud of me.

Bandhavva, 11 years old

My School

School is a temple of education. We go to school to gain knowledge and learn new things. I used to go to another school before I came to SSS, where I had to wear a uniform and tie two plaits. If I didn't the teachers would shout at me. The government school that I went to was far from my house. We had to take a bus and walk for half a kilometer. If we came to school late they would shout at us. But we did not have drinking water or clean toilets there.

The teachers would teach us mathematics, science, social studies and Kannada. In the afternoons we would have computer classes once a week. Every month we would have a unit test. But in class if we did not understand we were afraid to ask the teacher to explain again. They would shout at us.

In my previous school, because of our caste, they would treat the students differently. Even at the Parent – Teacher meeting they would treat our parents badly.

At SSS there is no difference between castes and the teachers also teach well. They explain again if we do not understand. Here we can take two subjects each exam, study well and write. The environment here is also very beautiful. The trees, plants, and flowers are all wonderful. In SSS, I can ask about things I don't know and learn. I can learn to dance and sing and I can play here. The children and the teachers are very nice here and I like my new school very much.

Sudha,
student of SSS
who dropped out of a government school



Learning the value of wheatgrass

Staying healthy

A Medical Camp sponsored by Teach International was organized this July for the Bandhavi and SSS children. Doctors from the Seventh Day Adventist hospital spent a week at Visthar conducting thorough medical check ups and preparing individual records. Periodic check ups continue with visits to the hospital by the children. Our special thanks to Dr. S.K. Subramaniam whose commitment and love for the children not only made this partnership with SDA a possibility but also in enabling the institution receive a substantial grant from an individual donor.



Dr. S.K. Subramaniam at the medical camp