

# The Diary of a School Teacher

Hemraj Bhatt



Translated by Sharada Jain

An Azim Premji University Publication



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## FOREWORD

November 26, 2008. I was in Udaipur for some work when I received the news of Hemraj Bhatt's passing. It was our common friend Ambrish telling me over the telephone that a road accident had taken Hemraj away from us. A chill went down my spine. For several seconds I was at a loss for words. On coming to myself, still somewhat dazed, I started calling people here, there and everywhere, hoping all along that somebody would refute this news. Unfortunately, that never happened.

For many days after that, I could not reconcile myself to the fact that Hemraj Bhatt was no more. I just couldn't come back to my normal self. I kept reliving every moment we had spent together with Hemraj. His all too sudden departure had left all of us, his friends and well-wishers, feeling utterly bereft.

Hemraj was a polite, sedate, ordinary-looking assistant teacher at a remote, hilly, single-teacher village primary school. In spite of this apparent ordinariness, as one's contact with him grew, one could not help but be impressed with him. Gradually, but surely, he had created a niche for himself in the hearts of each one of us – and of the children he came in touch with. The children's stories and poems he wrote under the pen name 'Balsakha' had the innate ability to touch the heart of each and every child.

On my return from Udaipur, I had a strong urge to visit Hemraj's family. I discussed this with Hemlata and Ambrish, and found that they too were thinking along the same lines. We decided to set forth for his house in Dhaneti on a holiday. All the way to his place we shared our memories of Hemraj. Our recollections of him played out like a movie before us – a movie with no interval or end; a movie that will play on forevermore.

On this journey we were accompanied by Hemraj's brother, Chandramohan. It was only natural that we stop at the place where the accident had taken place. A narrow

road and a deep chasm; Standing on the edge of the road, we looked down the 400 feet abyss. Down there lay the accursed Maxi cab looking, from where we stood, like an empty matchbox. The rest of the way passed without any exchange amongst us – it was as if the gravity of the scene, the terrifying impact it had on us, and the renewed surge of memories that followed had sealed our lips into silence.

Members of Hemraj's family were not acquainted with us. Even in their midst, we could not muster the courage to break the silence that had enveloped us. It was then that Giriraj, Hemraj's younger brother, broke the silence and, with tearful eyes, in a hoarse voice, requested us not to let his brother's work go waste - it had to reach the common man. We didn't know then, how this would happen. All we knew was that we had to accept this request.

We stayed at his place that evening and the exercise of wading through all that he had written began. Hemraj's laptop, the various well-organised folders in it, his one-room house, his books, diaries, registers and files full of his published works - very systematically, we went through it all. And as we progressed, we realized the stark truth that now came before us - how little we really knew this man! In that ocean of sweet water, we found poems, essays on a variety of topics, a schoolteacher's diary and letters to the editor. All of this proved beyond any doubt that Hemraj's expertise was not limited to the many children's stories he had written, but extended way beyond that. We also found a copy of the Bhagwad Gita in Garhwali and many publications of the Prajapati Brahmakumaris.

After all of this, we felt like visiting the school Hemraj taught in. This was no ordinary school. Here the children's process of learning was assisted not by a mere teacher but by a friend, a 'Balsakha'. The school was closed, as it was a holiday. But that did not matter. A school need not be open for one to observe the handiwork of a teacher stationed there, for teachers leave their imprint on the very walls of the buildings of a school. There were no heavy-weight inscriptions like 'Tamso Ma Jyotirgamaya' and 'Sa VidyaYaVimuktaye' here, but instead right at the entrance was written, 'Nanhe Munne Mitron Ka Vidyalaya Mein Swaagat Hai' (A warm welcome to my little friends).

Usually, only a few attempt to take the untrodden path. And even those who do so and accomplish a bit of something as they go along, never tire of speaking in self-

praise. Hemraj was different. Never had we heard him speak of what was now revealed on visiting his school. On seeing strangers around the school, a few villagers too came there. The children told us that 'Balsakha' thought of all his students as his friends. He had even made cushions for his students to sit on. It was not just the question of a certain comfort to be made available to the children; the point was that Hemraj had made every single one of these cushions himself. We wondered at the intimacy, love and sensitivity that went into this act.

In the following pages you will read Hemraj's diary. You will read about the challenges he faced as a teacher, the wars he waged every day, the system he wished to fight from within. In his diary, we are made aware of problems with roots so deep that it might take us generations to find effective solutions to them. All we hope for is that his clarity of thought and the purity of his intentions leave an indelible impression on one and all, inspiring us into thoughtful action that takes us to the solutions he was searching for.

**- Anant Gangola**

**Date: 10<sup>th</sup> April 2007**

Today I attended the monthly meeting at the Nyaya Panchayat Resource Centre (NPRC). I had to close school to go there. The monthly meetings at the NPRC level are a bit of joke and a waste of a teacher's time. Today the NPRC co-ordinator Mr. Bisht was absent. Shri Devendraji was the teacher in-charge of the primary school cell. He had only two notices for circulation. Half of the teachers present handed over information about their schools to the convener. And the meeting ended.

If a suitable environment is created, then these monthly meetings could be very beneficial for us teachers. All of us could discuss the significant aspects of daily teaching activities. The headmasters or the people in-charge of primary schools are present in these meetings. If an environment of positive discussion is created in these meetings, we assistant teachers would also get an opportunity to take part at the NPRC-level once a month. However, this is entirely dependent on the NPRC coordinator's organisational skills. Maybe, this actually happens in some NPRC/CRC.

**Date: 16<sup>th</sup> April 2007**

Today I reached school an hour late. The children had finished the Morning Prayer by then and were sitting on the ground - class-wise. The children of classes 1, 2 and 3 were writing something in their notebooks, under the guidance of Ms. Pratibha, a volunteer.

I have arranged for a volunteer teacher to work with me from today. I will pay her myself.

Over the past 15 days, I have begun to feel that the multi-grade teaching methodology is not very practical. It looks nice in theory, but is rather complicated and tedious for the teacher, in practice. The situation is worse if children from all classes are not at the required level. It could be tried once in a while, for a change, but it should not be made a part of the basic teaching methodology.

Multi-grade teaching not only requires great preparation on the part of the teacher but the children need to be active and full of energy too. It can be successful only if the teacher works for 2-4 hours at home and prepares the plan of activities for the

next day before coming to school.

Three guardians and a teacher from a neighbouring school came to the school today. We spent almost an hour and a half discussing new admissions and issuing TCs. I had to leave my class unattended during this time.

**Date: 18<sup>th</sup> April 2007**

It was raining since morning. Children reached the school by 8.30 am. No prayer was conducted today and regular work began at 8.30 am. There was a low student turn-out due to the rain. Only 35 out of 51 children were present.

Pratibha looks after classes 1 to 3. I am teaching classes 4 and 5. All of the 18 children enrolled in my classes are at the class 2 level in all subjects. I am concentrating on clearing fundamental concepts in Hindi, maths, and general studies/science before moving forward.

Eight children- Gita, Sangita, Shivhari, Chitra, Suman, Santoshi, Pratap Singh, and Gaje Singh are quite weak in studies. They cannot recognize two digit numbers and cannot even read small words.

My effort is to develop their reading and writing skills before proceeding further.

I have prepared a list of 168 words, most used by children in daily life. I typed the list in font 28; took printouts, and distributed them amongst the children. They practice reading them. This activity should have been done in class 1-2, but I have to do it in classes 4 and 5.

Today I made the children read the list of words before the interval and then dictated 30 words from the same list for them to write. Out of the 12 children present today, one child wrote 24 words correctly, 2 children wrote 15 words correctly, two children wrote 9 correct words, two children wrote 8 words correctly and one got only 2 words right. The rest could not write a single word.

In Maths, except for the 8 children mentioned above, the other 10 have begun reading, writing and understanding the concept of units and tens, of two digit numbers.

I did not scold or beat any child today and very patiently, tried to make them understand the concepts. I have to work very hard. Eight children still do not understand the concepts. They stare back blankly on being asked a question. Surendra, Atar Singh, Ramesh, Kamaleshwari, Sunita, Naindai, and Dhripal, however, are quick learners.

**Date: 21<sup>st</sup> April 2007**

These children have been formally enrolled in this very school for the past three years. But in the 20 days that I began working here seriously, I feel like this is a new school with new children – it doesn't feel like these children have been enrolled here for so long. If people blame the teachers for the poor performance of the children, they are not very wrong.

**Date: 1<sup>st</sup> May 2007**

From 20th to 30th April, I went door-to-door to revise the voters' list. During this period, the volunteer, Ms. Pratibha, taught at school. Due to all the administrative work, however, I did not get to spend any time with the children, in spite of going to school for an hour or two everyday.

A worker from the Vidya Kendra was to teach at school during this time. But I noticed that she had no interest in teaching. She wrote a line on the black board – something like "always speak the truth" or "health is wealth" - and asked the children to copy it in their answer books. For 10 days, the children wrote only such sentences in their notebooks, while she continued to look after her own children.

If a child's timetable at school is disturbed, even for a day, it hinders their progress. If children are left on their own for a long time, they begin to forget what they had learnt before, lose interest in their homework and there is a rise in absenteeism. .

During these ten days, the attendance dropped to half. On 1st May, only 18 children were present. My focus is on class 4 and 5. Children of both the classes are at the stage, where they should be able to recognise numbers up to 1000. But only 7 out of the 18 children can do that. The rest cannot even read numbers up to 100. In spite of all the work I am putting in, there is no visible improvement. I have noticed that it is the absentees who are lagging behind.

Today, the children practiced recognising/counting numbers on the abacus. The children learn very fast on the abacus. I explained the concept of addition on the abacus.

**Date: 4<sup>th</sup> May 2007**

Today, there was low attendance due to the Bhagwat recitation in the village.

**Date: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2007**

I am attending a training camp for working teachers in NPRC, Bhetiyara (place - R.E.K. Dhauntari) from today. The aim of the camp is capacity building. The first

day's training has been a mere formality. In fact all such training sessions have become a formality. The senior trainer speaks and everybody else is silent. He never gives others an opportunity to speak. There is a strange reason for this. This Master Trainer (MT) is an 'expert' and has a lot of experience. Under DPEP he has successfully 'trained' many persons.

The second MT is the Nyaya Panchayat Coordinator's 'yes man'. He takes the Coordinator's side in discussions and speaks on his behalf. So the Nyaya Panchayat Coordinator has got him appointed in a primary school right by the road. Earlier, he was working at a junior high school 5 kilometres away from the road. This is his first time as a MT, and clearly it is because of the Nyaya Panchayat Coordinator's influence. This is why he wants to show-off and hence speaks without purpose and context.

**When I come close, the birds take flight - I wonder, why?**

There was a tree outside my house,  
A bird had made her nest in it,  
And in the nest,  
Her three little ones.  
How often would those little ones  
On seeing me  
With beaks agape  
Lift up their heads -  
And peeping from the nest,  
Would play  
Hide and seek with me.  
They're older now,  
And jump around  
Now here, now there.  
And yet oft even now they stare  
At me, perhaps in wonderment.  
But into full-fledged birds now grown,  
They fly,  
Go places  
Miles on miles -  
And yet, they come back.  
But what surprises me now is,  
They take to flight when I come near.  
I wonder, why?

**Date: 13<sup>th</sup> July 2007**

Today on the 13th of July, I participated in a working teacher's training session in B.R.C. Dunda.

This training session was organised for those who were not able to participate in the last training session. Thirty-two teachers are a part of this. The subject is 'Hard spots in textbooks'. The modules of this training include many subjects – Hindi, Maths, English, Sanskrit, Science, and Social sciences. There is only one trainer - Mr. Bisht. He is an assistant teacher in a junior high school. He teaches Science and Maths and it seems like he is well-versed in both.

Today the session began with a discussion about recurring decimals and their conversion into fractions. The presentation was one sided. There was no active participation on the teachers' part. The trainer explained the subject traditionally, like a Maths teacher explains sums in class.

Sometime ago, DIET had organized an MT training. I found that the participants here were comparatively more active and desirous of learning. They listened patiently and even reacted. If the trainer prepares a bit more and comes with his homework done, the training can be very interesting for keen learners. Usually we just keep to the text book like traditional primary school teachers. Here also, the MT did not dare step out of the prescribed module syllabi.

Today's session ended with a lesson on computing the Highest Common Factor (HCF) and the Lowest Common Multiple (LCM) by factorisation as well as by the division method.

I have always been confused about words like recurring, HCF and LCM. The reason is that my students have never reached that stage. I have never taught my students about HCF and LCM. Even in fifth class we could not go beyond subtraction.

**Date: 28<sup>th</sup> July 2007**

A meeting with the children's guardians was scheduled for 10 am today. However, the guardians started coming in from 8 am in the morning – this in spite of informing the children of the time. The first to arrive were two mothers who had to go all the way to Danda for their buffalo and hence had to leave immediately. I requested them to stay for a bit but they said that they had a lot to do at home and left. I also did not insist, for I understood their obligations at home.

In a similar manner, four other guardians came and left. They said, "We have full

faith in you. You scold and beat them as much as you want. They don't listen to us but the fear and respect for the teacher is a different thing. We won't mind your beating them. We ourselves were thoroughly beaten by our teacher." And saying thus, they left. They also had a lot of work to do at home.

At 9.30 am about 20-25 guardians together with Gram Pradhanji and the members of the local Panchayat came. We asked them to sit on the sacks spread out on the ground. All of the 60 children sat in front of the verandah. I requested the Gram Pradhanji to distribute bags, copies, drawing boxes, pencils and erasers - these were bought with the money given for encouraging the education of girls.

**Date: 1<sup>st</sup> August 2007**

Today, I set out from Uttarkashi at 7 am and reached the school at 9 am. I was busy at the Learning Guarantee Programme till 5 pm yesterday.

The Education teacher, Ms. Vimla, and both the volunteer teachers were already in school and were talking in the office. On seeing me, they became conscious and started preparing to go to class.

The children were sitting quietly in the classes and the cook was preparing the meal. The four of us had a discussion about who would teach which class and which subject. It was then decided to seat the children in four places.

After the lunch break, all the other three teachers went to their classes. I cleaned a classroom with the children's help. The room was full of sand and other material that had been discarded from the school.

Today I did not teach anybody anything. I only went through the first lesson of environmental studies in class 3. When I asked the children what they had been taught till now, only two were able to answer correctly - living and non living things, things made by God and by man. Other children simply named random objects like- chair, leaves, man, buffalo, etc.

I taught this class continuously for three days. I taught them the lesson titled Chandan and discussed with them man-made things and natural things, living and non living things and tried to explain these concepts to them.

Out of 20 children, I could not get 16 children to pronounce the word Prakritik correctly (it's a Hindi word). At such times I get irritated, even though I knew this was merely a linguistic problem. I was sure that the children understood what I was saying and even gave appropriate examples when I asked them questions. These children do not hear a lot of Hindi around them. Thus they have to make quite some

effort to understand and remember Hindi words.

Today I let the children leave at exactly 1 pm. All my time was spent in getting the rooms organised.

I came home, ate lunch and rested till 3 pm. From 3pm to 4pm, I typed out a story for the children of class 2, printed it and laminated it. I hope to get the children of class 2 to practice reading with this story about two goats. At present they cannot even read the alphabet correctly. At 4 pm, the Acharya of Vidya Mandir came and I taught him to use the computer for an hour. Then I went with him to the market.

I wrote the diary from 8.30 pm and finished it by 10 pm. Then I browsed through the pages of the August issue of Kadambini and slept at 10.30 pm.

**Date: 6<sup>th</sup> August 2007**

Today is 6th August. I reached the school at exactly 7.15 am. The children came to school by 8 am. The prayers began at 8 am. After getting the children to stand in line and giving necessary instructions to Vimla and Bindu, I set out for Pradhanji's house. On the way I met the cook. She was on her way to school. She greeted me. Urging her to go and cook quickly I went on to meet Pradhanji. After some important consultations with Pradhanji regarding the construction work going on in school, I came back to school at exactly 9.15 am. I noticed that the cook had still not started the fire. The food should be ready by 10 am everyday so that children are able to eat during the break. The cook was still getting the fire going at 9.15 am even though she had reached the school at 8 am. I got annoyed at her; when I asked her to come on time and get the food ready, she began arguing like every day, instead of apologising. She kept arguing till I got very angry and scolded her. I told her that if the food was not ready by 10 am, she could not take the cooked dal and rice home.

She had only cooked the rice by 11 am. During break she asked me for some dal to cook. I refused and kept the cooked rice to show the guardians.

Actually, I am tired of her obstinate habits. All the children and guardians are tired of her. But we cannot replace her because she abuses whoever comes in her stead. She has no children of her own. She discriminates amongst children, comes late every day, wastes fuel, answers back rudely, and never prepares food in time. If the children do not obey her or do not fetch water she uses abusive language with them too. She enters the classroom and grumbles unnecessarily. After school, I gave each child two apples and asked them to get their guardians to school tomorrow so that they could advise her. When I asked her for the key of the kitchen, she hid it and started abusing me.

This is the third or the fourth time when I have called the guardians to advise the cook. These situations are a cause of great tension for me. I have thought of firing her several times, but I feel sorry for her and don't want to be the cause of her miseries. I want to explain things to her and reform her.

Earlier, she used to steal rice, pulses, and other material from the school during my absence. She had even given the Pradhan and the education committee a letter of apology for this and had promised not to do it again. But she has now reverted to her old ways.

The whole day passed with her brooding. I did not feel like teaching after the break. She, on the other hand, being the great actress that she is, went back home crying.

As I was going back home, her brother-in-law met me on the way and tried to start a discussion again. I asked him to meet me in school.

Before the lunch break, I explained the concept of antonyms to classes 4 and 5, dictated some antonyms to them and got them to memorise some opposites of prayukta words.

I gave the class 3 children, a practice test on recognising numbers. Out of 20 children, only 5 were able to read numbers up to 100. Maybe my method is wrong or the children are scared or they are hesitant or they just don't have the capacity to understand. I tried my best but to no avail. Tomorrow I will divide them in two groups and work with them separately.

The fact is that I have not been able to free myself of the traditional teaching methods. I lose my patience very soon and often give in to my anger and beat the kids. Later I feel bad about it and resolve not to repeat this but end up doing it anyway. To work with 63 children at the same time is mentally exhausting and limits one's ability to communicate with love. Although Vimla and Vidhu are helping, I have to keep an eye on them too. Besides they are even more traditional than me.

I am getting them to teach children of classes 1 and 2 to read and recognise words. They find it difficult to believe that children can learn to read directly, without first learning letters, matra and barakhari. They laugh at me but end up doing what I ask them to do. They have been cooperating with me since 1st August, but no progress is visible in the children even though we have reached the fifth day.

This year I will see to it that my school makes it to the Learning Guarantee School category. This resolution gives me constant energy; in spite of innumerable disappointments, I never give up and start planning the next day's activity.

Tomorrow we will divide the children of all the classes into groups and then work

with them. But a major part of tomorrow will be wasted in dealing with the cook.

**Date: 7<sup>th</sup> August 2007**

Today I reached the school at 7.30 am in the morning. There were a few children at school already by then. These days, children come to school from distances as great as 5-6 kilometres. They come from their hamlets which are at a distance of 5 kilometres or more from the school. Thus we don't scold children for coming late. It is extremely courageous of them to brave such long distances to come to school. Even children of classes 1 and 2 walk more than 10 kilometres every day. One is surprised to see this extraordinary stamina of children.

The children reached school by 8.30 am today too. By that time the prayers had ended. I had also called the guardians in connection with the problem of the cook. They came after 9am, but only 8-9 people turned up.

**Date: 8<sup>th</sup> August 2007**

Today I reached school at 7.15 am exactly. I had heard that the B.E.O. and the deputy B.E.O were in the vicinity, so we were expecting them to visit the school today. Usually we begin classes at 8.30 am but today we finished prayers by 8 am. Even though all the children had not reached school in time for the prayers, by the time classes began, most of them were there. Today, 45 out of 63 children were present. However if we considered the children without enrolment and those from the Vidya Kendra, there were a total of 58 children present.

Today we divided the children of classes 4 and 5 into two groups for Hindi. Group one comprised of children who could read correctly, or could read words but found it difficult to read sentences and/or lacked fluency. In the group two were children who could read only small words. Out of 20 children in both the classes, 10 were identified for group 1 and 10 for group 2.

The second lesson from the Hindi textbook of class 4 was taken up with the first group. First, I got the children to repeat the lesson after me. Then I wrote the difficult words of the first four sections on the blackboard and asked the children to write them in their notebooks.

The second group was asked to read the list of 130 words prepared as T.L.M quietly. Only this was done in classes 4 and 5 in Hindi in the first period.

The second period was Mathematics for class 3. The children were divided into two groups yet again. In the first group were those who could recognise numbers up to 100 and in the second group were those who could either recognise numbers up to 50 or not none at all.

The first group was taught addition without carrying over, and the second group was given practice with number recognition.

We have to work very hard to get the children to recognise numbers. Even after learning units and tens they are unable to recognise numbers up to 100. The children of the first group, however, are beginning to understand the concept of addition. They make mistakes either in writing numbers according to their place values or in placing the signs.

Although learning to read numbers is much below the standard of class 3, it would not be correct to proceed without the basic concepts being clear.

Now that I am completely involved with the children, I realise how much harm have I done to them in my greed for worldly reputation.

Till now, I have been able to work on Hindi and Maths with children of classes 3, 4, and 5. I still have not given any attention to classes 1 and 2. Bindu and Kedari are teaching them according to the traditional method but they aren't getting any results either, in spite of all the hard work.

I am still not in favour of multi-grade teaching. It can be contextual to a certain extent, for a couple of days, but if there are many classes in one, then multi-grade teaching is absolutely meaningless.

Today, children of classes 4 and 5 repeated the second lesson of the class 4 Hindi textbook aloud after me. It took half an hour. In such circumstances even if it is possible to look after other classes and occupy them in such a way that they also learn something of their own level, it is a hard and tiring activity.

Today after lunch break all children helped in preparations for the Independence Day. They were keen to celebrate Independence Day. The request for celebrations came from them. They were all made to sit down in the verandah and they sang folk songs and recited poems of their own choice. Some girls danced.

School ended at exactly 1 pm.



## Clouds

Clouds that are black  
And clouds looking brown,  
Misty clouds  
And bright-looking clouds.  
Wrapped in a colourful cloak the clouds,  
Spread across the skies, the clouds!  
Sometimes thundering, sometimes pouring,  
Sometimes hurtling, at other times still.  
In the twinkling of an eye,  
How they suddenly vanish from the sky!  
The thirsty land below they see,  
Our longing for the water they see.  
And shower us with a pleasant spell,  
Of their pouring water's swell.  
Look how they hide the sun,  
Look how they hide the moon,  
The greenery down below they see,  
And smile to themselves, ah these clouds.

**Date: 10<sup>th</sup> August 2007**

The monthly meeting was scheduled for today, at the Nyaya Panchayat office. I reached school at 7.15 am. 3 or 4 children had reached school by then. I opened the office, gave the key to children, and they cleaned the rooms quickly. I asked the children to stand in a line and say their prayers. The children prayed and I also stood with them. Almost 35 children had reached school by the time prayer was over. These days it is morning school and most children walk 2 to 5 kilometres to get here. They are only able to reach here by 8 am. I am familiar with the local circumstances and so I never scold them for coming late.

After prayers, instead of seating them in their classrooms, I gave them a holiday because I had to attend the meeting. By the time I reached the road, I met the cook. I told her about the holiday, asked her not to cook and reminded her to fill the water for tomorrow. I then proceeded to the meeting.

I reached N.P.R.C. at about quarter to nine. Only the N.P.R.C. coordinator was there. I had to go to Uttar Kashi today, to pay the telephone bill and the LIC premium. So I handed over the information about my school to the coordinator and left for Uttar Kashi. Actually I wanted to utilise the day to run my private errands. I know that it is important to attend the meeting but nothing meaningful happens there. The coordinators have taken on the role of postmen. In this meeting they give some information and receive some. That's all. Some discussions do take place but more often than not, they are meaningless. People greet each other, talk about pay scales and transfers, and after wasting one or two hours thus, they go back home. This is just an excuse for getting a holiday from school.

Sometimes the coordinator sends a message to someone that the meeting will take place on the 12th or the 14th instead of the 10th. But due to lack of communication, people tend to come on the day before and on the day after too. Sometimes the coordinator doesn't come at all. No one questions him about wasting two working days of the teachers. Most teachers prepare their notices there. If they have forgotten some data at school, they improvise right then and there. Our coordinator is an expert at this. He is supposed to prepare the reports on the Mid-Day Meal and quality grading. All he does for this is get the signature and the seal of the Headmaster on the format provided for the subject. In the last session, he told me in connection with quality grading- "You give me the mark sheets of your children after taking the exams and show your school in grade C."

Thus, taking advantage of such a meeting, I finished my work in the district headquarters. I deposited the phone bill, and paid the life insurance premium. I had to get a counter signature on two Transfer Certificates (TCs) but the senior district education officer had gone to welcome the honourable education minister. So the TCs had to be left in his office.

On reaching Uttar Kashi, I received telephone calls from Saurabh Rai ji and Anant Sir. Saurabh ji invited me to take part unofficially in the feedback workshop being organised in Dehradun from 15th to 17th August. Anant Sir told me briefly about the objectives of the workshop. He asked me to suggest names of some more teachers. I could only think of Yamuna Avasthi. So I called Avasthiji and invited him to take part in the workshop.

On my way back, I purchased the Yugvani magazine. I read the reminiscences of Ruskin Bond, an article on new text books by Sitaram Bahuguna, an article on the role played by women from the hilly regions in the war of independence. It was written by G. C. Joshi. There was a story by Pankaj Bhisht titled Ghar. Yugvani has been printing good material. On returning to Dhauntari, I received a draft for Rs. 2475 as an honorarium for taking part in a workshop on textbook writing. It was sent by A.C.R.T. At 8.30 pm, I typed a letter of thanks to the senior director. I decided to take a print out the next morning. Wrote my diary from 9 to 10.30 pm and simultaneously listened to ghazals by Ghulam Ali. I will now read the August issue of Kadambini for about half an hour before going to sleep.

**Date: 11<sup>th</sup> August 2007**

I reached the school at 7.15 am exactly. Only two children had come. They opened the rooms and cleaned them. Bindu turned up by 7.30 am and Vimla by 8 am. At 7.30 am the children were asked to stand up for prayers. There were about 30 children for the prayer but by 8 am, 45 children were present. Since families have shifted to distant hamlets, the turnout at school has decreased. They have to walk up to 5 kilometres to reach school. The minimum a child has to walk is a kilometre. As it is, our school is at a distance of more than one and a half kilometres from the main residential area. Ordinarily, for senior classes, I insist on their timely presence but these days if a child comes even at 9 am, we don't scold him. Attendance has decreased drastically in classes 1 and 2. For small Rama, Shiva, Ganesh, and the disabled Mamta of class 3, walking 5 kilometres is rather difficult. Children living at great distances are not coming to school these days. Today, the prayer session continued from 7.30 am to 8.20 am. After prayers they practiced clear articulation of the oath and then patriotic songs were sung and practiced.

Considering that it is the rainy season and there are centipedes on the way, the attendance of children of classes 3, 4, and 5 is normal. On an average, 4 out of 20 children in class 3 and 1 child in classes 4 and 5 is absent. However, after 15 days, attendance in the senior classes will decrease all at once. It will be the season for sowing bhang and children will be required to stay home and help their parents. This will, obviously, affect attendance and we will have to face the problem of absenteeism again.

The cook reached school at n language. I want children to learn Hindi and become fluent in it. That is why I avoid experimenting with the mother tongue. Ultimately they will have to answer exams in Hindi.

In the month of August, I only want to concentrate on the reading skills of all my students.

To the second group of the same classes, I gave the typed story, 'Two Goats', and asked them to read it silently. I have not been able to talk to this group much. But the reading material that I have created is having its effect on them. I can feel it, even from a distance. If the students come regularly, then by the first week of October I will ensure that this group is at par with the other group. By that time, the first group would have made significant advances in language. In this group the number of girls who absent themselves regularly is more as compared to the other group. Chitra, Gita, Shivhari, Sangita, Dhripal, and Suman are the ones who are absent the most.

Today I taught addition in maths for this group. The first group did addition of five lines with carrying over. The second group did addition without carry over. The second group still does not recognise numbers up to 100. The challenge is to make them recognise numbers. It is only then that they will understand place value and proceed to addition and subtraction. The first group acquired this understanding in April.

In class 3 too, the first group did addition involving carry over. I repeated the method of counting on fingers. This group will learn numbers and the process of addition soon. However with the second group, the problem of number recognition continues. I will have to work really hard to teach them numbers. Till now, the efforts haven't succeeded.

I haven't been able to supervise classes 1 and 2 personally till now. Vimla and Bindu are teaching them in the traditional way. But they are continuously working hard

with the children. One special thing about both these girls is that they don't scold or beat the children.

**Date: 12<sup>th</sup> August 2007**

Today is the second Sunday I called children to school. I reached there at 9.30 am in the morning. I had asked the children to come to school at 9 am, and they were present at that time. 20 children from classes 3, 4 and 5 had come, in spite of the heavy rain. Those children who had gone with the buffalos to Dadu (Chhaniya) could not come.

I had asked Kedari to look after the children till I came but she herself hadn't turned up. Perhaps she had fever. Kedari is the health worker in the Gram Sabha Bharkat working under the Government's Asha scheme. On 28th July, she had told me that she wanted to render free service to the school. Her intention was that she would spend her time in a meaningful way with children and at the same time she would improve her Hindi and maths. I noticed in the 10-12 days she has been here, that she makes many spelling mistakes. Similarly in maths, she cannot solve minor addition and subtraction problems. I consulted the Gram Pradhan, members of the education committee and some guardians and gave her permission to teach at school. However, at present, I have only given her permission to teach classes 1 and 2 and that too orally.

Kedari is a devoted worker but her family circumstances made her a housewife at the tender age of 19. She has passed the class 10 examinations but she is hardly at par with a class 8 student intellectually. She thinks that by working at a school, she will be able to learn something herself too. Her husband works in a hotel in Chandigarh. She gets very little as honorarium from the Asha scheme and it is quite possible that she hasn't received anything till now.

Like every day, I asked the children of classes 4 and 5 to sit together and children of Class 3 to sit in a group. The first group from Classes 3 and 4 is getting proficient in reading and can recognise numbers up to 1000. They can also add big numbers and I taught them the concept of multiplication tables by the addition method. I want the concept of addition to be absolutely clear before moving on to subtraction. The second group is still unable to recognise numbers up to 100. I made them add numbers without carrying over. I hope that most of these children will learn addition with carry over soon.

Similarly, I asked both the groups of Class 3 to practice addition. Exactly at 12 noon, I set the children free.

Many object to my opening the school on Sundays. I am surprised how narrow minded people are becoming. But the opposition comes from those people whose children are not studying in our school. Many comment that this master has no work at home and so he comes to school to pass his time. This information is also brought to me by these children. No one has dared to talk about it directly to me. I feel that on Sundays children feel free and are neither tense nor pressurised. They behave in a friendlier manner towards me too.

There is a nine-day training workshop at NPRC Barkat from tomorrow. I have to participate in it as the Master Trainer (MT). I am not interested in participating in this training at all. If it was not obligatory, I would not have gone at all. Having had spent all my time with children since August 1st, I have become very attached to them and do not wish to leave them at all. So tomorrow I will leave the children under Vimla, Bindu and Kedari's charge and will be at the training till August 21st.

## **What will People Say? I think !**

My heart's call is -  
Stand at the window,  
For hours on end,  
Gazing  
At the crowds of passerby men,  
At the dark child gleaning and collecting rubbish,  
And at the flying cloud, up in the sky.  
But then I think,  
What will people say?  
My heart's call is -  
Step out of the house,  
And talk  
To a motherless child,  
To an old mother sitting  
In a forlorn house,  
To an old father cloaked  
In the stillness of time.  
But then I think,  
What will people say?  
My heart's call is -  
Jump out of this nest,  
Onto the branches,  
And fly off  
On a journey long.  
Far into this vast sky.  
But then I think,  
What will people say?  
My heart's call is -  
That I remember my first love,  
That I sing with a choked throat,  
That I tie my dancing bells and dance  
To my heart's fill, in the open yard  
But then I think,  
What will people say?

**Date: 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> August 2007**

Today I reached school precisely at 7 am. I have to go for the nine day training at NPRC Barkat as the MT today.

It was drizzling. I stayed in school till 9 am. Prayers were held at 8.15 am; thereafter the children sat down in their classes. I left for Cluster Resource Centre (CRC) Barhet at 9 am, after giving Vimla the charge of various administrative functions and instructions for teaching at school. Today, only Vimla and Bindu were in school. Kedari was not feeling well and was going with me to the hospital. She had come to Dhauntari for this purpose.

At 10 am, we reached CRC, Raimer on Scooter. 28 teachers were issued orders for training but today only 8 were present. One teacher just signed the register and left. The others were smiling at his act.

The focus of today's session was introductions and the training schedule. I briefed the participants about the upcoming nine days of training. The first 3 days were for abhiprerna; the next 3 days were for the foundation programme of the Pratham organisation and in the last 3 days modules were to be presented for evaluation, measurement, testing, quality grading and blueprint etc.

Since the room was almost empty, I was hardly enthused about training. Informal talks were held with participants. During these informal talks, nearly all teachers admitted that these training sessions were becoming exceedingly meaningless. The teachers found them unpleasant. As I see it, there are many reasons for this. Firstly, there is a lack of discipline in the training centres. This situation prevails everywhere - from DIETs to CRCs. In the initial days of DPEP and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the training sessions held at the BRC had an environment charged with enthusiasm. Participants came in groups of 32; they came on time and took interest in the proceedings. The discussions were meaningful and the participants were present for the entire duration in the training hall. Even outside the training room, there was an environment of debate and discussion. A strange glow could be seen on the faces of the participants when they came out from the training sessions, so much so that even in the bus the talk was about the issues of training, the presentations and the quality of presentations. But after the third year, gradually the quality of training declined and today things have reached such a state that no one wants to even enter the training room.

When I conducted a training session at the BRC-level for the first time, I prepared a lot. The participants also asked meaningful questions on related subjects. This practice continued in the trainings of 2004-05. During this time, I tried my best to share

the knowledge I had gained by studying and through experience. The issues of 'Stotra' published by Eklavya proved to be very useful during this period. I shared with my fellow teachers, some relevant articles published in the old issues of these magazines.

Taking part in training with devotion, hard work and interest proved profitable for me too. On the one hand I increased my experience of presenting the subject in an interesting manner and on the other hand, I was appreciated and honoured which was a great achievement for me. I was also noticed by officers and started getting opportunities to work at the state level. Gradually I was promoted from the block level to the state level.

At the end of every training then, I wished that the workshop were longer. Apart from dealing with educational issues, these training sessions brought people emotionally closer to each other. People made new friends and shared their problems, their achievements. All in all, the training sessions were an exhilarating experience. Even officers came in to listen to the sessions every second or third day, and thus became a part of it. Those teachers who had no chance of being introduced to officers or even seeing them, came close to them through these trainings. In a way the officers considered the teachers to be their colleagues.

The current scenario of the training sessions makes me weep. Those few people who were always a burden on the educational world have come to dominate our profession now. They were present before too but since everyone was active, they had to behave appropriately during the training sessions. When absent, they were ignored by the rest. But now, they have become icons. Participants now question, "Why is so and so not present? If nothing happens to him, why should we waste five hours here?".

Our whole educational machinery is responsible for this state of affairs. From the CRC Coordinator to the BSA / DIET Principal and perhaps even higher officers – they are all responsible.

Another significant cause of the failure of training sessions is the corruption which has seeped into our whole system. The objective of the training is not to increase the quality of education but to earn money. All eyes are fixed on the huge amount of money that comes for the training sessions. Earlier, there was a tussle between the DIETs and BRCs as to who would host the training. Because of decentralisation of training, the BRCs won. For the next two to three years, the optimal number of trainees was called for training i.e. 32 trainees in a batch. However later, they started inviting 90 teachers in each batch at a BRC. One can imagine the quality of training in such a situation. Such a state of affairs benefited those who think that it is their fundamental right to not attend trainings and to be present for a session is below their dignity. Money has played an important role in encouraging these absconding

trainees. It happens like this – they meet the BRC Coordinator or Assistant Coordinator and say, "You take my TA / DA for the training and sign on my behalf." Hence both, the trainee and the coordinator are happy. After the trainees leave at the end of the training, the Assistant Coordinator forges the signatures of the absent teachers and is able to make quite a bit of money. And so, money and ration are both saved.

After this, the BRC Coordinator and CRC Coordinator complain that they have to share the money with higher officers. It is said that the District Coordinator, BSA (Anushravan karta) and DIET Principal, are all a part of this racket.

**Date: 15<sup>th</sup> August 2007**

Today, I reached school at 6.30 am. The children had started coming to school early and by 7 am, all the children were present. All the 63 children were present in school today, and that too neatly dressed in their uniform. The children from the Vidya Kendra Dodu and Daura, together with a few un-enrolled children were also present. In all, there were more than 90 children at school today.

I sent all the children with the Shiksha Acharyas - Vimal and Darshani - for Prabhat Pheri. Meanwhile, I started preparations for the flag hoisting ceremony. I dug a pit and fixed a pipe in it with a wheel at the top and a flag in it. The children returned by 7.45 am. Some guardians had also come with sweets. I had also brought 4 kilograms of sweets along with me.

After hoisting the flag, all the children, guardians, and teachers shifted to the campus of the Junior High School, which is about 1-2 kilometres from our school. The cultural programme was to take place there. Pradhanji had also come to our school. He also accompanied us to the Junior High School.

The children wanted their programme to be held in their own school. Some children were reluctant to go to Junior High School but agreed to go at my insistence. Despite their reluctance, I had to take them to another school.

**Date: 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> August**

1. On 15th August, I went to the school first and then to Dehradun to attend the non-formal workshop of LGP for creation of activities.
2. In the workshop from 16th to 18th .
3. Returned on 19th August.
4. On 19th August, I was to be given an award in Chinyalisaud but I was not informed in time.

## Children's Magazines - and I

Whenever I pick up,  
A children's magazine,  
I am transported  
To a time gone by,  
Far back into my past.  
Image upon image,  
Is revived -  
Parks, seesaw, and fun-rides,  
Clothes full of dirt,  
Playing hide and seek, hit and run,  
Jumping around here and there  
Fight today and best friends tomorrow,  
The schoolbag full of books,  
Mother's love, Father's reprimand  
And Guruji's loud voice -  
Parade! Attention!!  
Guruji's scoldings,  
Picnics and outings.  
I remember it all - and much much more.  
Ah! My childhood,  
That wondrous world,  
Out of reach it all is now,  
No matter how much I may try  
Can I retrieve it now?

**Date: 20<sup>th</sup> August 2007**

On Monday I reached Gorsada at 9 am for the training of working teachers. On my way, I received a phone call from the NPRC Coordinator that the Basic Shiksha Adhikari was paying us a visit. On reaching the training venue, I was informed that two district Coordinators and the Basic Shiksha Adhikari had gone with the BRC Coordinator to Upper District Shiksha Adhikari Garhthati Junior High School.

Today, only 4 out of the expected 13 participants were present for training. Since this is the situation almost every day, I have no interest in training. A low turnout does not create an atmosphere where you would like to talk about various topics. I distributed modules of evaluation to participants; I discussed how to frame good questions, evaluation and measurement. The lunch break was at 1 pm and the training session ended.

Training sessions are increasingly becoming uninteresting. More than 25 participants had to take part in this training. Some people, who go to the district headquarters often, received their training in the BRC headquarters. Hence the number of trainees in NPRC has come down. There is no discipline. People come and go at their own will. Some come on the first day and again only on the last day. Naturally those who come regularly feel angry and have developed a disregard for the training. Perhaps now it is too late to bring back the former quality of training.

When I reached my room in Dhauntari at 2 pm, I found two persons waiting for me. They wanted a copy of their wives' Class 5 mark sheets. Their wives had passed class 5 ten years ago. I set out for school at 2.30 pm and met the Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA) on the way. He stopped me and told me that he was returning after visiting my school. Since the school had closed by that time, he must have seen the school from the outside.

In a mocking tone, the BSA said "Your school is good. I was very happy to see flowers in your garden. I saw your work too. The walls are well white washed. The railing on the ramp is very well made and the cleanliness of the school is commendable." I knew he was being sarcastic and I kept quiet. Because of the rains, wild plants and bushes had grown everywhere. Construction work was going on in the school under the child-friendly scheme. Sand, stones, wood, cement and other things were strewn all over the place. Every thing was helter-skelter. So the premises were very dirty. I was worried about this myself, but hoped that perhaps in a month or so everything would be all right. But what can an outsider know, especially if he is an officer? Instead of giving you advice, they are out to find faults with your work.

The BSA Saheb's comment made me anxious for a short while, but I controlled myself. After all, everyone has their own weaknesses. Rarely do officers pay attention to their own weaknesses or think about what their subordinates expect from them. I am fully aware of my weaknesses and am committed to getting rid of them too. I know that I am answerable to God. Whenever I come under any sort of stress, I convey the real situation to him. I am aware of the weak state of affairs at my school and am determined to change that. I hope that soon I will be able to remedy this situation and would be able to stand with my head held high. And I will gain so much self confidence that I will even dare to invite the Education Director to my school.

Then the BSA Saheb asked, "Have you received the letter regarding review of the text book?" Although I had not received the letter from his office, but had received it directly from the Directorate, I said, "Yes". He said that I should meet him before going for the review. I pleaded with him that as per the Directorate's suggestion, we should increase the number of people in our team for the book review. He did not give his assent and left. This conversation took place on the roadside. He was sitting in the bus and I was standing near his window.

I went to school, gave the documents relating to their wives to those two men and returned home.

**Date: 21<sup>st</sup> August 2007**

Today is Tuesday, 20th August. The training at CRC Raimer ended.

Harish and Girish fought.

Explained the blueprint.

Got TA bills filled and paid them.

In the morning, there were only 6 people present.

At lunch time there were 11 people at TA.

Saklani gave us sweets.

Contacted many through phone for book review.

**Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2007**

Today, I went to my own school after participating in the nine-day training as MT. Reached at exactly 7.30 am. As usual, both the volunteer teachers - Bindulesh and Kedari were present. Kedari left school at 9 am today, as she had to deposit an appli-

cation for the post of helper in the Anganwadi. She went to the block headquarters at Duada to give her application. Today I was not feeling well and so did not teach any classes. Before leaving, Kedari had assigned reading practice to the children of classes 4 and 5 from the Teaching Learning Materials (TLM) created for practice in reading. As an exercise, the children had to search for names of flowers, fruits, animals and eatables from the text and write them in their exercise books. The children could only finish half of the task by the time the Sanskrit period started. Vimla gave them practice in reading Sanskrit.

Today Shiv Dutt ji had come to the school. He is helping us create a child-friendly school. I gave him Rs. 2,000/- as an advance. I have to give him an additional Rs. 1,000/- by the 26th.

Today, effective teaching could not take place. I did not take a single class. After the school ended, I paid Ramesh, Surendra and Uttam for breaking stones into small pieces. These three boys broke 18 bags of stones and I paid Rs. 400/- to all three of them. Since no local man was available for this work, I had to get it done by these children. But they did this work willingly and they did it after school.

Today I paid the lady who brings us wood. I gave her Rs. 170/- for two loads of wood. Kedari had brought a pullover knitted by a poor lady to sell at school. It was not knitted well. I told her that I would help the poor woman and asked her to sell the pullover to someone else.

I also paid two children for the ghee today. I had asked them to bring 3 kg of ghee on the 14th. I received a message from the NPRC Coordinator, Shri Bisht that on 27th of August an audit of food related items would be held at the BRC. So I decided to prepare for the audit tomorrow.

**Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2007**

I reached school at quarter to eight today. Most of the children had reached but both the volunteers, Ms. Vimla, and the Acharya of Vidya Kendra, Dodu had not come by then. Even the cook wasn't there. They reached within 5-7 minutes of my arrival. The prayer session started. No child ever wants to come forward to sing the prayer. They have to be asked again and again and sometimes scolded to come forward to sing. Similarly they cannot pronounce the National Anthem and the Oath correctly. In the oath, especially, they make many mistakes. I will have to take this up seriously. I feel that children view the prayer session as a burden. I have to make an effort to make this session interesting and I will do so.

Even today I was not feeling well. My body was aching and I was feeling very tired.

But today I went to all the classes, took attendance myself and taught some methods of teaching to the helper volunteers. I gave both the groups of classes 4 and 5 some exercises from the paper prepared for their reading practice. They were asked to select names of eatables, vegetables, animals, flowers and men from that paper.

Every child learns and understands at his own pace. This is where the teacher loses his/her patience. We want every child to learn every subject at the same pace. Merely accepting this fact will be great help to the children.

In the three papers that I have prepared for their reading, I have included words that the children are familiar with and have heard many times and also simple stories which they can read and understand. The papers have really helped the children and me. Previously, only 3 amongst the 20 children from classes 4 and 5 could read correctly. Now, 10 can read fluently. These 10 children are not only able to understand what they read, but they are also able to classify the subject matter after analysis. Now I have to start with the story paper with this group.

Children from the second group are able to read a few words fluently but get stuck with some words. But whatever they are able to read, they understand. This activity should have been done in class 2 but the children of class 5 are even below the standard of class 2. This is why I had to try this experiment with them and I have got results beyond what I expected.

The concept of new textbooks, where reading is started with words instead of alphabets, and recognition of alphabets is introduced later, has been proved correct by these experiences.

The child understands what he/she is writing with this activity. This can also be tested. I have collected 168 words in my paper. The children often hear these words and often use them and they are not entirely unfamiliar with them. At first I asked the children to read these words after me. Then I asked them to read with emphasis, by putting their finger on each alphabet of every word. Then the words were discussed. For example – "What is Jalebi?" The children answer "A thing to eat, a sweet". The children often answer in the tone of their mother tongue like for - Meethae, they will say - Mithey. "What is a Kurta?" The children answer - thing to bring (laney kee cheez). Here laney means 'wear'. So the children do understand but in expressing themselves, they use words of their mother tongue. Our traditional teaching method not only discourages use of such words but makes fun of them. An ordinary traditional teacher expects children to use solid standard language. He insists on using correct language and this does not allow the child to develop his/her linguistic expression.

We play a game of words through this paper. Today some boys listed Gulab Jamun in the category of flowers. Similarly some boys thought that Chameli was the name of a place and many listed butterfly as a bird. When such situations arise, they provide a good atmosphere for discussion. Many children thought 'Rabri' was rubber and said it is something we put in our hair. Some boys said 'Rabri' is an eraser. All children associated cream with cream rolls and put it in the list of eatables. In local language 'Makri' is called 'makra'. The children could not understand that 'Makra' and 'Makri' were the same thing. They can differentiate between animals and birds but cannot understand the difference between animals and insects. That is why they put butterflies and moths in the list of birds and lizards, cockroaches and snakes under animals. So this activity creates an atmosphere for discussing language, our environment and science etc., all at the same time. I have only realised this now. When I prepared the assignment, my objective was merely to develop the reading skills of children.

I did carry-over additions with group one of class 3 in which only 5 out of 8 children were present. The second group, in which 9 out of 12 children were present, practiced simple additions without carrying-over. I am experimenting with the activity of making tables by addition. For example, if children add 13 two times, they will know what 2 times 13 is. Similarly adding 13 eight times will give us what 8 times 13 is. The children take interest in this. Sometimes they make their own tables and compare them with the tables. They have learnt the tables by heart. When the answers tally, it gives them a thrill and they get to practice addition. Today Jamuna from group 2 was promoted to group 1. She has started addition involving carrying-over now.

I had oral conversations with classes 1 and 2 but no written activity was done with them. Bindulesh looks after these two classes.

**Date: 24<sup>th</sup> August 2007**

I woke up at four in the morning. Did meditation in the meditation room of the Ashram from 5 am to 6 am, took a bath etc. and from six to half past seven sat for meditation again and joined group prayers. I stayed in the Ashram till 9.30 am and prepared certificates for the children who are participating in the inter school competitions organised by the institution.

Exactly at ten, I presented myself in the assembly hall of the district panchayat for the meeting of "Jila Sandarbh Samuh Balika Shiksha". -3-4 women were sitting in the assembly hall and one or two people were milling outside. At 11 a.m. the DEO and the BSA reached there. Like all other meetings, this also appeared to be a formality. The representative of the CMO said a few things about health and nutrition –

girls should have a balanced diet, the teachers should be a little alert at the time of hormonal changes, girls should be informed about these changes, there should be a medical kit in the school etc. etc.

The representative of Bhuvaneshwari Mahila Ashram talked about their programmes being organised for girls and about the radio programme. Similarly the representative of Mahila Samakhya talked about their work.

I did not find anything in this meeting that touched you or could become a cause of inspiration. Like all government programmes, there was a hurry to wind up by 2 pm. Everyone talked about their problems. Most of the time was wasted on the problems of the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV). No solution was found for any problem. Yes, the talk about making arrangements for KGBV with community help was inspiring. But such examples neither teach us anything, nor encourage us, nor can such experiments be repeated elsewhere.

Our whole machinery is drenched with negativity. I put up a proposal that a medical kit should be kept in primary schools which would contain medicines for common ailments like fever, cough, cold etc. I suggested that there should be a two-day training for teachers on how to use this kit. The DEO rebuffed my proposal at once, saying, "If the trained teacher is absent on the day the child falls sick, then this kit will remain unused like the sports and science material". Then he changed the subject and said, "Whichever school I visited, I did not find a single teacher teaching in the class. If I find anyone absent or not teaching now, I will take strong action".

I kept quiet. I did not think it worthwhile to anger him. In every conference of teachers, they repeat the same things in their address.

In this meeting, Shri Pande ji, the ABSA of Nogaon put forward two very effective suggestions in very polite but powerful language. First – the same teacher should not be made MT again and again. He should also be allowed to stay at his school. Second – the experiments of remedial teaching should be done only in the beginning of the session. It should not be done in winters because it is very unpractical. The rest put forward only their problems.

The effort of the district coordinator Shri Bhatt was laudable. One could see his strong intentions to make this meeting a success. But if the team is weak, what could he do. The address of Shri Bhatt was also well delivered.

The workshop ended at 3 p.m. I returned to Dhauntari only today.



## **Fish**

Fish swim,

Fish don't drift,

Fish swim.

Fish don't drift,

Fish drift,

Fish drift towards the source.

Fish don't drift,

Fish swim,

Fish swim against the current.

Man swims,

Man doesn't swim,

Man drifts away.

**Date: 25<sup>th</sup> August 2007**

I woke up at 4 am. I meditated for an hour at the Brahmakumari Ashram. The experience of shifting your attention from the misleading, outside world to the world within is extremely pleasant. You are filled with peace and feel fresh, light and stable throughout the day. Meditation energises the heart, relaxes you and enables you to remain calm in adverse circumstances.

From 5 am to 6 am, I finished the daily chores of the morning and at 6 joined the group prayers at the Ashram again. They have half an hour for meditation and an hour for discourses, during which they read a few sentences uttered by God and then discuss them. They talk about human values, the difficulties of applying them in life and how by following these human values, you can lead a happy life. This is a very energising discourse. We receive a lot of strength from these classes which last for the whole day.

I came to Dhauntari by the seven o'clock bus in the morning. I reached Dhauntari at quarter past nine and went straight to school. Bindulesh was at school. She was teaching a class and the food was being cooked. I did not teach a single class today. On Monday, 27<sup>th</sup> August, there will be an audit of MDM in BRC. So I looked through the MDM receipts and updated them. MDM began in 2003. So I examined all the bills, vouchers, cash books and ledgers dating back to 2003. The previous headmaster's work was not very clear, so I maintained it in my way. I spent the whole day doing this.

**Date: 26<sup>th</sup> August 2007**

Today being Sunday, I stayed at home. I went through the MDM documents once again. I updated the incomplete bill vouchers. I also spent time completing work left over from the week. Completed MDM work of Vyas bahan. Her documentation was incomplete too. I went through it and with her help, her cashbook, ledger and guard file were also updated for the audit.

**Date: 27<sup>th</sup> August 2007**

I went to BRC Dunda today, to get the MDM documents audited. Since I was alone at the school, I had to declare today a holiday.

I set out from home at 7 am and reached BRC Dunda at eleven. BRC is 65 kilometres away from our school.

The BRC auditors were already there. There were two auditors and two rows of teachers near each one of them. Everyone wanted to get their audit done first.

At the BRC, you have to pay a commission to get your documents audited. On paying this commission, the teacher is given a slip of paper. The auditors go through your documents only after seeing this slip. After the audit, the auditors are handed over their pre-decided share of the commission and the balance left is divided amongst the BRC officials. The auditor's commission was fixed either on the basis of the number of students per school, the number of documents to be audited per school, or just a random number fixed per school. Today's amount was decided on the basis of the number of students. For 30 students it was Rs. 300/-, for 30 to 50 it was Rs. 500/-, for 50-100 it was Rs. 600/- and for more than 100 students, it was Rs. 700/-.

At first the teachers were reluctant to give a commission. Some made a noise, some tried to show leadership, but no one was able to get the audit done without giving money. This was because the auditors, after inspecting a teacher's documents, would handover a long list of mistakes to the teacher and would ask him to bring back the documents after correction. The catch was that these mistakes were impossible to rectify. The reason is that when a sum of money is sent to the school, there are no clear instructions as to how and in what manner the money is to be spent. This is especially so with construction work. Every school has its local problems. Members of the Education Committee, the Gram Pradhan, the guardians and even the teacher's colleagues have different views on how the work is to be done, where and to what extent.

In many schools, the Gram Pradhan controls the construction work. The work has to be done according to one's need but the bill vouchers have to be drawn out in a certain way. It is apparent that things like cement, broken stones, sand, iron rods, paint etc. will be purchased according to the school's need. But ultimately, bill vouchers have to be adjusted according to the instructions of the auditor and the JE. If the work is done under the Chairman of the Education Committee (Gram Pradhan), he becomes a sort of contractor. He wants to make some money like this. If the Head Master takes on the responsibility for the work, then he has to look after the labour and the quality of work. This means that he has to leave his classes and spend extra time on this work. He may have to stay back after four to keep an eye on the labour, go to the village to look for the mason or to the market to purchase building materials. Sometimes, for minor things, one has to leave the class and go to the market. The market is usually several kilometres away from the school. The teacher sometimes has to pay money from his own pocket for the building materials. Normally

lady teachers cannot do these things. Many male teachers also avoid getting involved in this. They leave the work to the Gram Pradhan or some other person from the village, making him the leader of the team. These men have nothing to do with quality.

Another disturbing trend is catching on these days. The person or the family who has given the land for the school does not allow anyone else to work on that land. They become the contractors themselves. The teachers are helpless. They do not want to be part of an avoidable controversy and are not able to spend the money, granted for their school, as they think fit. The teacher's role becomes limited to signing the cheque, getting the money from the bank and handing it over to the contractor. Some bold teachers stand against this arrangement and are even able to do good work. But they cannot or are not able to keep away from this chain of commissions. And thus starts this chain of commissions, from the school to the audit.

First and foremost, the shopkeeper is given a commission of 2 to 10 percent for adjusting the bill vouchers. Then comes the commission of up to 2.5 percent to the JE for evaluation of the work done and for adjusting the sum to equal the amount granted in the measurement book. Next is the commission of 2 to 5 percent for the Gram Pradhan. He is given this for signing the cheque if he, in his role as the Chairman of the Education Committee, is not the contractor himself. In such a situation, he gives the teacher a small amount as audit expenses, after assessing the teacher's personality. He also gives the teacher a bill voucher and shares the commission with the JE. He doesn't care about the quality of the work.

A commission is also paid to the CRC Coordinator, the BRC Coordinator and the deputy BEO for certifying how much work has been done or if the work has been completed. This commission is also paid for forwarding the file and ensuring it reaches the senior officials. Also, there are the issues of payment, like the last instalment for construction, or if the school is being built, then the full amount. This, together with the last permission for handing the building over, justify the commission for the CRC/BRC Coordinator and the Deputy BEO. For all this the teacher has to make several trips to the DPO office where he is scolded, humiliated, given much advice and reprimanded for the mistakes in the file which he has to correct time and again. Alongside, he is also distributing the money. Often, he does all this at the cost of his own self-respect because even though there are multiple people earning commissions in this cycle, the ultimate responsibility for the quality of the work rests on him. Irrespective of who did the actual work, if any villager complains to the higher authorities about the quality of the work, the teacher is blamed. The teacher has to

answer for everything. If there is an enquiry and a fault is found, then the loss is recovered from his pay. Hence, every teacher wants to ensure perfect documentation. In spite of a teacher's efforts, auditors find mistakes in the teacher's papers and he has to offer this last commission here before he can relax.

It is not that the department or the officers do not give any freedom to teachers to take up construction work. Under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, instructions have been given on how to spend the granted money. If the Gram Pradhan interferes unnecessarily, then the instruction letter gives the teacher the right to convert the joint account of the Village Education Committee into a single account so that he is able to spend the money for construction according to the instructions of the department. However, from the point of view of public behaviour, this does not look good. The Gram Pradhan may feel insulted by this kind of behaviour and even if the teacher gets the account converted to his name alone, he cannot get out of paying commissions. He has to be a part of that chain.

No teacher takes this step anyway. Teachers depend on the Gram Pradhan for a lot of things. We teachers have our weaknesses too. Sometimes, we are late to school, or we close school early, or we take 'french leave' or we are not able to give the children our full attention, sometimes the food isn't prepared and many other such scenarios. If we do not maintain a good relationship with someone and that person lodges a false complaint against us, then we need a certificate from the Gram Pradhan to escape punishment.

In my opinion, all departments are alike when it comes to matters of money. A friend of mine once told me that the District Panchayat never approves any work without first taking a 30 percent commission from the contractor or organisation.

This fault is now a permanent fixture. We don't seem to have a way to reform it. Many times, at a district or state-level workshop, I thought of making the suggestion that the commission amounts for all department officers we come into contact with, be transparently standardised and the CRC Coordinator be authorised to handle all transactions. They do this indirectly a lot of times anyway. This will save the teacher's time and will shield him from all the rebuke and humiliation that comes his way. There are perhaps only 2 to 3 percent of teachers who want to handle such transactions. Generally teachers want to avoid doing the work of a contractor or writing daily accounts of bread and butter.

So on 28th August 2007, I also gave the ABRC Rs. 500/- for the MDM audit of 63 children. The auditor ticked with red pencil on the register (did not sign anywhere) and I came back home.

Later my teacher colleagues told me that the auditors asked the remaining teachers to sit down and told them how to maintain a cash book and how a ledger is made. If I had not started for home at 1 pm, I would have been compelled to stay on and would have incurred the additional expenditure of a hotel room. Teachers are given no TA for visits to the Block Headquarters for the audit. They have to pay it from their own pockets.

**Date: 6<sup>th</sup> September 2007**

I reached school at seven in the morning. These days the teacher from the Vidya Kendra is also managing her centre from the school. The villagers have gone higher up the hills with their buffaloes and other animals. During the rainy season, families from this village shift to higher places where they have built temporary residences. There is lot of fodder there these days which ensures that the buffaloes give lots of milk. They have their farms higher up on the hills too. Taking their animals there assures them of dung for the farms. Some people have orchards of apples, apricots and peaches. In the sloping ground of the hills, potatoes grow aplenty. Some grow green peas which is a cash crop.

In higher places, on step-like sloping farms and fallow land, people sow seeds of hemp. By September hemp plants are ready. In the hot sun of September they rub the leaves of hemp with their palms and prepare hashish, which is sold surreptitiously, at high prices.

The children also accompany their parents. The school is thus 5 to 7 kilometres away from their homes. The children of Vidya Kendra, Anganwadi and classes 1 and 2 get tired of walking such long distances. The walk to school and back is a 10 kilometre walk every day. Thus the attendance of younger children is greatly decreased. Not a single child comes to the Vidya Kendra. So the teacher from there teaches in my school. This situation continues till the end of October and if the weather is not very cold, it can go on till the first week of November.

In November they sow rada (a variety of sarso), potatoes and come down to sow wheat. In September the attendance of children is between 10 and 30 out of 63.

In these two months the guardians come and plead with us, "Guruji don't scold them for being absent. This is our only means of income for the whole year. You know yourself, wheat and rice farming does not give much. We hardly get more than 5 to 7 sacks of rice in a year etc." We teachers develop a relationship with villagers over time – it is like we belong to one family. We are a part of all aspects of their lives – the good, the bad and their secrets become ours.

I did not teach anything today. I was in the mood for a holiday. While coming to school in the morning, I met the owner of the cement shop. I had purchased some cement and iron rods from his shop for some construction work in the kitchen. When I asked him for the bill, he asked for a commission. I told him that I wanted a bill for the amount I had spent, not a fictitious bill. But he became adamant and said, "Whether you ask for a bill equal to your purchases or greater or less than the true amount, you will have to give a commission of 5 percent." I warned him that if he didn't give me a bill, I would report him to the consumers' forum. I have to attach the bill with other papers. The shopkeeper was agitated by my threat and said, "Do what you want!" I did not think it right to argue with him and so came to school.

At school, I drafted a notice for the shopkeeper from the Education Committee and sent some children with it to Pradhanji for his signature.

Meanwhile a gentleman came to the school. He was a pine resin contractor. He had come to lodge a complaint against the children. He said that the children would overturn or throw away tin boxes hanging from the pine trees for resin collection on their way home. He said, "How do these boxes harm the children? Please scold and thrash those children who go home through the forest."

I told the gentleman that I would definitely talk about it to the naughty children and make them understand. After some small talk, he went away. I did talk to the children after he left, but did not scold or beat them. I was reminded of my own childhood days and smiled to myself.

When I was young, we did the same thing. During our holidays when we went to the forest to graze our animals or to bring grass and wood, we would upturn the tumblers full of resin collected from pine trees. We would even bring some tumblers home. On Diwali, we would mix the resin with rice husk and burn it like lamps in the courtyard. My mother and grandmother would apply fresh resin on their cracked heels. Resin was also used to make a fire.

Once we had overturned a PWD trolley full of tar into a ditch 500 metres deep. It happened like this. The workers of the PWD were spreading tar on the road. 7 to 8 of us children were on our way to school. Some labourers were pushing a trolley full of tar. They asked us to help them push it. We began pushing and then thought of some mischief. We pushed hard and turned the trolley towards the edge of the road. The labourers felt helpless and within seconds the trolley overturned and fell into a ditch. We stood for a short time watching it fall and then ran to school. The workers came after us and complained about us. We were trembling with fear, thinking that

our Guruji would give us a good thrashing. Our Guruji called us and asked, "Did you overturn the trolley?" We said, "Sir, they asked us to push the trolley. We did that. Suddenly the trolley moved in a downward direction. We could not control it and it fell into the ditch. It is not our fault." Our Guruji asked the worker, "Did you ask these children to push the trolley?" He did not say no. So Guruji said, "Then the mistake is yours. You wanted the children to work for you?" He scolded us a little and then sent us to the class. We had a hearty laugh later.

After the departure of that gentleman, the children came back from Pradhanji's place with the notice signed by him. I packed the notice in an envelope and gave it to the children to get it registered in the village post office.

The cook reached late today and so the food was not cooked.

A funeral procession passed outside the school today. We found out that a young woman from the village had died today. It was time for our lunch break, so we all stood up and kept silent for two minutes to pay our condolences for her and the school was closed after the lunch break.

I will be on leave from tomorrow i.e. 7th to 9th September. So I gave the charge of school to Vimla, the Shiksha Acharya.

Shri Shiv Duttji, our guardian and member of the Education Committee, had come to visit when the school opened. He works as a mason and we have given him the work of repairing the kitchen and putting a lintel on top of it. For this we will use Rs. 5,000/- out of the money given to us for this year.

Shiv Duttji had prepared the bricks beforehand. Today, I explained the work to him - the height at which the lintel was to be placed, the position of the skylight, the direction in which the floor should slope in, and where the rack should be built etc.

Shiv Duttji is an elderly gentleman. He must be over 70 years old, but he has the strength and energy of a young man. He understands the work very well. He is also a member of our Education Committee. Three of his children study in our school – 2 boys and a girl. He married again at the age of 58. His second wife would not be more than 34-35 years old. The first wife had borne him only 3 or 4 daughters.

I sometimes supervise the work and chat with him. He becomes emotional when narrating the story of his struggles and dearth of money. He says, "When I had no son from my first wife, I became very frustrated and disappointed. Then my well-wishers and friends suggested that I marry a second time at the age of 58. I did that

and now I am happy. I have to struggle for my children but I do it happily." Shiv Duttji tells me some very interesting stories. I find his stories so compelling, that often, I think of compiling them under the title, 'Shiv Duttji's stories'.

I met Matvarlalji on my way home. He asked me to accompany him to the Sub-divisional Education Officer's office and help him with some important work. His daughter had studied up to Class 8 from our school and now she was married. Since she had not studied further, she had not taken her TC.

Recently, applications were invited in her village for the post of Anganwadi Worker. She wanted to apply but her age was six months more than required. Her parents wanted to reduce the age of the girl in the school documents. She was from a scheduled caste and there was a good possibility of her being hired due to the reservation.

I went with him to meet the Sub-divisional Education Officer and pleaded with him. He agreed and issued an affidavit ordering the concerned Headmaster to amend the date of birth in the document.

On my way back from the office of the Sub-divisional Education Officer, I went to Dunda. A few Tibetans live here. I wanted to meet the Lama in the Buddhist Monastery but could not meet him. I spent the night at the Brahma Kumari Ashram. I took part in the ashram activities like meditation and discourses. At night, I completed the paper work for the inter-school students competition organised by the Ashram on their annual day and prepared a plan for conducting the programme. I was invited by the organisation to help with the arrangements of this programme. I kept working till late. I worked for sometime on the Internet and slept at 11.30 pm.



### **Cannot Leave Behind...**

Some people cannot  
Leave behind their vanity  
And instead end up  
Losing much love.

Some people cannot  
Leave behind the branches  
And instead end up  
Losing a great flight.

Some people cannot  
Leave behind their frustrations and dilemmas,  
And instead end up  
Losing a lifetime of faith.

Some people cannot  
Leave behind their doubts  
And instead end up  
Losing a life full of peace and calm.

**Date: 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> September 2007**

I stayed in Uttarkashi from 7th to 9th September; I helped members of the organisation conduct the children's competitions held at the Government Post Graduate College, Uttarkashi. I worked with members of the Brahma Kumari organisation in the college auditorium and conducted various competitions for 150 children from 11 schools.

The children from the Junior Section (Classes 6 to 8) and Senior Section (Classes 11 and 12) took part in all the competitions with great enthusiasm. The competitions ranged from questions and answers, quiz, self-composed poem, poster making, painting, speech, folk songs, essay and folk dance. Children from 3 Government Schools - Government Inter College Uttarkashi, Government Inter College Joshiada, and Government Girls Inter College, Uttarkashi - and 8 private schools had taken part in this competition. These are all the reputed schools of the town, where children are admitted on the basis of an entrance exam. Children from affluent families study here. Not a single Government Junior High School took part, though invitations were sent to them too. Government School teachers prefer not to participate because they think that children from private schools will outperform their students. They also feel that the poor children of government schools cannot learn as well their private school going counterparts because of the difference in their backgrounds and home environs.

But the fact is that we – the Government teachers - are unable to put in the extra time and effort needed for conducting such extracurricular activities.

We got the opportunity to see the children perform naturally in the poster making, solo singing, folk song and dance events. However, the children's performances in speech, essay and self-composed poem are dictated by elders. Children recite memorized speeches artificially and if they forget one sentence, they lose the thread of the rest of the speech too. The same thing happens in poetry and essay too. The language, the sentences and many times the whole theme make it amply clear that the piece was not written by the child. Parents and guardians try to make the language as intricate, intellectual and difficult as possible. They come up with words which even the audience find difficult to understand. They think that they will make the child look very intelligent. On the contrary, when a child recites a text written by someone else, one can clearly see tension writ on his face. The same is the case with poetry writing.

In a way the quiz competition is a live example of skill in cramming. What is so great

about learning things by heart and reproducing them? What do we want to inculcate or develop in our children through such competitions?

Instead of allowing prior preparation like this, children should be given topics which they can relate to, a short while before the actual performance. Topics should essentially be given a half hour or so before the competition so that the children get some time for thinking and contemplation. This can be done for both, essay and speech competitions. This will inculcate a habit of writing and thinking before speaking. It would also give us a glimpse of the child's thoughts, knowledge and opinion on that particular subject.

In music, dance and painting, children are able to display their natural talent with full freedom.

In the painting competition, I saw children fully absorbed in their work giving shape to their imagination. It seems meaningless to award first, second and third prizes to this physical manifestation of a child's imagination. Every child paints a different picture about the same subject. I saw the subject, 'India of my dreams' depicted by many scientific experiments and other the material facilities by one child, while another child showed India being rich in natural resources – green forests, butterflies fluttering on flowers, rivers flowing, children playing in the park, animals grazing in green fields. A third child depicted a happy village – elders talking in a Chaupal, women embracing each other, people celebrating, children going to school holding hands. How will you give them ranks? On what basis? Only on combination of colours, clarity of illustrations or something else? As far as illustrating the theme is concerned, everyone has been successful from their own point of view. But in every school and in every competition, it is not the drawings that are assessed but emotions of children. I feel that such competitions play with the emotions of children, and are unjust. Can all the children be awarded prizes in an equal manner? It will take some time for the teachers of private schools, managers and education officers to understand this. At present, children are only a means of fulfilling the ambitions and egos of teachers and guardians.

**Date: 10<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2007**

Today I reached Dhauntari at 9 in the morning. I went to the CRC. The CRC Coordinator Shri Bishtji had reached at nine. From 10 to 12 noon, the dry meeting went on. Teachers came one by one, filed their information and went away. Only 4 or 5 teachers remained till the end. They chatted for some time and left.

This day of monthly meetings is a holiday in a way. Our CRC Coordinator is not capable of keeping the teachers together for 2 to 4 hours and creating an atmosphere of effective discussion.

During the meeting, the leaders of the workers' organisation came for subscription. I left the place as soon as they started the topic of subscription.

I dislike politics immensely and also dislike those people who threaten and mislead other teachers on the basis of their leadership.

Teacher leaders have greatly limited their role in education. They are only concerned with pay, service regulations or issues regarding transfers. It is true that these teacher leaders raise their voices if the Government takes some adverse decision in the service related areas and the Government has to concede to them. But are teachers only Government servants? If education is a means of holistic development of children, then should teacher leaders have no role to play in decisions about education?

From the very beginning, I have been associated with the teacher training organised by DPEP and later, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education For All). I have never seen a single teacher leader sitting attentively in the training room. I never heard or read of any leader suggesting ways of improving or even commenting on the quality of training. However, if there's some problem in the arrangement of food during the training sessions, everyone makes a lot of noise. Even in this, their interests are selfish and not the overall welfare of teachers. Many times, they crib and complain only because they do not get along well with the BRC Coordinator, or are jealous of him.

Teacher leaders go everywhere to collect subscription money and when its election time, they accuse each other of misusing that money. While many come to collect subscription money, nobody gives an honest account of how that money was spent. An ordinary teacher has no way of knowing how the money he gave was used. On the other hand, when the syllabus for the state is drawn up and reviewed, none of these teachers organisations intervene – either negatively nor positively. They have such a callous attitude towards the most important aspect of education. I doubt that any teacher leader has a copy of the syllabus or can even talk about any textbook and its contents. It is rare to find teacher leaders like the late Padam Singh, who contributed actively to the teaching process. The rest perhaps cannot even recall the names of four children of their school.

Even in the matter of transfer policy, teacher leaders have not been able to initiate

any effective steps. When transfers take place during the session, the wives of leaders and people with contacts at the right places get transferred to the good places. Here too, teacher leaders tend to use their influence. They get their own 'men' transferred to the good locations. Teachers with no contacts are sent to some faraway place and they stay there throughout their lives. There are many schools where they have 3 teachers for 10 children and one teacher for 150 children. What have our teacher leaders done to reform this faulty system?

Teacher leaders always protest against being assigned extra work – work apart from teaching. But they have not been able to influence the Government to free teachers of this extra burden. On the contrary, they often interfere and mislead teachers.

In June 2008, teachers opposed BLO, but ultimately they had to work in July. While June was a holiday for children, July was not. Hence, schools and children suffered.

In November-December 2006, teachers of primary schools were assigned the job of revising the voter list. They had to get identity cards made, get the photos for the identity card taken etc. All the administrative officers, right from the Tehsildar to the District Collector were under great pressure. The teacher leaders incited teachers to protest against this. Some even returned the orders. But when the administration started disciplinary action against teachers, then these teacher leaders backed off.

Similarly during the June vacations, teachers were once again, given the task of revising the voters list. The leaders, yet again, asked all teachers to return the orders. And yet again the teachers had to do this work in July.

Our teacher leaders gave a written suggestion to the State Project Director, Uttarakhand that all teacher training should be held during the summer vacations. Holding them during the session affects the students adversely.

The State Project Office followed this suggestion and before 21st May 2008, conducted the training module, State Level Resource Person training and Master Trainer training janpad-wise. A schedule was made to complete training from 25th May to 30th June. But as soon as the first cycle of training started, our teacher leaders started opposing these trainings, saying that no trainings should be held during vacations. Teachers left for their homes without completing the training.

These leaders became a victim of their own policies. The various training modules were completed in June, but the confusion this gave rise to, affected the quality of the training.

This is just an example of how our teacher leaders display their fickle-mindedness on many occasions.

And so, I did not give any money to the teacher leaders who had come to collect subscription money. I told them "If you can give me an account of last year's subscription money, then I can think of giving you some for this year". I did not give any money but the other teachers did. Our teacher leaders know the tricks of collecting money.

On returning from the meeting, the shopkeeper of the cement shop gave me the bill. May be he had received the notices. Giving me the bill he said, "Guruji, you took offence unnecessarily". I did not reply and came back home with the bill.

Today I was not feeling well. I read the newspaper for a short while and then went to Nikhil's house to watch the news on the T.V. I wanted to know more about Nawaz Shariff's return.

While watching T.V., I came across a news item about a Madhya Pradesh teacher who had advertised in the newspapers for a female friend to massage him and fulfil his sexual needs. The police, on reading the advert, conducted a sting operation on the teacher and took him to the police station. Here, they asked him vulgar questions again and again – just to enjoy themselves at the expense of his discomfort. The teacher, on his part, was visibly ashamed and kept apologising, saying that he would never do something like this again.

The TV channels played this clip on loop. Several questions came to my mind. What do these channels want to convey by showing such news? What is worth showing and what is not? What was so great about conducting a sting operation on a poor teacher?

In a country and in a society where nothing is immoral if done on the sly, who gave the police and the TV channels the right to define morality?

This teacher could have fulfilled his desires without the advertisement. Then the police and journalists would not have known about him. But he expressed his feelings. What does freedom mean in a democracy?



### **The Cat and the Mouse**

Once upon a time this cat,  
Caught a nice, fat rat.  
The rat was nice and fat,  
But a broken tooth he had!  
A one-toothed rat when the cat looked at,  
Oh, like crazy laughed the cat!  
Off then ran the rat like a shot,  
For her grip the cat had lost.

**Date: 11<sup>th</sup> September 2007**

From today, 11th September 2007, there is a change in the school timings. The school will now be open from 10 am to 4 pm. I reached the school at 9.30 am. The children reach school in time - at 10 am - because they get their food in school. Mothers push their children to go to school early in the morning. Even the small children who come from far off places (Chania) reach school by 10.30 am with mud all over them. Today, even the cook came on time.

On reaching school, I found the lock of the office broken. Someone had purposely hit it with a stone and broken it. But no damage had been done inside. It is very common for school locks to be broken. It has happened many times in the past too. A few times, boxes of biscuits were stolen after the break-in. Once someone took the rice. I have changed the lock many times. Our school is at quite a distance from the residential locality and is in a lonely place. One finds pieces of beedee and empty packets of snacks in the verandah. We have not been able to find the culprits.

I was frustrated to see the broken lock. My desire to make this school grand and attractive received a setback yet again.

I feel desperate when I see the community taking no interest in the school and mischievous elements acting like this. I feel like doing nothing for this school or its children. But when I see the children and their innocent faces, my anger melts and I think, "After all what is the fault of these children?" And once again I start my struggle with all my might.

As soon as the children reached the school, Vimla and Bindulesh asked them to clean the room and spread the jute mattress on floor for them to sit on. The prayer began at 10 am and by 10.30 am, the children were seated in their classes.

Once the children were seated, they gave rice, dal, oil, salt and other food items to the cook, and she began cooking. The children can now estimate what quantity is needed. They count the number of children present and give the cook the things required. The cook prepared the meal by exactly 12.15 p.m today.

In the first period, I got the school campus cleaned by children of classes 4 and 5. Lots of grass and bushes had grown all around the school. I also helped the children with the work. The village children do this kind of work with great expertise. They are not hesitant about engaging in physical labour. On the contrary, they enjoy it.

After the hour long cleaning programme, I asked classes 4 and 5 to sit together and

told them the story of the Panchatantra, the third lesson in the class 4 textbook. We discussed the story and also had an oral question-answer round. I asked the children to select the words whose meaning they did not know. The children wrote down the difficult words in their answer books. I then discussed these words with them and tried to get the children to find out the meanings themselves. Then all the words and their meanings were written on the black board and children were asked to note them down in their answer books.

Working on one subject with children and doing both oral and written work takes all the time till the mid-term break. More time has to be spent talking to the children who can neither read nor write, just to ensure they understand the subject. Half the children in classes 4 and 5 find it difficult to read and write, but are adept at the subject orally.

After the lunch break, I talked with the same classes about crops, farming and means of irrigation.

No written work was done. In the last period, Science, I told them about the internal organs of the body and asked them to draw an illustration of the lungs at home.

Vimla took care of the class 3 children and Bindulesh looked after classes 1 and 2.

The total attendance today was 53/63. Attendance began declining from the first week of September. With the end of the rainy season, when the sun starts getting stronger, the children start going with their families to sow hemp. For two months children are busy with this.

Came home. After tea and newspaper, read the August issue of Chakmak. From 5 pm to 6.30 pm, I went to the market for a stroll.

Wrote the diary from 9 pm to 9.30 pm. Read Kadambani till 11 and went to sleep at 11 p.m.

**Date: 13<sup>th</sup> September 2007**

Today, I was on casual leave. I woke up at 7.30 in the morning, got ready and reached the market at nine. According to the fixed programme, I went to the house of my fellow teacher, late Harish Oswal for a condolence visit. With me were the HPRC Coordinator Shri Bisht, Girish Thapliyal, Sobti Vyas, Rajni Chauhan, Jabra Devi and Ravi Dutt. All of us set out from Dhauntari at 10 am and reached Harish's village, Newgaon, at noon. It was a difficult walk. We had to climb about 4.5 kilometres to reach his village.

It was an atmosphere of mourning. Visitors kept coming in constantly. We met Harish's elder brother – Girish Oswal – and his father. We sat with them for about an hour and consoled them. Our fellow lady teachers met the mother and the wife of the deceased.

Harish was a sharp and outspoken teacher. He was never hesitant or afraid of making his point. Though very intelligent, he had fallen prey to bad habits. He was notorious amongst teachers and the general public for being quarrelsome and negligent of his duty. But it was also widely known that he was a clean hearted person who though quarrelled often, never kept any ill feeling in his heart. His bad habits were the cause of his downfall.

He was dead drunk when he left for home at night and slipped on a rock. His body was found the next morning after a long search and had to be pulled out with ropes with great effort.

**Date: 1<sup>st</sup> October 2007**

I reached school today at quarter to ten. I was the only teacher at school today. Only 18 children were present. I asked all the children to sit in one place and told them that we would practice good handwriting. Then I gave them a dictation, and asked them to exchange notebooks and mark their peers.

They, on their part, corrected their classmate's notebooks with great concentration, trying to uncover as many mistakes as possible. This improves their language too.

Till lunch break, the children studied only language. The children from classes 1 and 2 were given words for reading and writing. I gave stories to the rest of the children to read and asked them to come up with five questions for every story they read.

Initially, the children came up with questions based on what, why, where and who. For example, the title of the given story was "Two Goats". The children framed questions like this on this story –

1. Who was sitting on the bridge?
2. Where was the other goat grazing? etc.

After the interval, I gave the children a test. At 2.30 pm, I let them leave with instructions to come dressed in clean clothes for Gandhi Jayanti.

I worked till 4 pm and completed the evaluation registers for two classes. At 4 pm, I left for home.

**Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2007**

Today was Gandhi Jayanti. I reached school at nine in the morning. The children also reached by nine. We had a flag hoisting ceremony. I borrowed an implement from the neighbourhood for digging the earth. I made a pit to plant the flag post. I put in the rope, prepared the flag and decorated the base of the flag post with lime and made a wheel on it. The children stood in a row, sang group songs and shouted slogans.

Precisely at ten, the flag was hoisted. Today the NPRC Coordinator, some guardians and Pradhanji had come. After the flag hoisting, all the children sat together, sang some songs and presented some dances and poems.

I told the children about Gandhiji, Lal Bahadur Shastriji, and other patriots. I allowed the children to leave at 11:30 am, after the distribution of sweets.

Afterwards, the NPRC Coordinator sat in the office and filled the quality form. The children got a B for educational achievement, without even giving a test and the school got an A for 'physical state'.

Back home, I began preparations for going to Almora. I turned over the pages of the textbooks and thought of questions based on competency. I also, glanced through the questions prepared in the previous workshops.

I slept early today. Tomorrow, I have to go to Almora to attend the State Level Question Paper / Blueprint Workshop.

**Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> October, I set out at 9 am from home for Almora where I had to participate in the workshop preparing the blueprint for competency based question papers being made under LGP.

I met Dinesh Nautiyal in Rataldhar. Passing Shri Nagar we reached Karnaprayag at night and stayed in a hotel there. We discussed the blueprint for some time and did some homework. We slept at ten as we were tired after this long journey.

On 4<sup>th</sup> October, we set out at 7 am from Karnaprayag and reached Almora at four in the afternoon, passing Gwaldam, Garur, and Kausani on the way. In Almora, arrangements for our stay had been made at the Sewa Nidhi Institute. Soon the DIET Principal Shri Chaubeji and Saurabh also came there. We talked about the next day's programme.

Food arrangements had been at the DIET which was about 1.5 kilometres from the Sewa Nidhi. In the afternoon we roamed about and visited Almora's Lala Bazar.

We participated in the blueprint production workshop from 5th to 7th October. I worked in the Hindi group. There were eight people in this group. I was asked to act as the leader of the group. Everyone was fully committed and worked very hard for these three days.

We stayed in Almora on the 7th and went to the bazar, talking about primary education and the beauty of Almora.

On 8th October, I went to Jageshwar. There are a group of attractive temples in Jageshwar from the 8th and 11th century. Temples of the same style and tradition are found in Lakhamandal, Uttarkashi. It appears that the same king or the same dynasty had built these temples. Recent excavations in Lakhamandal have revealed numerous small temples with Shivlingas in them. Their design is a copy of the small temples built in the campus of the Jageshwar temple. We visited the museum in Jageshwar too. It is very well built and contains many old statues.

Almost a kilometre before Jageshwar, are the Dandeshwar temples. They appear to have been built much later than Jageshwar. They are comparatively new but the architecture is like that of Jageshwar.

On our return journey, we visited the famous temple of the Golu god. We saw thousands of bells hanging there along with the letters of devotees. It is said that the devotees write their wish and tie it in the temple and the Golu god fulfils it. The Golu god was actually a king of Pithoragarh but he is worshipped like a god. He was a just king in his times and even now people believe that he gives justice to all.

After visiting Jageshwar we returned to Almora at about 2 p.m.

We set out for Dehradun today at 7 pm and stayed the night at Katgodham in the bungalow of Kumaun Mandal Vikas Nigam. We travelled from Almora to Katgodham at night. We listened to music in the car and held discussions on various topics of which primary education was the most important.

**She said "Yes!"**

I was overjoyed

That she said, "Yes!"

I was overjoyed

That she hadn't said, "No" in a long time.

*It won't happen,*

*I am broken,*

*I cannot come back to myself,*

*It's all very difficult!*

*It's not in my destiny-*

And how many more

Such sentences, full of

Heartbreak, had become a part of

Her daily parlance.

*No, not, difficult, never*

Had become her favourite words.

Today, when she said,

*I want to learn something,*

*I want to study something,*

*I want to hum something,*

*And I want to write a song that has taken my fancy -*

I felt that somewhere, somehow,

I had become a part of her life.

**Date: 11<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

I stayed at home from 11th October to 14th October. I wasn't feeling well ever since I returned from Almora. I had a slight fever and no desire to do anything. I tried naturopathy during these four days – Neti, Vaman, Kunjar Kriya, steam bath and tied wet bandage. It gave me great relief.

On October 11th and 12th, I went to Bharkot to refresh the voters list. But I found no one at home. Either they had gone to work in their fields or had gone to distant 'Dand' to sow hemp. In Kafalwanu, I sat with Chandan Singh and got the photos in the voters list identified.

I stayed at home on the 13th and 14th. I read the newspaper and turned over the pages of one or two old magazines. I also updated the diary.

**Date: 15<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

I did not go to school today, as there was the monthly meeting of CRC and TLM fair. No one had made or brought the teaching learning material. The CRC Coordinator collected all the information and distributed Halchal etc. and the books given by the Pratham organisation.

The meeting went on till 2 pm. I stayed at home after 2 pm. I made flower beds and watered them. I read a few magazines and wrote some letters.

**Date: 16<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

I reached school at 9.30 am. I waited till 10 am for all the children. 28 children were present at the prayers. The cook had not come yet. I had to go out on voters list work today too. So I put up a notice on the notice board about my programme, and distributed 2 packets of biscuits to each child. I gave them a holiday and set out towards Satiyalidhar for the BLO's work. In Satiyali, I got the news of Shri Lakhiram Chachaji's death. So I went straight to his house and joined in his last rites.

If it was merely to attend his funeral, perhaps I would not have gone. But since I had given the children a holiday today, I decided to go. I postponed the BLO work for a day. Today, I felt very sorry about leaving the school. The poor children, they innocently went back home with bags on their back without any reaction. If they were more aware of their rights, they would have definitely asked me, "Why this oppression? Have we not the right to even have two teachers in our school?" My children are not happy when they get a holiday, as is the common notion. But I helplessly

watched them going back to their homes. I also have my own compulsions. After all, I am a government servant. Whatever work is considered important by the Government, it will ask me to do it on a priority basis. Patwariji has come to school many times since September 28th and insisted that the school may be closed as the work of verifying the voters list must be completed.

As long as you are a BLO (Booth Level Officer) you are a worker of the Election Commission. So this work has to be completed first at any cost. The ADM had himself expressed the same thing in the meeting.

Anyway no school work can be done, from today till 31st October. The school will remain closed, because there is no arrangement for any other teacher to come. A teacher from Junior High School Bhadkot is also busy preparing the voters list and the panchayat children also left.

I reached home after the funeral at about 5 pm. I read the newspaper, took care of the flower beds and then went for a walk. The electricity came back on at 8 p.m. and then I wrote my diary.

**Date: 17<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

I reached the school at quarter to ten. About 25 children had come by then. Prayers were held at ten. The cook did not come today too. I also had to go and visit each home to confirm and revise the voters list. I declared a holiday for the children and wrote the notice on the blackboard. Today I revised the list of Dora Majna. Tomorrow has also been declared a holiday. Once again, the same painful, helpless feeling.

**Date: 18<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

I went to school today and remained there till 11 am. After that, I left the children and went to Dadu for the voters list work. I took the help of Vimla and confirmed all the voters. None of the voters were willing to give their photograph. Many had gone to their fields to work and we met only very aged persons or children at home. This is delaying the work of revising the electoral rolls. I stayed in the village till 2 pm. and then came back to Dhauntari and left later for Uttarkashi. I stayed in the Ashram on 18th night and discussed various topics with Ghanshyamji.

**Date: 19, 20, 21 October 2007**

19th, 20th and 21st were holidays due to Dashera. I stayed in Uttarkashi from 19th evening to 20th October. I helped in the exhibition at Kuteti. I went home on 21st

morning. I got a DTH connection today. Their representative came and fixed the connection. He also stayed with me for the night since he missed his train.

**Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2007**

I went to school today and stayed there till 11 a.m. After eleven, I went to Warkha village and Thati colony to do revise the electoral rolls. After returning, I prepared the list of those voters whose photos are missing.

**Date: 9<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

Today there was a rumour that the D.M. (District Magistrate) is coming on a tour. The new D.M. is very strict. He has suspended many male and female teachers for not doing the needful in MDM or has cut their pay. Today there was a good chance of his coming in connection with the Panchayat elections. I too reached the school at nine because I had not filled the MDM register since September 1, as I was on election duty from September 2 to 7 and was in Naogaon.

Soon after reaching school, I counted the children present and completed the register. By this time children had also come. Since our school is also a voting booth, I asked the children to trim the bushes, clean the rooms and the drains. I cleaned the toilet myself and got the pipeline repaired. I asked the cook to clean the kitchen. It was 12 noon by the time all this work was done. Today only 10 children were present. The sun is very strong now and the season for sowing hemp has begun. So, very few children will come till mid-October. I am not worried about the atmosphere of the school or about the documentation, but today I was a little concerned about the low attendance of children. If the DM sees such a low attendance, then he would definitely be apprehensive about the attendance on other days. Very few officers look at academic achievements. They don't show any interest in children or talk informally with the staff. This is one of the reasons why teachers are scared of the officers' tours.

The polling party had come by 2 pm. I had allowed children to go home after lunch at 1.30 pm. The D.M. did not come and I heaved a sigh of relief.

I gave the necessary materials to the polling party, made arrangements for a cook for them, handed over the keys of school to them and left for home at four.

At five, I went to the village and motivated the villagers to vote for the candidate of our Gram Pradhan.

I was busy till midnight with the election campaign. I slept at midnight.

**Date: 10<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

Today, on 10th September, I slept till eight in the morning. After finishing the morning chores, I went to vote, and then returned to my room in Dhauntari. I talked to Saurabh Sir on the telephone. I plan to take 15 days leave and complete my writings. I informed Saurabh Sir about this and he said that I could go to his place and finish my work there. I agreed and I will probably finish my writings at his place. On earlier occasions too, I had written some articles during my stay with him. I will be able to read a lot of books at his place too. During the day I read a few more pages of 'Letter to the Teacher'. I wrote the diary at night, read for sometime and slept at eleven. Today nothing special happened.

**Date: 15<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> October 2008**

I stayed in BRC Dundaon October 15th and 16th to take part in the Feedback Workshop organised under the Learning Guarantee Programme – Broadening of the understanding (Samajh Ka Vistar).

I met Shri K.R. Sharma. The meeting brought to my mind many issues.

Ordinarily teachers do not take much interest in any workshop. The resource persons have to speak more than necessary to get the teachers to express their opinions about any subject. They have to provoke the teachers to speak. The silence of participants disturbs resource persons. It is pretty hard work to create an environment for independent thinking amongst participators.

What I could learn from the workshop:

1. We should not consider the mistake of the child as an issue.
2. If, according to us, the child is giving a correct answer, then all that we can infer is that the child is able to solve that particular problem or question. We cannot know anything more about the child from that correct answer. The same is the situation if the child does not even attempt to solve any question and leaves it untouched. But we can learn a lot about the child if he gives a wrong answer or a partially correct answer.

Usually we do not pay any attention to a child's wrong answers, nor do we analyse what he has written. However, we can know many things about the child by looking at his wrong answers.

**Date: 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2008**

17th was a holiday for Karwa Chauth. On 18th, the school will become a polling booth. I went to school, arranged the necessary material for the polling party like chairs, tables etc. and gave the key to a neighbour.

Polling was on the 18th. I went to GIC Kamad and got an order issued for Junior High School Bhadkot to arrange for the Blueprint Construction Workshop. Since the principal was not at the school, I went to his residence to get his signature on the order.

On 19th, I set out from home at eight in the morning to participate in the Blueprint Construction Workshop.

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### **Some abbreviations**

NPRC	–	NyayaPanchayat Resource Centre.
CRC	–	Cluster Resource Centre.
TC	–	Transfer Certificate.
MDM	–	Mid Day Meal.
M.T.	–	Master Trainer.
DPEP	–	District Primary Education Programme.
T.A.	–	Travelling Allowance.
D.A.	–	Daily Allowance.
BSA	–	Basic ShikshaAdhikari.
BRC	–	Block Resource Centre.
Deputy BEO	–	Deputy Block Education Officer.
DEO	–	District Education Officer.
DPO	–	District Project Officer.
JE	–	Junior Engineer.
BLO	–	Booth Level Officer.

## **Azim Premji University**

**Azim Premji University** has a clear purpose – to make significant contributions towards a just, equitable, humane and sustainable society. The University attempts to do this through the development of talent and the creation of knowledge which can facilitate improvement in education and allied development areas. The University is committed to developing outstanding leaders in Education and Development by fostering a vibrant, multi-disciplinary learning environment. The University is an integral part of the vision of Azim Premji Foundation.

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**Hemraj Bhatt** (22.06.1968 - 25.11.2008) was an assistant teacher in a government primary school in Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand. Hemraj was a remarkable man – in spite of the challenging circumstances that he worked in and an environment that was largely indifferent to his efforts, his abiding interest in school education and his love for children shone through in his professional and personal life.

Unfortunately, Hemraj's life was cut short by a tragic road accident in 2008. But during this short time, his work, his poems, his writings and the school that he had nurtured, created a lasting impression on everyone who had known him.

Hemraj also kept a daily record of his experiences in a diary. The pages of this diary provide a glimpse of the struggles and joys of this man, for whom teaching was not just another job. While Hemraj Bhatt's diary narrates the personal journey of a government school teacher, it simultaneously holds up a mirror to the larger education system in India.

