



ZP School Kaspada with suhrid foundation

Zilla Parishad Primary School, Kaspada is a humble government school in a remote and inaccessible tribal area of Vikramgad in Thane district. With two teachers on board, the school enrolls about sixty tribal kids studying grade 1 through grade 4.

KASPADA



Like any other tribal region, Kaspada too is a secluded place – no roads, no vehicles, no supplies and no communication. With a continuously mounting burden of poverty and debt, elders in the family prefer to stay under a permanent influence of country liquor. The kids, on the other hand, do not even have right for clean drinking water leave alone some nutritious meal in their diet. What kind of school education one can expect when these unfortunate, hungry, thirsty, dirty and mostly naked kids have nothing else to do except to wander here and there under the burning Sun all day long.

The fortune of school was no different than that of the kids coming there – a single floor, two classrooms building with a weakened foundation and cracked walls – struggling to survive after a heavy rain and flooding in the last monsoon. The school can't even remotely dream of a book library or a sports kit for its students. The kids were however contented with whatever midday meal they were getting at the school, whatever textbooks they received from the government, and whatever sticks, stones and balls they had to play with.

The tribal community, deeply immersed into ignorance, superstition and addiction, can do very little for the kids, especially when each couple has at least seven to eight own children to look after. Health, Hygiene, Education and Ethics are the words never spoken to or heard by the children, so what can one expect these children to look up to or follow through. With government striving hard to run the school and teachers tired of record keeping and reporting, very little care the teachers could take of their wards, but nevertheless they endeavored to do it, to the extent possible.

It is believed that when hope, willpower, and ambition is carefully nurtured among the kids and a path is shown to them to translate their dreams into reality, they are all set to take giant leap, demonstrate heightened performance and reach their goals. But



looking at overall circumstances at our school and the kids we had at our school, it was quiet unlikely that our school can even participate in any annual inter-school sports event at the center or district level and compete against another 15-20 schools participating in the event. It never happened in the past.

SUHRID FOUNDATION

SUN project was launched at our school on 01-September-2013. Our school children, who were getting only rice and *dal* (lentils) in their government supplied midday meal, for the first time now, started enjoying tasty and healthy vegetables and jaggery in their diet. The prime reason for including vegetables like cauliflower, cabbage, beans, carrot, green peas, spinach, fenugreek, white radish as well as jaggery in the meal was not only to make the meal delicious and enjoyable but also to enrich the child's diet with iron, minerals and vitamins. Within fifteen days, the atmosphere in the school changed. The attendance at school is consistently 100% since then. Many parents came along with their wards and associated themselves in school activities. For example, some villagers offered vegetables grown in their farms at a concessional rate to the school only because their children are ultimately benefited. Many small children who were not yet enrolled in the school also started coming to school, which we think is important for them to develop a liking for school. We teachers always wished for this to happen and we began to work even harder to get the school, the students and the studies in order.



Meal before SUN Project



Meal after SUN Project



The work of Suhrid Foundation is primarily focused on health, hygiene and value education, but when we presented ideas about some important yet low cost provisioning for hygiene and health care at school the foundation introduced the concept of "petty cash". It is a small fund in cash, which was given by the foundation to



the teachers at each school so that they can take care of day-to-day hygiene and health needs of children at school. As the parents are usually least bothered about cleanliness and tidiness of their wards, we teachers at the school use the petty cash to buy hair bands, ribbons, handkerchief, hair oil, talcum powder, soap, mirror, nail-cutter for children. We purchased basic provisions for bathroom and toilets and ensured that our children get into habit of daily bathing, hand washing, clean clothing and so on. With clean uniform, tie-belt and I-card, the kids not only look pleasant but also feel more confident, courageous and vibrant. With basic health care and hygiene becoming part of life at school, the atmosphere at school is charged with positive waves and renewed energy. The children now get more focused and more involved in studies, sports or any other extra-curricular event that we organize at our school.



Our most critical problem of clean drinking water was solved by Suhrid Foundation. The team equipped us with a simple yet scientific process for water filtration and purification. With the aid from foundation, we have setup a proper sixty-liter water tank at the school and we receive regular supplies of chlorine tablets and alum for water purification. Our kids value purified water and cautiously utilize it without wasting a single drop.

Suhrid team has also setup a mini library in each school so that our kids have access to



many different books covering a wide range of knowledge area beyond the text books. There are about 35 books in our school library now. The kids not only practice reading but enjoy it, especially because these books are very engaging and simple to grasp. Moreover, kids started talking and writing independently



on different topics that they understood from these books.

The school received sports goods, toys and games from the foundation. This included carom set, lego blocks, skipping ropes, dumbbells, dance sticks (*dandiya*), jingling cymbals (*lezim*), seven stones (*lagori*), volley ball, cricket set and so on. With more entertaining and engaging games, toys and sports goods, the kids became more active and participative. This helped them a lot in their studies, health and as well in their team spirit and team work.

Until now, Kaspada School was never ever noticed for anything, either at *taluka* or at district level. The school was not known to have any form of talent among the school kids. In contrast, this year the school participated in all events at beat and *taluka* level during November and December. The children not only took part but also won prizes in every competition - running, three-leg running, musical chair, elocution and singing. The children excelled in every aspect of competition that involved demonstration of vigor, confidence and practice – be it in an individual capacity or in a team work. Needless to say, Suhrid's conviction and contribution for all-round development of these deprived kids have started showing the results. The parents were overjoyed to see the success their kids have drawn in the competitions. The parents are now coming closer to the school and contributing to school events, sports days and, parent meetings too! In a school where the teachers do not expect even ten parents to turn up for a parent meeting, there is 100% attendance these days.



On 20th October 2013, Suhrid Foundation conducted a health camp for the children of all the schools under SUN project; medical checkup for about four hundred kids was completed in a day. This helped the team to understand the common health problems and deficiencies



among the kids. For example, protein deficiency was found in a majority of kids during this checkup and accordingly, the foundation included eggs, twice a week, in the diet plan from 01st January 2014. The SUN diet plan from September 2013 till February 2014 at our school has shown, on an average, an increase of 6 Kg in weight and 3 to 4 centimeters in height of our kids. It is indeed going great.

During the health camp, the kids who were suspected or diagnosed to have critical illness were later taken to Mumbai and were examined and treated by renowned specialists in Mumbai. Suhrud Foundation took full responsibility and care of kids as well as accompanying teachers and parents while they were in Mumbai for the treatment.



The SUN project continues with additional dimensions getting included every month. After personal hygiene, the team is now focusing on clean surrounding and provisioning of toilet cleaning materials – water tanks and buckets, broom and dustbin, mop and brush, phenyl and soap. Lately, all the kids who usually walk barefoot are given footwear so as to avoid regular infection they are catching through their dirty foot.

These initiatives under SUN Project by Suhrud Foundation are operational in eight schools in Vikramagad vicinity and not just the Kaspada School. It is improving quality of our education, and building confidence among our kids. The kids now aspire to participate in various higher level examinations and competitions at *taluka* and district levels; it is only because of the positive vibe created by Suhrud during the last six months or so.

The volunteers of Suhrud Foundation looks after the school children like their family members, and come forward to celebrate every small and large success the kids achieve. Whenever we arrange a school event, be it a picnic, a get-together, an essay competition, a sports day or a prize distribution ceremony – we are assured to get full support and help from Team Suhrud.



Team Suhrid – people close to our hearts – people who care for our kids like responsible guardians – people heartily sharing the happiness with our kids – people compassionate about the pains of our kids – people trying to strengthen the wings of our kids – people whole heartedly contributing and complementing the government initiatives – people recognizing and fulfilling

their social responsibility...

I sincerely wish and pray, for Team Suhrid, an ever expanding success in their journey ahead.



This article was originally written in Marathi by Ajit Shankar Gonate, a primary school teacher at the government-run (*Zilla Parishad*) primary school in Kaspada (*Taluka Vikramgad, District Thane*) – about 150km from Mumbai.