

Mosamat Budhiya Shiksha Nirman Sangathan (MBSNS)

Annual Report 2018-19

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Introduction

The Mosamat Budhiya Shiksha Nirman Sangathan (MBSNS), was registered under the Trust Act on 11th October, 2017. Though the registration is new, this educational initiative itself is born out of a ten year old struggle that started in Araria district of North Bihar. The struggle was a humble attempt to ensure that people’s entitlements under laws like the NREGA were met. In the process we committed ourselves to building a better world, “nyay samanta ho aadhaar aisa rachege ham sansar!”

However, even in the early phase of our struggle we understood that the struggle was as much within as outside. The hierarchies that we saw outside had made their homes in our hearts and minds. And we have in our own limited ways tried to keep our caste, class, gender, religion and minorities lenses on to ensure that we worked with justice in our heart and in our actions. This education initiative is to

strengthen what we have instinctively known, as Dr. Ambedkar said “Shikshit Ho! Sangathit ho! Sangharsh Karo! Sangharsh Karo!”

The MBSNS Centre

The MBSNS has a small centre in Araria district headquarter. The centre is a space for people and organizations interested in working towards a better society. The campus has a large kuccha hall, a kitchen and three rooms for resource persons. The physical space is designed such that about 40 people can be comfortably accommodated for residential trainings, workshops and camps. The resource person rooms have been constructed in this financial year and a conscious effort has been made to use local construction materials as far as possible. Sun dried clay bricks were developed with help from an IIT Powai student Gaurang, which were part of the construction material. Other than this baked clay tiles and kansa (a form of grass) are used for roofing on campus, though for costs reasons we have had to use tin/asbestos sheets for some spaces.

These premises have been used for MBSNS related workshops and trainings but also by other groups like Project Potential, CHARM and the JJSS.

The physical space has also the calm and acceptance to host people in difficult situations for a short time, especially women facing domestic violence.

Residential After School Programme

For this year 7 school going children have been living on campus. They attend local government schools and after school stay at the centre, cooking, cleaning and maintaining the centre with older residents. The older residents include Rupa (care taker and care giver), Mithun (student intern of the MBSNS pursuing his Bachelors and volunteering at the centre) and more recently Abhimanyu (a post graduate from Ambedkar University, Delhi). The real challenge is the Government school these children are enrolled in, which are mostly dysfunctional especially after standard X.

The aim of this effort is to ensure that the following objectives are met: Ensuring that children are able to get the 3 Rs (Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic); Personality development, which would go beyond giving a career oriented education; Introduce innovative pedagogy which would not capitalize on fear and corporal punishment; Develop morality and values which will ensure changes within oneself and in the society around us; Develop scientific thinking; Strengthen Government education system; Develop strong leadership qualities in the younger generation; Access to learning resources: Develop our own understanding of what education means. A detailed note on the objectives is at the end of this report.

Men's Gender Workshop

A follow up workshop to the first gender workshop with 40 active volunteers from 4 districts was conducted from the 16th – 18th of August at the Araria centre. The resource persons included Ashish Ranjan (Secretary, JJSS) and Nasir Bhai (a senior freelance journalist). Sessions included work distribution (esp household work) and decision making powers, socialisation of and into gender roles and stereotypes, power walk, discussion on family planning and consent. This was a refresher workshop of sorts, the objective of which was to make our identifying male volunteers to question varying degrees of privilege and/or oppression based on primarily their gender identities but also other identity markers and locations. The idea was to make them to be more supportive to women and other marginalised genders at home, in their workplaces and in the larger socio-political-economic and cultural arenas. It was also to help us form a more informed and sensitive opinion of larger happenings in the country and the world.

Women's workshop

A series of gender workshops have been held by the JJSS for its women volunteers over the last couple of years. This year, 4th – 6th September 2018, the MBSNS along with the JJSS organized this workshop, with focus sexual violence, domestic violence, child abuse, and the law! Also, how law can be used to liberate (as in the case of Domestic Violence Act or POCSO, but also oppress as in the case of the UAPA)

Summer Internship, 2018

In May 2018, JJSS along with the MBSNS hosted the 4th summer internship programme for local rural youth. 20 young people in the ages of 16 to 24, were identified for this one month long residential programme. The internship this year, like previous years, introduced concepts such as gender, caste, class, religion and power structures in society to the interns using theatre, games, film and discussions. Furthermore, the interns learnt games from the "Play for Peace" or "Khel se Mel" toolkit which encourages non-competitive, fun, interactive learning through action songs. Once they learnt these games, the interns travelled in teams from village to village and facilitated games with local children. This helped boost their confidence, public speaking and leadership skills.

What was unique to this year's internship was the fact that all aspects of planning- from curriculum design to logistics planning to actual facilitation was primarily led and coordinated by a team of first batch interns led by Doli and Jaimanti-- two former interns. Jaimanti is currently enrolled for a law degree in the neighbouring district or Purnea and Doli is pursuing her Bachelors degree form Araria. Both have been able to postpone their age of marriage in a an area where child marriage is common and according to the NFHS 42% women in Bihar marry before the legal age of marriage i.e. 18. After the internship, the interns have continued to various volunteer efforts including organising youth meetings in their villages.

Youth Workshop

On August 11th – 13th, 2018 the MBSNS hosted a youth workshop at our centre in Araria with 20 young people, who had just completed the internship programme in June 2018. In this meeting, we discussed the importance of scientific thinking and the dangers of harbouring superstition, particularly on community health. This discussion arose in a context where we found out that one of our youngest interns was subjected to "*jhaad-phook*" instead of being given medical help. For the last two years, we have been campaigning strongly using the slogan, "*andhavishwaas bhagao. Aman-shaanti badhaao*" Especially after one of our active saathis lost a child to "*jhaad-phook*" and delayed medical intervention. The discussion used plenty of games and theatre to help unpack and question deeply-held

beliefs in a non-threatening and lighthearted way. We also talked about how some of these superstitious beliefs can be exploitative and life-threatening.

Boli Workshop

A three day “Boli” workshop was conducted by senior freelance journalist and our friend Nasir Bhai to explore the possibility of creating audio content in local languages for social Media. Eight volunteers, including those from the JJSS, who speak different local languages of Bihar such as Bhojpuri, Maithli, Magahi, Thethi, Vajjika etc participated in the workshop and created audio content on pertinent issues like Demonetization, Farmers Issue, etc. It was an enriching experience for all of us. However it is going to take huge effort to regularly create such content by our own volunteer base.

Etc.

In addition, a fifteen day **Computer Workshop** for MBSNS interns, **continuous children’s camps** in different villages in Araria, Katihar and Saharsa were held. Additionally, **day-long theatre workshops** were held in Araria, Katihar, Saharsa and Vaishali to engage with young people in creative ways about themes of justice and equality.

Yuva Samvad

The Bihar Yuva Samvad was organised in Patna, from 7th to 9th April 2018. MBSNS youth team members played a crucial role in organising this samvad. Yuva Samvad is visualized a platform for young people working with social movements to discuss, debate and share their experiences of struggle, and work towards building a collective understanding of a what a better world means to us. This process, initiated by the National Alliance of People’s Movemnts (NAPM) with a national level Samvad in November 2017, hopes to begin building networks and forging solidarities across movements, identities, and lived realities.

In Bihar, over 100 young activists young activists under the age of 35, from across Bihar districts came. The Yuva Samvad was led entirely by young people, about 20 MBSNS youth also participated in the Samvad. A small session was organised on challenges being faced by youth in movements and the way forward, and three parallel groups discussed media, culture and RTI as tools. In the three-day samvad, many decisions were taken including carrying out a state-wide yuva yatra.

Yuva Yatra

A dialogue of, by and with the youth - Yuva Samvaad that happened in Patna earlier in the year, organised by NAPM Bihar, led to a plan for doing an All Bihar Yuva Yatra to connect with more young people and build a stronger network where the youth can network and share information about the work they're doing, voice their opinion, build critical political awareness, decide what they want for themselves and move collectively towards getting it. This felt especially important at a time when there is a large cultural intellectual lacuna being felt by and for the youth in the state which is making it easier to distract them with casteist, communal, neoliberal thoughts. With the National Elections coming up, a united and self-aware coice of the youth seemed like an absolute necessity, hence the yatra to build relationships and promote dialogue, rational thinking and meaningful social engagement among the youth of Bihar. From February 1st to March 10th, the yatra covered 30 districts in 30 days, connecting with young people across districts and the a strong MBSNS volunteer contingent was part of the yatra. The yatra culminated in Patna on the death anniversary of Savitri Bai Phule.

Health workshops

The MBSNS hosted, a health workshop with SAATHI, a Maharashtra based health rights group that is also a part of the national health rights campaign, Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, like us, to create barefoot health workers and health activists in villages. The meeting happened from the 26 th – 28 th of July in Araria. Village and panchayat level meetings were held at fist to help elect participants from each area who would train to be barefoot health workers with an understanding of basic health, health rights and diagnosis- treatment-medication-first aid. Another objective is to promote scientific thinking among the population, right from the bottom up, and help dispel harmful superstitions, unhealthy practices and myths.

Action against Sexual violence and other forms of institutionalised violence in Bihar state shelter homes

In June-July 2018, the whole country was shaken by horrific reports of sexual violence in shelter homes in Bihar. As part of multiple local and national networks, voices were raised, statements issued and follow-ups done. In Araria, residents marched to break the silence around sexual violence. This is an issue we constantly discuss through all our interactions across age, believing that we need to break the violence, around violence, in order to make a difference.

A detailing of the Objectives met through the after school residential programme:

1. Strengthen children's school education – Ensuring that children are able to get the 3 Rs (Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic).

It has been well demonstrated by the ASER reports that quality of education is questionable in both Government and private schools alike, with the exception of some elite schools. It is in this context that our work would be such that the young people we work with we will try and ensure that they meet the basic 3R requirement that tally with their age. For example the ASER survey points out that across states it has been found that first graders are unable to read simple sentences the young people we engage with, we will use the PRATHAM booklets to ensure that they meet age specific requirements regarding reading, writing and arithmetic. However we acknowledge that school education is not only about the 3Rs and will work on other aspects of education as we move forward.

2. Personality development, which would go beyond giving a career oriented education.

In the present societal context education has become a means of getting ahead in the rat race for jobs and acquiring personal material comforts. But we would like to help evolve a larger understanding of education where it is not just a mean of getting a job but will translate into overall personality development, where a person learns to question, where they are able to debate what is right and what is wrong and come to their own conclusions, where they develop a value framework beneficial for the betterment of society.

3. Introduce innovative pedagogy which would not capitalize on fear and corporal punishment

- It is indeed true that even today corporal punishment is seen as a means of disciplining and self-restraint and internal discipline are not inculcated from an early age.
- We will work on developing and building on existing pedagogical methods which help children and adults learn alike through play, activities and joy, where fear is not the driving force, where internal desire for learning and inquisitiveness will help people learn.
- We will not try to re-invent the wheel we know that many organisations and individual have worked on innovative learning and we shall tap into their resources and learn from their experiences even while we will carry out our own experiments and learnings.

4. Develop morality and values which will ensure changes within oneself and in the society around us.

As discussed in point 2 for us education will not be limited to career advancement but will focus on developing a framework which would contribute to the development of society and upholding some basic principles like non-violence, dignity to all irrespective of caste, class, gender, race, ethnicity etc, democratic and participatory decision making etc.

5. Develop scientific thinking

India is still marred by a lot of superstition and unscientific practices. These interfere with an individual's growth to their full potential. And our initiative will try and find ways to engage people with scientific and rational thinking.

6. Strengthen Government education system

Though we continue to be torn between schooling and de-schooling society. As a group taking this initiative, we would like to see a just and equitable education system which is easily accessible to all children. It is in this context that if given a chance we would like to engage with the 'sarkari school'. But this will be contingent on the Government's openness to give us such a space.

7. Develop strong leadership qualities in the younger generation

Children need to learn more than 3Rs, and our initiative will try its best to focus on overall personality development of the child. It is in this context that children would be encouraged to learn through doing, engaging in sports, theatre and various forms of learning and self expression and not limit learning to the classroom setting.

8. Access to learning resources: Ensure that children from under-privileged backgrounds get the same opportunities, as the middle classes for example computer education, proper sports facility, reading room-library, interactions with people from different walks of life.

9. Develop our own understanding of what education means. It is true that even as we write this proposal to start an intervention in the field of education, we are constantly challenged by what our understanding of education is, whether we believe in monitoring and standardized testing, whether play way of learning can be sustained in the present schooled education and other related matters. It is for this reason that we will have a space to learn from other initiatives and listen to educators and their experiences.