

1. *Background*

Udaan is a residential programme for girls in the age group of ten to fourteen years who have either never been to schools or have dropped out of formal schools. The aim is to provide an opportunity to girls who have missed the opportunity and if not provided with an immediate and focused intervention, would have missed it for life. Through an intensive ten months course, the programme strives to provide these girls the education equivalent to grade V in formal schooling as well as to equip them with social education of a kind that helps them build an independent personality with critical capacities to discern and decide. The specific objectives of the programme are as below:

- To break the social and psychological barriers which made them believe that education is unimportant and irrelevant,
- To provide competencies equivalent to primary education,
- To develop independent and critical thinking abilities,
- To develop the analytical skills and a spirit of inquiry
- To equip these girls with information, skills and attitudes that would enable them to deal with the world from position of strength,
- To provide a joyful learning environment and to enhance interest in continuing further education.

Udaan is part of the Girls primary Education Project (GPE) in Uttar Pradesh, being supported by CARE-India. GPE is operational in selected villages of two educationally backward blocks of *Pihani* and *Tadiyawan* in *Hardoi* district of the state. The local NGO, *Sarvodaya Ashram (SA)* manages the implementation of *Udaan* and CARE provides financial and technical support.

Udaan was not part of the initial set of strategies identified for the GPE. This emerged as a result of action and interaction between several factors and has been an evolving programme. The whole evolution has been a process of learning for all those who have been involved in conceptualising, providing technical and financial support or implementing the programme. This has also been a process of change for many of those involved - a change in trusts and beliefs, a change in perceptions and expectations, a change in confidence and aspirations.

The first batch of 96 girls completed their course in May, 2000. Out of these, 91 girls have cleared class V examinations of the Uttar Pradesh government! This documentation is a modest effort to catch the changes and understand the process of evolution for *Udaan*, which means the FLIGHT! The idea is to have an imprint of the nuances before they are forgotten or lost.

The process of evolution of *Udaan* has not been a simple one. In almost all aspects of functioning including the management, curriculum development and classroom processes - it involved brainstorming, experimentation, making mistakes and learning from the experiences of self as well as others. This report makes an attempt to document this process of learning and growing, of minor failures and big successes!

This documentation is based on a systematic exercise of observation, interviews, discussion and participation in *Udaan* activities at different stages of its evolution.

The functioning of *Udaan* was observed for three to four consecutive days thrice during the 10-month period. This included observation of the whole day's routine starting from morning prayer to breakfast and from classrooms to games. The teachers, the coordinators and the consultants were interviewed at all stages. Selected villages were visited in order to get a feel of the context of the lives of the girls and to interact with their parents and other family members.

Direct participation in some of the activities such as Community Seminars and Completion Ceremony also helped in gauging some of the finer aspects of *Udaan*. The report is a complete story of how the idea emerged, how it grew and matured, and how was it implemented.

2. How did the idea emerge and evolve

The two NGO partners of CARE in implementing the GPE project in *Hardoi* district, *Sarvodaya Ashram* and *Vinoba Seva Ashram*, had years of experience in different areas but their exposure to different kinds of ongoing experiments in primary education had not been sufficient. During April 1998, a cross visit to some of the acclaimed programmes across the country was organised by CARE for GPE personnel working either in CARE or these NGOs. One of the aims of the visits was to expose these personnel to new ideas and understand their functioning.

MV Foundation at *Rangareddy* district of Andhra Pradesh and *Lok Jumbish* in Rajasthan were the two of the seven programmes that were covered during the cross visit. The participants from SA were influenced by the short residential courses being held for children under these two programmes. MV Foundation organises residential camps of varying duration (Varying from few weeks to several months) to run bridge courses for out-of-school children. The aim is to prepare them for regular formal schools. There is a strong focus on community linkages and they perceive themselves as change agents in persuading society to send their children to schools. The administration of the residential camps was found to be "very impressive" by the SA personnel.

Another impressive aspect of the Camps being run by MV Foundation was the "open and enabling environment" available for children. The SA, which believes in Gandhian ideology, felt that such environment was close to Gandhi's concept of education.

Similar feelings and thoughts came when they visited *Balika Shivir* (Girls Camp) being run by the *Urmul* trust at Bikaner district in Rajasthan with financial support of *Lok Jumbish*. About two hundred and fifty adolescent girls were staying there for a six-month course. The idea had been adapted from MV Foundation with change in several aspects including the pedagogical approach. While the MV Foundation emphasised on admission to local schools at the end of the camp, *Lok Jumbish* was trying to provide competencies up to grade III or V in the camp itself.

The idea appealed to SA members who had already been running residential formal schools in their premises for socially disadvantaged groups with financial support from Government of India. The experiences of working with community in GPE had made it clear that there is a need for this kind of intervention in *Hardoi* also. Most of the land in the area is not fertile and the consequent deprivation coupled with socio-cultural milieu means low priority to girls' education. If there were a short residential course for adolescent girls, parents

could be convinced to send their daughters.

The sharing workshop that followed cross visits made it clear that almost everybody agreed on the need and suitability of such an intervention for GPE in *Hardoi*. But at the same time this was also apparent that none of the existing models could just be transplanted; rather a new model has to be evolved, which can learn from these experiences but would also have to have its own character. A number of elements of "good education", seen elsewhere during the visit could be incorporated to strengthen the intervention. Despite the fact that this was not part of initial plan, CARE agreed to support the intervention provided it could be developed as a feasible strategy.

3. Process of developing and revisiting the plan and the budget

A series of meetings, workshops and consultation within CARE and NGOs as well as with participation of external Resource Persons were held at various levels in *Hardoi*, Lucknow and Delhi leading to emergence of a somewhat clear thinking regarding the likely shape the intervention should take. Arranging financial support was a major issue, as this did not figure in the initial planned budget. After repeated negotiations, it was agreed that the SA would provide infrastructure including space and

building, and CARE would provide all the running cost in addition to making all the technical support available. However, the experience suggested that there were under-estimations on the part of both SA and CARE.

The SA, despite having experience of running residential formal schools in its premise could not foresee a number of small but essential expenditures that were necessary to make a piece of land and building into a living and learning space. The rooms that were already there had to be renovated, the verandah had to be roofed to serve as learning, dining and recreational space, electricity lines had to be fitted, and toilets had to be constructed. Some of the needs emerged as the programme started functioning. For instance, it was felt that there should be a separate boundary and gate within the premise for security reasons. Hence, alternative arrangements were made for shifting some of the families living in those portions of the *Ashram*. An iron gate was fitted at the entrance of the inner area to ensure safety.

The story was not very different for CARE either. Initially it had thought of not spending anything on infrastructure. However, later, as the programme was operationalised and newer needs emerged, it could not help responding and included provisions for ceiling fans, almirahs, table and generator in the revised budget. Similarly, the experimental nature of the pedagogical approach

adopted necessitated enhanced expenditure on teaching-learning material and teacher training. Same was the case for support activities where new ideas such as holding of community seminars to keep parents/villagers informed about the development as well as to widen the impact of social learning meant increased allocation for the purpose. As a result, CARE's commitment increased from a total budget of about Rs. 8.00 lakhs to about Rs.13.06 lakhs. The analysis of final details suggests that total expenditure remained within this limit of revised allocated budget.

What is noteworthy in this process is the commitment and perseverance of both the partners in seeing this intervention into operation despite odds. For SA, it meant going beyond their means and for CARE, it meant looking for funding avenues from various alternative sources. However, what made them continue with the endeavor was their strong conviction in the relevance of the intervention for the girls in the area.

There were hundred girls in the first batch of *Udaan*. An analysis of the budget reflects that the per student expenditure turns out to be Rs.13600.00 for the entire ten month course. This amount includes elements of in-service training for teachers and conduct of community seminars. This also includes elements of preparatory activities that were undertaken before launching the programme. The

CARE's Approved Budget for *Udaan* (June 1999 to May 2000)

I	Preparatory Activities	Budget (Rupees)
1.	Teacher Salary for one and a half months	13800
2.	Field visit of teachers	400
3.	Orientation and Sharing - I	250
4.	Orientation and Sharing -II	9000
5.	Cross Visits	7000
6.	Sharing Workshop	250
7.	Induction Camp	24750
8.	Milan	21500
9.	Documentation	10000
10.	Inauguration	8000
	Total	94950
II.	Camp Activities	
1.	Boarding/lodging of 108 persons for ten and a half months (@ Rs. 500 per month per person)	567000
2.	Teachers salary (@ Rs. 1800 for ten and a half months)	75600
3.	Teacher In-charge's salary (@ Rs. 2000 for ten and a half months)	21000
4.	Cooks' salary(@ Rs. 1000 for three persons for eleven months)	33000
5.	Lodging material (@ Rs. 800 for 100 girls)	80000
6.	Learning material (@ Rs. 500 for 100 girls)	50000
7.	Medical Record (@ Rs. 20 for 100 girls)	2000
8.	Equipment and furniture (Generator, 21 ceiling fans, 3 Almirah, Table)	63000
	Total	891600
III.	Support Activities	
1.	Training	169200
2.	Social Learning Library	50000
3.	Community Seminars (bi-monthly)	100000
4.	Visitors	2000
	Total	321200
IV.	Contingency	52120
	Grand Total	1359870

preparatory activities mainly consisted of exposure trips and training of teachers, and organisation of a three day camp with support of MV Foundation. This camp was organised with the purpose of giving a first hand experience of running a camp to teachers and SA personnel, and to expose the parents to the kind of environment they could expect for their children.

If the amounts spent on preparatory and support activities are discounted, per-student expenditure for the course comes down to Rs.8900.00 only. This amounts to less than Rs.900.00 per month for one girl and includes the non-recurrent items also. In case, the investment on non-recurrent items like equipment, furniture and lodging materials are removed, the per-student expenditure would be about Rs.750.00. This includes expenditure on boarding/lodging, salaries for all the personnel including teachers and provision for learning materials and medical record of teachers. This could be taken as an indicative requirement for future batches as the amounts spent on non-recurrent items would not need to be included.

A more pragmatic approach, however, would be to include part of support activities in this indicative per-student expenditure for future estimations. Though some of the activities like curriculum development would cease, some activities for training of teachers as well as

community linkages would continue. Similarly, some of the preparatory activities would also be necessary. Some money must be kept for maintenance and some for fall in the value of money!

Therefore, it could be said that roughly a per-student expenditure of about Rs.1000.00 to Rs.12000.00 per month would be the minimum need for future batches provided the same pedagogical approach is continued. This estimation would be valid only if the batch continues to be of hundred girls and the teacher-student ratio remains the same. Per-student expenditure would go up if the number of children in one batch goes down and the management would be difficult if the number goes beyond hundred.

The need for more teachers was being felt strongly for better management and functioning even if the number of girls is not increased. This would also necessitate an upward revision in the cost. However, Rs. 12000.00 per child for the entire duration seems a reasonable budget for subsequent years.

It is important to mention here that the parents were expected to make a contribution of Rs.300.00 in cash or the equivalent in kind (cereals). The idea was to make parents feel responsible. The collection of this contribution was slow in the beginning. During the first four months, only less than fifty percent of the parents

fulfilled this requirement. But the situation changed after the issue was discussed at Community Seminars and the parents were happy with the progress of their children. The total contribution received till the end of the session by this means amounted to Rs.22,000.00 which is about 73 % of the estimated RS.30,000.00. This money, however, could not be utilised and would be used for the next year's course.

It also needs to be highlighted that SA's contributions have not always been monetised. Their contribution goes beyond providing building and infrastructure, as they are committed to provide medical support from the doctor who lives in the SA campus on an honorarium to be paid by the NGO and not by CARE. The SA also provided services of one of the senior members of the NGO on an honorary basis. In addition to their initial commitments, they have also been providing services of some of the SA personnel for managing the Ashram as and when needed. Therefore, there are many hidden items of investment or expenditure that are not always obvious in monetised budgets.

It is also felt strongly that the economic analysis of any programme should go beyond the analysis of mere finances. There are a number of externalities and benefits that are being experienced in the immediate post-course completion period, which have larger social, economic and financial implications also. For

instance, the community seminars as well as the girls who have passed out from *Udaan* have generated an unprecedented interest among parents regarding girls' education in the area. Parents of 250 girls were willing to send their daughters for the second session. Since it was not possible to accommodate those many, around 150 girls and their parents had to be disappointed. This is the same area where the volunteers had tough time in convincing parents to send their daughters to *Udaan* by withdrawing from paid or domestic work in most cases.

The parents of almost all the pass-outs of the first course are committed to their further education by some means or the other. These girls and the kind of personality, attitude and competencies they have been able to develop during the brief period of ten months are the biggest motivator for the parents as well as other villagers.

These are external benefits that have significant social and economic value. Though it is difficult to ascertain monetary value or financial implications, it is possible to point out to some of the savings that have been caused by these factors. The volunteers would have spent substantial time in motivating parents and generating awareness about girls' education. The awareness is going to benefit not only the programme but it is also likely that parents would show

greater interest in education of the girls in general.

CARE's investment on the programme has equipped them with a replicable model. The model can be used with modifications for many other interventions.

A comparison of per-student expenditure with a similar programme

A comparison of *Udaan's* per student expenditure with a somewhat similar programme shows that these costs are comparable. *Mahila Shikshan Vihar* (MSV) run by *Lok Jumbish* in Jalore district of Rajasthan* also offers similar education equivalent to class V in a period of one to one and a half years, albeit for girls/women in the range age group of 12 to 30 years. A comparable number of 97 students live together and pursue similar aims. The per-student expenditure turns out to be higher at about Rs.1800 per month excluding village support as well as materials/training support activities that are borne directly by *Lok Jumbish*. The relatively high cost can be attributed to higher salary for teachers @ Rs. 3500 per month and high number of teachers (roughly one for every 10 to 12 students instead of one for 20 in *Udaan*). The students are also given two pairs of clothes per year in MSV whereas there is no such provision in *Udaan*.

*This comparison is based on details provided in an article on MSV by Vimala Ramachandran in *The Hindu* dated August 22, 1999.

4. The process of identifying girls and teachers

The number of hundred was also decided after much discussion as this was considered ideal in view of infrastructural requirements, management feasibility and cost effectiveness. Once the number was decided, the issue of identifying the girls emerged. Under GPE, a number of Formal Equivalent Centres (FECs) as a model of Alternative Schooling had been opened in the villages where there were no schools or large number of out-of-school children in 6 to 14 years of age group lived. The experience of working with community had shown that large number of uneducated girls are there in many villages who have either never been to schools or had dropped out after brief periods of irregular schooling. These girls were reluctant in coming to FECs because this meant studying with younger children. Therefore, it was decided to target this age group for enrollment in *Udaan*. It was also felt that the programme should be aimed at the most deprived group and hence a preference should be given to never enrolled girls.

The next issue was to identify the target area - the villages and habitations - from where to get the girls. It was decided to include both the GPE project blocks, *Tadiyawan* and *Pihani*, for the programme. One view was to get two children from all the villages whereas the other view was that it would be easier to

influence parents and children if larger groups would come from same or neighboring villages. Therefore, it was decided not to have any fixed rule regarding number of girls from one village. Consequently, there were only one or two girls from some villages in *Udaan* and four or five from others.

Distribution of girls by Social Groups		
	Social Group	Number
1.	Scheduled Caste	41
2.	Other Backward Castes	26
3.	Minority (Muslim)	16
4.	Other General Castes	17
	Total	100

Another issue in the context of identification of girls was whether to have any norm regarding representation of various communities. There were divergent views and finally it was agreed not to have any norm regarding caste or religion. The experience has been encouraging as the group turned out to be a mix of castes and religion. The focus on getting girls from deprived sections itself meant higher number of girls coming from the Scheduled Caste families. Apart from having 16 girls from the minority Muslim community, 41 girls belong to Scheduled Caste, 26 to Other Backward Castes and 17 girls come from so called high caste families. What is notable that all the parents are aware of children belonging to different castes including Muslim



and so called lower castes living together, sharing their rooms, belongings and food, but have never raised this as an issue.

As for teachers, it was agreed that at least four teachers are essential for hundred girls. In addition, it was felt that one person to double as teacher and manager would be needed to handle accounts and other official works. It was realised that the educational qualification of teachers was not given much importance in other similar programmes. However, after much debate and discussions over the issue, it was decided that the minimum qualification should be intermediate in view of experiences and evaluations of several other programmes.

All those involved in the process of conceptualisation including SA members, CARE team and external resource persons felt strongly that the identified teachers should have appropriate aptitude and hence some experience of working with children would help. Although an advertisement was given in a local newspaper, the earlier experiences had suggested that the word of mouth was considered more reliable.

SA is known in the area and many candidates turned up when they heard that the *Ashram* is looking for full-time teachers. Four women teachers were identified by SA through a process of interview and informal interaction. It was considered

important to have a male teacher in the team and hence a fifth male teacher with experience of handling accounts was identified.

Considering the tightly-knit nature of the programme, it was also felt that additional teachers would be required to substitute these teachers in case of illness, leave or any other need. For this purpose, some of the Village Level Workers (VLW) working with GPE at SA, who had already been associated with FECs, were identified and associated with the orientation and training of teachers. These VLWs did replace teachers at times of need.

Though this arrangement worked for some time, there were several limitations. *Udaan* requires 24 hours duty and the VLWs used to find it difficult to spend several nights away from home due to family responsibilities. They are generally operating from their respective villages and it was not possible for them to spare the kind of time that was required. Besides, it was also not easy for them to be in touch with the latest stage that was going on in different groups and hence difficult to follow in the same manner the particular teacher had been teaching.

Four women teachers, who handled four group of children, were also quite overloaded with work. Taking four sessions of two hours each everyday along with a number of managerial responsibilities had been quite difficult. The tight schedule of the

programme and high goals and targets also meant that no leniency was possible at any stage. Every day and every week was so important complete the identified curricular items that it was not possible to miss even a day's time. On top of all these, the teachers are also expected to contribute their time for follow-up activities for the girls who are keen to continue their education and need some support from the Ashram. Therefore, both NGO and CARE decided to include three more teachers from the coming year onwards.

The *Udaan* Team

Core Team

Coordinator	: 1
Teacher Incharge	: 1
Teachers	: 4
Cook	: 3

Support Team

Programme Coordinator (GPE)
Training Coordinators (GPE)
CARE-UP's Field Officer (GPE)
CARE-UP other GPE personnel
External Resource Persons

Three new teachers would be added and the role of external resource persons would be minimal from second year.

The observations at different stages made obvious that the commitment of the teachers in seeing the programme on the ground has been total. "They form the backbone of the programme; without their commitment and determination, it would have been impossible to continue with this tough and demanding task", says *Urmilaji*, the *Udaan* coordinator. Almost all the personnel associated with *Udaan* echo similar feelings.

5. *Bringing Girls and Building Community Support - Then ... and...Now*

In order to run a residential programme for girls in adolescent age, it is important to win support of girls, parents and the community. Combination of formal and informal strategies were adopted.

All the GPE personnel at SA including Programme Coordinator (PC), Training Coordinators (TCs) and VLWs played important role in preparing the parents to send their daughters to join *Udaan*. In the initial phase, the parents were not forthcoming and many a times refused to even discuss the topic of sending their non-school going girl to live somewhere else. This was despite the good relations with the community in these villages built over past two years of GPE operations. Parents generally declined to send their daughters on the ground that "they are now grown-ups and need to get married soon". They also felt that "these girls do a number of household chores; who would take these responsibilities if they go to *Ashram*".

All kinds of arguments were used to convince them. If there is still one year of time left, why cannot the girl be sent; if the older one cannot go, at least send the younger one; do you want to keep your next generations also uneducated and uncouth...and so on. The logic as well as persistence



This is ***Shalia***. One of those who are doing well both in academics and other aspects of *Udaan* life. She is also the best friend of many.

Shalia had been the housekeeper for the family for many years before coming here. Her mother works in the Stitching Centre of the SA and father is a Rickshaw-puller. She was not only doing household chores and taking care of younger siblings but also adding to the family'' income through her embroidery work. It was necessary as big share of the father's income goes on alcohol, a common practice among males in that area. Today *Shalia* is in *Udaan* because of her mother who agreed to leave her stitching job if needed.

had its impact and many of the parents agreed to take a chance.

Some of the women working in other projects at SA also had a role in influencing parents, especially mothers, in agreeing to send their children. One such example is that of *Chandraprabha* who works in the Stitching Centre at SA. She belongs to the nearby *Tadiyawan basti*, from where some of the mothers have sent their daughters on her insistence and persuasion. The Mothers Groups that have been formed as part of GPE to support village level activities including FEC also played significant role in convincing parents. The positive image of the SA in the area helped in building confidence of the parents regarding security of the children in *Udaan*.

Organisation of a three day camp during June 20th to 21st 1999 with support of MV Foundation followed by one day *Milan* on June 22nd with parents as a forerunner to the actual programme was one of the formal events, which eventually turned out to be very effective and critical in ascertaining community support as well as in orienting teachers.

Around 68 girls were made to stay together in the three day camp and were exposed to various learning games and activities. The experienced resource person from MV Foundation handled the entire camp and in the process demonstrated the art of developing relationship with children



Safety and security of girls is a major concern

" I always wanted to educate my daughters but the family was not ready to send her to the neighboring village for reasons of safety. When I got to know about *Udaan*, I immediately decided to send my daughter, Ruby", says *Ramkali* of *Lalpur* village. She not only sent her own daughter but also influenced others to send theirs. Though there is a primary school in the village, the teacher seldom comes; the boys still manage by going to other villages, the girls are not allowed to go. *Ramkali* had full confidence because of her association with the Mothers Group (formed for GPE) and tried to tell others not to worry about security of girls in the SA. Nine girls from the village studied in first batch of *Udaan*.

The mother of *Usha* and *Nisha*, two sisters studying in *Udaan* was reluctant in sending her daughters because of the concern that who would share the responsibility of domestic chores in absence of girls. *Ramkali* told her that the same situation would arise when these girls get married but that does not deter the parents from getting the daughters married; then why cannot the girls be sent away for education. The idea appealed to both the parents and they agreed to send their children. Today they are proud of their two daughters.

Safety was a major concern for *Sherunnisa*, the mother of *Reshma* and *Shama*. "All the time I used be worried for their security even when they used to go to *Madrassah* and that is why I never favored their going to primary school despite the fact that there is a school in the *basti*", says *Sherunnisa*. She has seen how her daughters lived in SA and felt they were fully safe and secured there.

Most of the parents felt the same way about the issue of safety of their daughters. They express their satisfaction over the rules of the *Udaan*. They also have a lot of confidence over the four teachers who, they feel, are very responsible and committed.

and provided important tips on managing such camps. The teachers consider the experience very significant and learnt a number of important things just by watching the resource person.

The camp helped the girls come out of their reluctance and develop rapport amongst themselves. One of the biggest problems was to make them sleep, as many of them wanted to go back home. However, the girls thoroughly enjoyed all the activities and remember every single detail even after a gap of six months.

One of the deliberate activities planned was to teach them to write their names. The aim was to make them interested in studies and develop a sense of achievement. The parents also felt thrilled on the *Milan* day to see their children writing their names in three days of time. *Baburam of Lalpur* was overwhelmed to see his daughter recite a poem on stage. This was the case with most of the parents who felt that if children could learn this much in three days, it is worth sending them for ten months.

The sharing of the three day camp experience by the girls with their friends and siblings contributed tremendously in raising the demand for admission in *Udaan*. The girls who were initially reluctant and did not want to come started pestering their parents to send them too. *Sangeeta's* parents of *Bargadian* village wanted both their daughters, *Sangeeta* and

The haunted first night...

The first night in the camp is an experience that children and teachers would always remember. It was a hot summer evening and preparations were made for all the girls to sleep on the top of the roof. After everybody had gone off to sleep, at around midnight, suddenly one of the girls started shouting "*bhoot..... bhoot.....*" (ghost..... ghost..). Few girls woke up and after that, there was no end to commotion. By the time the teachers and VLWs could understand what was happening, the girls were all running downstairs. It took everybody a while to pacify the girls and make them go to sleep again.

The girls tell this story with great interest and agree that there was no ghost anywhere. However, till today nobody knows who was the first girl to shout!

Suman to join *Udaan*. *Sangeeta* refused to go for three day camp despite persuasion. But she started crying and forced her parents to send her also after listening to *Suman's* stories of the three day camp.

One of the discussions during *Milan* that created lasting impact on the minds of parents was regarding the cost. The parents were told that they would be paying less than a rupee per day for complete care of their daughters - proper diet, education, personality development and were

Suggestions given by M V Foundation to Training Coordinators and Teachers during three day camp

- The learning process would be effective and meaningful only when this is joyful and suitable to the needs of the girls.
- All the girls in the group should get a chance to sing a song or recite a poem so that they can express themselves and gain some confidence in the process.
- There should be a daily review of the day's activity. This would encourage the girls to express themselves clearly without any hesitation.
- The girls should be made to sit in circles at the time of daily review.
- *Bal Sabha* should be organised regularly so that creativity could be encouraged among the girls.
- The teachers should narrate stories or poems to the children before they go to sleep in the night.
- The teachers should discuss the next day's activities in the groups so that it is easy to manage those the following day.
- Any information should be imparted to the girls by taking their process and capacities for thinking so that they can learn fast.
- The girls should be made to work in groups. For example, while going to playground or dining hall, they should be asked to move in groups. This would inculcate discipline as well as a sense of belongingness.

asked if they would like to miss this opportunity. Most of the parents had not viewed the intervention in this light till then and felt convinced by the suggestion.

Despite very positive and useful experience of the three day camp, everything was not smooth when *Udaan* started. Many girls started fleeing and many others kept crying continuously. The coordinator, teachers and others were not prepared to face such situation. The initial experience was embarrassing for the VLWs and TCs as the parents and community used to be very critical of the fact that the girls were fleeing. A team of TCs used to be always ready with their motorbikes to come into action as soon as they would get to know about any missing girl. The coordinator immediately started collecting addresses of close relations also as most of the girls were found at their relatives' places. However, these were teething problems that were overcome with time. Now there has been increasing pressure from the community to admit more girls.

A need for interaction with parents at periodic interval was felt once the term for the *Udaan* started on July 18th, 1999. It was decided to have a one day seminar with community once in every two months. This was necessary to share the pedagogical approach, the philosophy of the social learning and also to take some of the change messages beyond the girls studying in *Udaan*. The first such



Oh, this closed atmosphere...

One of the most difficult tasks was to calm down *Afsana* who could always be seen crying. When *Afsana* used to start crying at the top of her voice, other girls would follow suit. And if she was not crying, she would be busy thinking on looking for new and newer ways to flee from the *Udaan*. She literally tried all possible ways to flee from the place. It was intriguing for the teachers as *Afsana* was one of the very few who did not cry at all during the initial three day camp. She had rather helped the teachers in calming other girls down during that period. However, she was a changed soul after two days of joining *Udaan*.

"I was scared, scared of everything - of studying, of sleeping in a big hall, of ghost, of EVERYTHING", says *Afsana*. She had never been to school earlier except to *Madrassah* for 15-20 days. She found the whole atmosphere totally in contrast with what she was used to - closed gates and fixed routines as against grazing cattle and roaming around in the open air, helping her mother in cooking and taking care of the younger brother. It was a different story later when she started liking the place very much, loved to read, write and draw, and made friends with many fellow girls.

Afsana joined the *Udaan* mainly because of her father *Ashique*, a cobbler who prevailed upon her mother who had apprehensions. However, the mother now disagrees that she had any reservations. She says that her daughter kept crying initially because she was possessed and stopped crying after she was exorcised.

seminar was held during September 1999. It created positive impact and the parents were generally happy with the progress. The children also presented several plays and songs on the stage. "I am not educated and do not follow half the things my daughter *Bitto* tells me, but I feel so proud that she is learning so many things" narrates *Bashir Ahmad*. Many of the contentious issues about lifestyle being followed at *Udaan* were also discussed and resolved during this seminar. It has been decided to hold such seminars with community after every two to three months. The second such seminar was held during November, 1999.

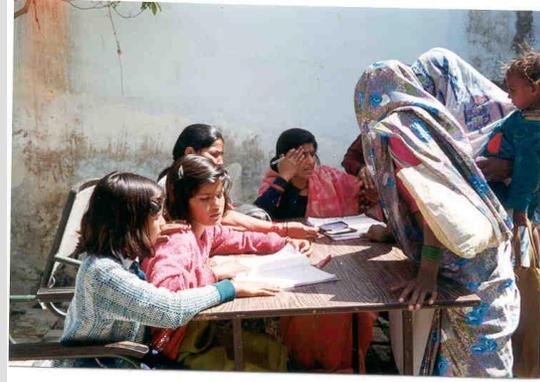
The experiences of the two seminars showed that "these were helping not only in sharing the progress of the girls but also in impacting the community's views on education and other related issues". There were discussions on the changes in the personality of girls attending *Udaan* and its implications, marriage of girls, etc., which stirred all present to think and reflect. Around 100 parents participated in these seminars and it was expected that such events would generate a process of thinking among the villagers on the deeper issues leading to a change for the better - in other words, taking the message of *Udaan* beyond *Udaan*.

The first two seminars were held at the Ashram and it was decided to hold the third at one of the villages from where five or more girls have joined

the *Udaan*. The idea was to involve villagers other than parents also in the process. However, this plan could not be realized mainly due to logistical problems. Organising the community seminar at any village would have involved a number of logistical preparations which did not seem possible at that stage.

CARE-UP personnel had been helping in conduct of these seminars so far. It was then decided that the next seminar to be held in March would be entirely organized and conducted by teachers themselves. The teachers did not mind it initially but when they realised that they themselves have to take all the decisions, they were a little scared. Though they were confident otherwise, they were conscious of conducting the proceedings in presence of their coordinator, Field Officer and others. But there was no option and they took the challenge. And they conducted the whole show in style and with an element of professionalism. This seminar was all the more important because it had been decided to share the progress of children and discuss the issue of further education of girls with parents.

The teachers were not alone in organising the seminar. Two girls, Renu and Veena, helped their teachers very efficiently by registering all the parents who came to attend. They handled the job with competence and it was a wonderful experience for the visiting parents to see them doing



Presenting the diverse and secular flavour of the country...

As part of the theme on Diversity in social learning, the girls were required to prepare Collage and stage presentations on Holi, Id and Christmas. It was an interesting process as the girls and teachers shared information among each other about Id and Holi - why are these festivals celebrated, what are the festivities followed, etc. It was fun to know why particular rituals are followed and also a discovery that both Holi and Id emphasized coming together of all by forgetting all animosity and differences. When it came to Christmas, they had to dig information from outside sources - by asking people and by reading books - as this has not been a festival they had seen or heard about.

Children collected photos, cuttings and other materials from old newspapers and magazines for preparing Collage. They were conscious that these should be able to communicate the essence of the theme besides looking good. The girls themselves came with some beautiful ideas and the teachers gave them some other. *Usha* and *Mamta* put in maximum work in preparing Collages.

It was tougher to prepare for and perform at stage, that too because the parents were there. If only teachers were there, there would have been no problem - the girls had been used to that. There were four to five scenes for each of the presentations. Each scene had four to five girls and the presentation involved freezing of one group the moment other enters. It needed practice and the girls were repeatedly making mistakes. But finally, the girls did it all well - the teacher used to provide clue by clapping and the girls used to catch the same. It was interesting to observe how girls of different community helped each other while preparing for these presentations - " No, no, this is not the way one puts *dupatta* on the head while offering *namaz* " , says *Ruby* to *Veena* and teachers her the correct way - *Veena* is also trying to understand and be perfect in looking like a Muslim woman.

this. The girls also handled the job of serving the *kheer* (sweet) to all the guests. They were aware that their future is going to be discussed in the seminars and were seen preparing their parents for the same!

A sense of deep satisfaction could be seen on the parents' faces when they were briefed about children's progress - how do they write stories and poems on their own, how do they solve mathematical puzzles, how they can make the country's map and what all have they learnt in social learning. In fact the girls presented Collage and stage shows on Holi, Id and Christmas - something they had prepared as part of social learning. This seminar had preceded Holi holidays in the camp.

The programme for the day started with *Kusumji*, the programme coordinator of the GPE in SA, making an appeal to parents not to get their daughters married off, and send them to class VI in any nearby school. *Urmilaji* informed them that girls belonging to SC community could get admission in the school being run in the Ashram for this specific purpose.

When the parents were divided into four groups for further discussion, one of the first questions was why this issue of not getting their daughters married before they are 18 years old. "We will be ostracised," they said. Lots of discussion followed, "it is not so easy to ostracise a family so easily" "you only told us that the

Shiksha Mela

Organising Shiksha Mela was yet another attempt to reach out to others - this time it was mainly to teachers of formal school and other Alternative schools in the area. The teachers of FECs and VLWs also participated in the event.

Shiksha Mela was organized within the premises of SA with collaboration with District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). Different schools had put their stalls showing aids, puzzles and other materials and activities. The activities such as debate and Just A Minute (JAM) session were organized. An interesting event of Treasure Hunt was also organized. The *Udaan* teachers could not participate in the debate or other such activities mainly because they remained busy in watching the stalls and other such details. There was an element of hesitation and a little bit of fear too. However, later they regretted not participating. Perhaps they needed more encouragement!

The FEC teachers participated well in JAM sessions. The *Udaan* girls also enjoyed the whole event. They also remember what everybody had to say on girls' education. *Ruby Fatima*, the president of *Udaan* parliament, was also declared the president of this mela and she fulfilled the role with responsibility and grace. The mela provided the first opportunity to *Udaan* teachers to interact with teachers of other schools.

whole village is proud of your daughter" "that is true, others also want to send their daughters now, but marriage is a different issue, and then there is no school in the village", " even if a school is there, the teachers never come and what would she learn in that school, keep her here, we will also be saved from the pressure of getting her married", "put the pressure on teachers to come and teach, if you all together talk to them, they would come" and so on.

Most of the parents appeared convinced to continue with their education. Some of them were rather determined. Parents of the two sisters, *Renu* and *Kiran*, *Vinay Prakash* and *Shakuntal* are ready to take their daughters to *Hardoi* for further education. There is no school in their village. The daughters proved themselves worthy of this determination by doing well in class V examinations. *Renu* topped among all the girls of *Udaan* and *Kiran* also secured a first class.

Two of the common concerns expressed related to the school not functioning well if the school happens to be there and that of security if the school is in some distant village. One common request was to let the girls continue in SA only. "if my daughter stays here, I would not be worrying regarding her security or quality of education; I would also be saved from remarks of my relatives and villagers", said *Neelam's* mother *Shanti Devi*.

6. *The Process of Curriculum Development and Transaction*

A lot of deliberations were held on the curricular approach to be adopted for *Udaan*. The approaches that are being used by similar programmes (*Mahila Samakhya*, *MV Foundation*, *Lok Jumbish*, etc.) were reviewed as part of the process. The GPE teams at Delhi, Lucknow and both the NGOs along with external resource persons who had been involved with the curriculum development and other aspects of FECs participated in these deliberations. Certain important agreements were arrived at as a result of this process:

- There would be two strands of curriculum, the main strand would focus on competencies equivalent to those for formal primary classes and the social strand would focus on facilitating development of independent personalities among these girls.
- The main strand of curriculum would not focus on preparing girls to take class five examinations alone; rather the girls would be systematically taken through the identified competencies for different classes in such a manner that they are naturally ready to take class five examination at the end of the process.
- The teaching method would be activity based and experiential - building upon the experiences of girls

and making them go through various learning experiences. These would be facilitated through use of total environment and variety of materials but there would not be any textbook.

- FECs follow a non-graded, level based curriculum, which allows varying pace of learning for individual child. However, it was felt that given the nature of *Udaan* it would not be advisable to have the same approach. Therefore, though many of the curricular items remain the same as FECs, in the case of *Udaan*, the graded approach with fixed periods of several weeks allocated to different grades is being followed.

- The social curriculum would not be simplistic and go deeper into the politics and economics of social/cultural/gender issues.

- The main and social strands of curriculum would complement each other. These would be developed with due consideration to the items and experiences of conducting the entire curriculum and not in isolation.

- Both the main and social curriculum would not be a one-time event. In other words, these would evolve taking actual experiences of the teachers and children into consideration.

- There would be a definite stress on rigour and maximising the learning time without putting undue load on learners or teachers.

The task of developing this curriculum was given to external resource persons who had been actively associated with GPE as well as all the deliberations related to *Udaan*. It was challenging to develop such a curricula without directly participating in everyday's experiences. However, what helped *Subir*, the resource person to develop the main strand of curriculum, was periodical formal and informal feedback from multiple sources. The formal feedback came from CARE-UP and inform from many others who were visiting *Udaan* for various purposes. The same is true for *Jyotsna* who helped in developing social strand of curriculum.

There are some of the important aspects of this curriculum, which helped in making it more holistic. The whole day has been divided into four major periods of learning - three of two hours each and one of one and a half hours. The first three periods are kept for main strand including Language, Mathematics and Environmental Science (EVS). The fourth period is for the social curricular items. Saturday is a different day where the social learning gets two to three hours of morning followed by review of the week's experiences. The teachers reflect on their experiences and plan for the coming week with support of the coordinator.

Having a long period of two hours instead of 40 to 45 minutes is a major shift. This has been done deliberately

“to create a complete experience of the subject i.e., Language or Mathematics as against a fragmented experience where the class is broken as soon as it starts building up”. The two hours are broken into different activities in such a manner that there is variety and the girls are taken through many experiences simultaneously. In case of Mathematics, this meant if girls are learning addition, they are also revising their understanding of numbers and pre-number concepts, and in case of Language it meant creating learning experiences of speaking, reading, writing and creating simultaneously. In other words, there has been very strong spiraling in terms of curricular items and activities taken for those items.

Another notable feature of the curriculum was evolving priorities regarding relative emphasis on different subject areas. Since Language is a device for learning other subjects as well, this was given much more space in the classes I and II. The Mathematics and EVS have been given relatively more emphasis in classes III, IV and V. There has been a lot of focus on self learning elements and use of library books and newspapers as the means for learning. The social curriculum has also been developed in tandem and in consideration to the skills of reading, writing and other communication forms. Similarly, the main strand of curriculum is not devoid of basic stands on equity and empowerment.

For instance, it was important that the girls enjoy learning Mathematics and do not develop any fear towards the subject, a rather common experience at many places.

It was not easy to determine the choice of curricular items and time to be spent on the same. Because of the severe time constraint of putting learning items meant for one year in few weeks schedule, it was not feasible to include everything that should have otherwise naturally formed part of curriculum for the respective grades. Finally, the competencies that the girls of this age and background were expected to have developed from their earlier experiences were excluded from the curriculum in the effort to select the most appropriate combination. This proved to be one of the most arduous parts of the process of developing curriculum.

A system of weekly unit cards with five columns of curricular number, points, time needed for the activity, activity/remarks and preparation (for material requirements, etc.) was developed to act as the guiding the teachers in arranging the class. Different curricular points were arranged for a session of two hours each taking following into consideration:

- Inter-linkages between these items and the learning experiences to be created
- Activities that are possible for these items

- Time required for the activity
- The materials required to conduct the activity and the likely availability
- The teachers' capacity to conduct the activity
- The ways to empower the teachers to conduct such activities.

A typical Unit Card looked like this				
Mathematics, Class III, Week 3				
Session I (two hours)				
No.	Curricular items	Time (Min)	Remarks/Activities	Preparation
2-1a	Counting – Upto 1000	30		
2-2d	Multiples and factors	15		
3-1a	Addition with carry-over	20		
5-2a	Viewing from different perspectives	20		
5-3a	Area	30		
Session II (two hours)				
No.	Curricular items	Time (Min.)	Remarks/Activities	Preparation
1-0a	Descending and ascending numbers	15		
2-2h	Writing numbers in words	20		
3-1a	Subtraction	20		
3-2a	Preparing to discover mathematical relationships	30		
4-0a	Zig-saw	20		
6-0	Operations with money	20		

The Main Curriculum		
Readiness	1 week (based on <i>Halcha</i> - the readiness package developed for FECs)	
Class I	4 Weeks	120 Hours
Maths	Sessions: 28	56 Hours
Language	Sessions: 32	64 Hours
Class II	5 Weeks	150 Hours
Maths	Sessions: 30	60 Hours
Language	Sessions: 35	70 Hours
Class III	6 Weeks	180 hours
Maths	Sessions: 30	60 Hours
Language	Sessions: 30	60 Hours
EVS	Sessions: 30	60 Hours
Additional hours for Class III (based on Feedback & evaluation)		
Language	Sessions: 15	30 Hours
Maths	Sessions: 12	24 Hours
The approach changed in classes IV and V with a lot more emphasis on projects and self-learning. Thinking skills (TS) were also introduced.		
Class IV	7 Weeks	210 Hours
Maths	Sessions: 33	66 Hours
Language	Sessions: 33	66 Hours
EVS/TS	Sessions: 39	78 Hours
Class V	8 Weeks	240 Hours
Maths	Sessions: 42	84 Hours
Language	Sessions: 35	70 Hours
EVS/TS	Sessions: 43	84 Hours

The teachers are provided unit cards with first three columns filled and are expected to fill the last two columns on their own. Recurrent training is provided at the time of starting new classes. The activities that could be taken up for different items are discussed during these interactions.

Few general tips are provided as part of Unit Cards.

The process of curriculum development was a dynamic process in the first year. Mid-course corrections were undertaken based on feedback from teachers regarding the progress of girls showing that the process has been flexible, responsive and evolving.

A major turning point was experienced at the time of completion of class III and there was a lot of difference in the approach adopted for later classes, i.e., classes IV and V.

The important points for formal evaluation were marked in the curriculum for the convenience of the teachers. The formal evaluation as well as the observations by the teachers at the end of class III suggested that many girls had not attained the required competencies of reading and writing in Language. Therefore, a plan was made for additional two weeks giving emphasis on the aspects that were considered weak. The constraint posed by limited time, which cannot be stretched beyond stipulated period due to a number of reasons, is the biggest challenge. An analysis of the problems faced in Class III suggested that there are about 20 to 30 girls in the age group of 7 to 9 years for whom it might not be easy to complete five grades. Thus, the strategic options of dealing with the situation through separate grouping or revising the goals for those girls were considered.

***Shibri Shabdkosh* - A novel Experience**

In order to develop an understanding of the Order and vowels in the language, this unique project of developing a Udaan specific dictionary was devised. This was also important because the girls in *Udaan* had not started learning language by memorising *Varnmala* of letters.

Each girl in all the four groups were given one page each to write one word and its meaning. All these pages were collected and then put in order. All the words had to be linked to *Udaan* in some way or the other. While developing the order, the sequence of all the vowels and letters were discussed in detail with girls and a dictionary was developed by combining the works of all the four groups.

The whole exercise helped the girls not only in understanding the order and sequence but also prepared them for referencing and accessing materials in libraries! Referencing is perhaps the most important exercise where one needs to know the order and sequencing of letters and vowels (*vartani*).

The girls enjoyed this project tremendously - and on their own came with the idea of developing a separate dictionary of words related to Mathematics! This idea was accepted and the girls did develop in such dictionary also.

However, at the end due to hard work put in by the teachers and children, 91 girls finally cleared the class V examinations.

The subject teaching in *Udaan* was different from what one comes across in the typical formal system. For instance, language teaching was not only an issue of teaching to read and write but included other finer aspects as well. Language was seen as an effective medium of approaching one's universe and according treated in the curriculum that was developed. It was not easy to transform the aspects such as the difference between the language of literature and newspaper or humour into curricular items in a manner that these could be transacted easily in the classrooms.

Newer methods and activities were devised to develop the appropriate understanding and suitable application skills. These included a number of projects and activities including development of a *Shibri Shabdkosh* i.e., Camp Dictionary, bringing out a weekly Newsletter and development of their own book of Environment. A number of non-fictional materials such as railway time-tables were used to help children learn the concepts.

Environmental Studies was given much more importance in classes IV and V. EVS was seen not only as a means of developing concepts of science, history and geography but also a way of developing many of the application and sharpening of skills.

Own Book of Environment

Developing their own book on Environment was another new and interesting project completed in class IV. All the children were given one notebook each, which they had to finish within a given time frame. They were supposed to collect all information regarding their village and regarding Ashram, process those and report in their notebooks. In the beginning, the children were apprehensive whether they would be able to fill the entire notebook! But slowly when the teacher started asking questions such as how many families are there in your village, what are the sources of water, etc., the children understood and there was no stopping. These books are full of information on families, crops, rivers, flora, etc. in every village from where the girls came.

Many of the girls have drawn maps and made drawings - somebody made a drawing of the tree where she used to swing, somebody else painted her cow and somebody else the temple of her village!

In the similar vein, they wrote about details of *Udaan* life - where are the classrooms for four groups, how are the arrangements made for different activities, etc. They also collected information about the profession and other aspects of all those living in Ashram. The books also provide interesting information such as which is the tallest tree in the Ashram!

The importance of scientific as well as social means of finding a fact was emphasised in EVS teaching. The children were exposed to inter-relationships that exist in our environment. For instance, why lions do not live in jungles where there is no grass despite the fact that they do not eat grass was explained logically by showing that goats would not come to jungles if there is no grass and lions would not get their pray. The relativity of values and beliefs was also discussed. For example, how killing a person, otherwise a crime, becomes acceptable when resorted to in war or when State uses it as Capital punishment was discussed and deliberated upon.

The use of maps, globe and outdoor activities was common in EVS teaching. The children have learnt and enjoyed the experience. "I always knew when does Autumn come but now I know why does it come only in Autumn", says *Kiran*. She also knows which area gets maximum rainfall in India and can show the state in the map. They have also learnt why Indian climate is known as Monsoon climate and other such topics.

EVS teaching also included aspects of Human Body and it's functioning. In one such class, the children were at loss when asked by the teacher how many types of ears are there. They first said all have similar ears. Then they started touching their own and looking at others', and realized each one's was different from others.

100 girls have been divided into four groups of 25 girls each. In order to have an identity, these groups have been named after different birds - *Bulbul, Goraiya, koyal* and *Maina*. At the initial stage, it was debated whether to keep similar age-group girls in the same groups or to have mixed age groups. The latter was considered more appropriate for generating peer learning and therefore, suitable to the *Udaan* approach.

The use of Self Learning Guide

The use of learning Guides was started on a limited scale in class IV with dual purpose of encouraging self learning among the girls and to provide some free time to teachers for other purposes. The students were given written instructions for reading particular books and then writing answers to certain Questions. Later, this started including instructions on doing activities such as quiz and discussion. Towards the end of class IV, more open-ended instructions were given.

In class V, the girls were divided in groups of five and the teachers explained the curricular points in detail. The girls then used to look for relevant material and explore for possible questions and answers. These guides were used for only few curricular points. The teachers have documented the feedback with a view to use these in future, especially for follow-up activities.

Come and Read our Newsletters....

With an aim to expose and teach the girls about media and communication, it was decided that children in all four groups would bring out a weekly newsletter on every Sunday. The teachers were oriented regarding different aspects such as nature and layout of the newsletter and from where to collect the materials for the same. It was felt that the children would need some guidance and support for first four weeks after which they should be in a position to take this up on their own. The experience, however, proved this wrong. "We had to teach them only once, how to do and what to do, they never came to us again," says *Maheshwari*, one of the teachers in *Udaan*. Others agree with her entirely. *Indravati*, the other teacher adds, "the four groups used to compete - they also used to maintain secrecy, not ready to let the new leak before being reported in the newsletter."

The girls learnt a number of important values, concepts and skills through this experience. They learnt to work in a team set-up and also to divide work according to respective strength. The girls with good hand-writing used to get the desk job of writing all the pieces in appropriate sizes, making captions and putting them in bigger fonts, etc. Some girls used to make drawings and cartoons, some used to write poems and some jokes! Some other girls were given the responsibility of collecting news and reporting the same in writing. However, the girls got bored with the similar tasks and then decided that everybody would be given different types of tasks after some time. This involved interviewing and interacting with people. The girls did all these jobs creatively and responsibly. *Kalindri*, another teacher pointed out that at times these girls used to report seemingly mundane event also in such an interesting manner that it was fun to read those!

Teachers feel that the experience helped the girls in breaking their hesitation and made them communicate to all and sundry. "The girls used to go to all - the teachers of other schools in the Ashram campus, the staff of other projects, a passer-by on the road - to collect the information regarding happenings and to know their views. The questions, many a times, used to be so tricky that the respondents needed to think twice before answering."

The girls have thoroughly enjoyed the experience. They really liked to make the layout of the newsletter and loved to change it after few issues. The different issues of newsletters were full of interesting new items - "a dog got entangled in bicycle", "*Mamaji* burnt his tongue while eating hot *pakodias* early this morning", "trolley filled with sugarcane hit a bicycle", etc. One of the aims was to help the girls sharpen their expression capacities and encourage their creativity. There is no doubt that the project achieved these aims.

A Comparative Experience with One Formal School

Mr. F. A. Jami, A Field Officer with GPE, had undertaken a research project for national Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi. As part of this project, he gave the similar tasks of writing about their villages and environment of children of class V in a formal school in the same locality. Some of the interesting findings of his analysis are being presented here:

- The children in Formal school found it more difficult to write on any open-ended topic as compared to the girls in *Udaan*.
- The girls in *Udaan* were more creative in their writing in comparison to the children in Formal school who seemed more keen on providing information and facts alone.
- There was more variety and diversity among the writings of the girls in *Udaan* as compared to that in Formal school children. Their writings appeared to be similar to each other's.
- The girls in *Udaan* were enjoying themselves and their assignments while the children in Formal school were taking it as yet another task to be completed in some manner or the other.
- About 6% of girls in *Udaan* were weak in use of vowels and conjunct letters as against 20% in formal schools.

In general, emphasis on thinking, creativity and application has been the hallmark in the entire pedagogical process. The teachers used to give pictures and drawings to girls to develop stories. It was interesting how different girls interpreted the images quite differently from each other. The same photo with jungle, one bird, a lion and a snake led to formation of so many different stories - some girls made lion eat the bird, some other made the lion die and still others added more characters to it!

Creativity encouraged

The girls initially found it difficult to make rhyme - there used to be no meaning in these. Slowly the situation changed and they came with beautiful poems. Following are two songs of *Holi* and *Basant* (spring) prepared by girls:

*"Rang se Shari hai uski jholi;
ek-duje par daal rahe hain;
udhar se aa gayee bhabhi bholi;
sabne mil kar pakda usko;
rang se bhar di uski choli"*
(*Holi* song prepared by *Goraiya* group)

*"Mali le kar aaya thali;
usme thi phoolon ki dali;
aam ke baur ki chata niralai;
aur saheli gehun ki bali;
jise dekh kar boli aali;
aayi hai basant ki lali."*
(*Basant* song prepared by *Koyal* group)

Learning Mathematics can be Fun too....

In order to realize the objective of making the girls enjoy learning mathematics without any fear, certain activities/projects were planned in classes IV and V. One of the important aims was to make children curious about the existence of mathematics around them. "Mathematics in Kitchen" was one of the first such exercises - the children initially failed to understand how can there be any mathematics in kitchen but soon caught up when the teachers started explaining the shapes and sizes and use of proportions in cooking anything and so on. Now these girls can find mathematics in anything and everything. When asked about what mathematics is there in a ceiling fan they could promptly respond about the shape and number of its wings and were also quick to retort with a question on what mathematics was there in the charts put on the walls. They themselves came with the answers too - "all the angles of are the same", "lines are parallel" and so on.

The girls had an interesting time learning the concept of average or mean. All the girls were asked to find the average height of girls in *Bulbul* group - the children in this group being the youngest of all. Later, the girls in *Bulbul* group did the same exercise for girls in *Maina* group. There are numerous other examples such as use of knitting pattern and use of graphs to understand the scale map and relational concepts. The girls really enjoyed solving and developing the puzzles of language mathematics. The visitors often have to face questions like "if Deepa's paternal uncle's father is Rajani's grand-father, what is the relation between Deepa and Rajani." In case, the visitor happens to know that these two girls are sisters and answers immediately, they catch it and come up with the tougher ones.

In all the projects, one ground rule was followed - initial examples were always from within the context of girls, from their villages, families, fields, games or *Udaan* life. Examples from new and unknown world were also used at later stages to expose them to unknown concepts and facts.



As part of a session for thinking and problem solving skills, the girls were once asked how would they take one bed from the insides of a room to the top of the roof. The girls came with a wide range of answers - each different from the other - some would buy only folding beds, some would break the legs and then fix those again and some others would just carry this on its sides.

The social learning is aimed towards developing these girls into self-confident individuals, who could think critically, visualise their own potentials and be conscious of their social responsibilities. Most of the Life-skill based curriculum being used at other places were found to be loaded with information and somewhat naïve in its approach (i.e., issues of hygiene deal with the need to bathe regularly but ignore discussing regular availability to bathe in or the politics of unequal access to water). Therefore, this programme tried to avoid these limitations by developing a manageable yet dynamic curriculum. In order to facilitate planning and progression, six concentrics were identified:

- Self
- Immediate family, Friends, Community, Local environment
- Larger society, Gender divides, Hierarchy
- Ecology
- Economy

These were further elaborated and most of the topics and themes fit into one or more of these concentrics.

These are, however, neither mutually exclusive nor do they necessarily suggest a progression from one to the other. They provide a framework within which the items are selected and developed on the basis of actual experiences.

It was also borne in mind that much of the learning in both the strands fall into categories of skills, concepts, information and attitudinal development. The division and the inter-linkages affected the choice of methods adopted. For instance, if girls are expected to collect information by reading, that would not happen till they have learnt reading in language classes. Keeping these in view, the methods used for social learning content included discussions, role-plays, interviews, visits, etc. It was a conscious decision to choose methods that strengthen the skills learnt by applying those and enable critical thinking without making the whole experience boring and heavy.

The same system of unit cards was being followed for social curriculum also. The approach adopted for this strand is thematic. Six sessions were planned for each week, which were based on one single theme. The themes were chosen in and around the six concentrics. The choice was also always informed by the views and feedback from teachers and coordinators.

The topics covered included aspects of living together by sharing

responsibilities; health and hygiene; social, cultural, individual and occupational diversity; inequity in various forms; ecological interdependence; communication; collective actions in form of various people's movements; banking and credit systems; democracy and its functioning, transport, laws and its role in society, the status of girls and women in society. Dowry and women's rights to property, minimum wages, societal responsibility, etc. The topics for EVS and social learning were chosen after mutual consultation and consideration.

Learning about Mahatma - through Quiz

It is not uncommon to find children disinterested in knowing about life-stories of great people. Hence, when it was decided to include Mahatma Gandhi as a theme in the social learning, it was important to transact this through an interesting means. Quiz had already been introduced as a medium in the main strand. The girls were given a number of booklets and other materials on Gandhi and were asked to prepare questions for quiz. The teachers also helped and in the process a number of interesting events and aspects of his personality such as Dandi march, Non-cooperation movement, Gandhi's work in South Africa, how he used to tell lies as a child, who were his best friend, etc. were also discussed interestingly. The groups prepared quizzes and inter-group competitions were held on the basis of questions prepared by the third group.

It was a challenge to convert these themes/topics into suitable transaction exercises. Since the girls as well as the teachers used to be tired by the end of the day after three two-hour sessions, it was necessary that these sessions are interesting enough to hold their attention and get them involved. Hence, the elements of humour and outdoor activities were given special importance. For instance, Modes of transport was discussed through the theme "Journey" - the teachers started by telling interesting travel stories and the girls came up with all kinds of stories of traveling all modes, train, bus, bullock cart and so on. Some had seen trains, some had not. Some had not gone beyond the block headquarter, some not beyond Ashram. Information regarding all modes of transport were shared among each other and processed methodically by the teachers. Both girls and teachers did enjoy the experience tremendously and learn from the whole process.

The context was given critical importance in all the themes. The theme of bank was initiated by discussing the village moneylenders and different types of credit system that exist in the villages. The girls had first hand experience that could narrate and then followed the concept of modern banking and its advantages. They were also taken to a bank to see the functioning themselves, followed by a question-answer session with the bank manager. The week on

Marriage....views and stands....

It was a difficult situation - just before examinations, *Neelam's* parents came to SA to take her - they had settled her marriage with someone. The girl went to her group teacher *Kahkashan* to ask - what do I do? A lot of discussion followed. The parents felt that the teachers were overstepping their jurisdiction by advising parents to get their daughter married after examinations. *Neelam* kept crying and finally teachers and children could together convince the parents to postpone the date of marriage. It is common to get the girls married off at the age of 12-13 years in this area. *Seema* was married off during *Holi* holidays but she continued and passed with good numbers. Her mother *Jayarani* was defensive - "her husband is also studying and he would help her in studying further."

But a change can also be seen - "a number of proposals are coming because the girl has learnt to read and write, and has also learnt manners, but since she is keen we would let her study further first", said *Nanhi Devi*, *Pinky's* mother. Most girls are confident that their parents would now not force them to marry early. "If they insist, we will inform police, it is crime to marry girls before they are 18 years old" said *Supasna*. They have learnt this in social learning classes. However, some do not seem to have an option. *Poonam's* marriage is already settled and she cannot say no to that.

communication included visit to post office and exposure to working of telephone, fax and email.

Some of the themes were repeated also after a gap of several weeks with a change of perspective and by going deeper into issues at later stages. For instance, Diversity was dealt with once towards the beginning itself with a focus on nature, ecology, colour, etc. later this was discussed with a focus on religion, gender, caste, etc. The attempt was to treat a topic holistically taking all perspectives into consideration in a manner that children could comprehend and develop a view. The discussion on hygiene and health included deliberations on who is the last to eat in the family and why women and girls always eat leftovers and so on.

It was observed that the girls were more forthcoming in expressing their experiences and forming views as the time passed. When the topic of Marriage was discussed first, the children were shy and used to blush. Later they discussed it more openly, could relate this to a number of social practices and aspects such as dowry, gender discrimination, etc.

The theme of democracy was once discussed through Panchayats and their functioning. However, it was considered inadequate and to provide them a first hand experience the children were taken through a process of electing their own *Udaan* parliament when they were in class IV.

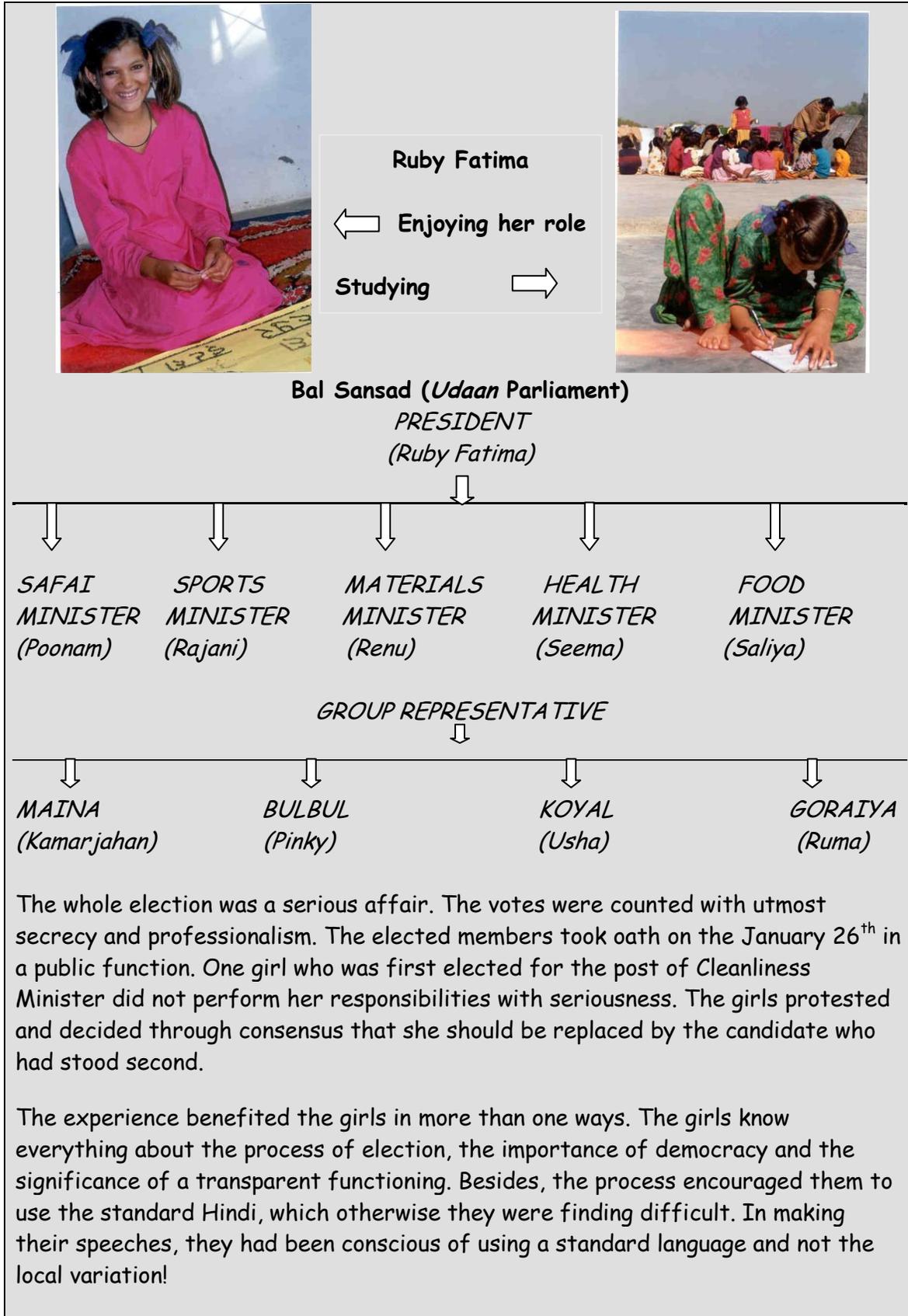
Bal Sansad – A Unique Experience

One experience that brings glitter in the eyes of children as well as teachers is that of going through the process of electing their representatives and forming *Udaan* parliament. The first three weeks of January, 2000 were full of excitement because of the preparations for and conduct of this election. The whole concept was first introduced in the form of a play to girls with an aim to show the difference between monarchy or any such form and republic. Then they were told that *Udaan* too would have an elected government. Initially the girls were reluctant to participate but slowly they became more and more interested and at the end the elections were fought passionately.

As a first step, an Election Commission was formed with few girls nominated as members. The girls were identified by general consensus. Then the rules were formed which were as binding as Mr. Sheshan's rules in the General Election. The rules barred certain things like spending any money on campaign or making false promises, etc. The posts for which the elections would be held were also decided. The girls were also explained that once elected, they are accountable to all and not only to those who have voted for them. Under the supervision of Election Commission, ballot papers and boxes were made.

The candidates were allotted space for posters and they could not use any other space for the purpose. The teachers narrate with interest how the candidates used to prepare their campaign speeches. Initially the girls did not take it seriously but slowly they started realising and feared losing. *Poonam* of *Koyal* group told, "all of us became very apprehensive of losing just before the polling day". *Indravati*, one of the teacher narrated how the candidates who lost cried bitterly. *Veena* of *Maina* group lost by just one vote to *Kamarjahan* for the post of group representative. It was obviously hear-breaking and *Veena* broke down when the result was declared. However, later she started helping *Kamarjahan* in fulfilling her duties. This was more or less true for almost all the candidates - those who won were jubilant and those who lost cried but later they were all again friends.

Ruby Fatima, who was elected president proved to a popular and competent candidate. *Moni* of *Bulbul* group told that everybody voted for her on her own - "she was the most deserving candidate, could take care of everybody, no discrimination, no nonsense." *Ruby Fatima* felt very happy to have won and loved the fact her name was announced from stage. Once she overcame her initial hesitation, she started enjoying the whole process of campaigning and participating in other exercises. Later she and her cabinet took their jobs quite seriously and participate in meetings along with teachers to discuss the issues and problems.



Since many of the skills, concepts and attitudes can be best developed by practicing them, it was decided right from beginning to have a daily routine that allows natural learning of many aspects. Therefore, it was agreed that different committees of girls would be formed for various tasks at *Udaan* and the girls would take responsibilities of running many aspects of the residential life themselves including cleaning their rooms, clothes, utensils, toilets, etc. The teachers and others helped them initially but slowly they started performing their duties on their own. In the same vein, it was decided to have them opportunity to play all kinds of sports including Badminton and Football. They were encouraged to learn cycling. These were expected to break the traditional stereotypes about the games girls should play and the skills girls should learn.

The relatively young age of some of the girls has also determined the approach and choice of depth for some of the social learning issues. The *Udaan* coordinator feels that the parents of these girls wrongly reported their age in their eagerness to seek admission and she would henceforth be very careful.

Paucity of time was considered a real problem by all including teachers, coordinators and the Field Officer of CARE. Since this was the first year of implementation and the approach being new, the teachers often had to struggle both to understand the new

Let Us Play Exams - Exams!

There had been no system of examination in *Udaan* and the evaluation was based on observations feedback of teachers. In order to make children familiar with the examination system and also to prepare them to take examinations without any fear, the idea of this game, Exams-Exams was thought of.

The teachers used to write questions on blackboard and the children were asked to copy them in their notebooks. Then they were asked to solve those within the stipulated time of two hours. Seating arrangement was also done to give a semblance of the real situation. In the game no choices were given though the real examination does offer choices.

In first such experience, 80 % of girls secured pass marks. *Indravati* was happy that all children in her group *Goraiya* passed and 6 girls also secured 90 % or more marks. *Maheshwari* felt that though 10 girls in *Koyal* group failed, others did well and after all this was first experience of its kind. The process helped teachers in identifying the problem areas from the point of view of preparing them for taking exams.

The experience helped the girls in taking class V examination later. The textbooks of classes IV and V were also introduced to girls as one of the reading materials to make them familiar to these.

Developing the curricula - A Multiple Challenge

Development of curricula for both the main and social strands was a multiple challenge. It was not merely an exercise of developing the curricular points or themes and training teachers on the same. There were a number of barrier that had to be overcome. First of all, the whole approach was new for the teachers as well the coordinator. They were often suspicious of their own capacities to be able to transact the same. At times, the problems were real because of weak conceptual understanding and at times it was only a matter of confidence.

The resource persons who developed the curricula and helped in training feel that some of the things could not be done simply because there was a lack of faith in children's capacity among the coordinator and the teachers. They could often not believe that these children who have never been to any schools would be able to undertake such activities. The anxiety about class V examination created an atmosphere that made children unnecessarily concerned and conscious of their performance.

However, there is now a sense of discovery and the experience has made the team seems to have more confidence in themselves as well in children. The good performance of children in class V exams has also helped in this.

concepts and to develop the capacity to transact the same in the classroom. Many a times, the teachers had themselves had forgotten many of the basic content areas in mathematics and Science and had to revise them. *Kahkashan* accepted that she had to revise the whole concept of decimals and fractions herself first before being able to transact these to children. *Indravati* also pointed out that it was much easier to teach the areas where they themselves had conceptual clarity. The teachers felt that paucity of time and fast pace of introducing new curricular points meant lack of sufficient practice time for children.

Many of the curricular points in class V were not covered because the children had to be prepare for taking class V examinations. The teachers and the coordinator were apprehensive of their children not doing well in examination and did not want to take any risks.

This being the first year, the teachers needed a lot of planning and preparation. *Urmilaji*, the coordinator also had to provide lot of support in these activities to teachers. The fast pace of learning expected from students often seemed unreal to the teachers but sheer hard work put in by both teachers and the girls could turn this into real. Though the second year would definitely be less demanding, better time management could also prove helpful.

7. *Training the teachers*

The teachers and others including selected VLWs as well as newly recruited Field Officers for CARE required to be oriented to different aspects of *Udaan* management and trained to transaction of Curriculum in appropriate manner. An elaborate plan for training of teachers and others was chalked out for the purpose.

First of all, the teachers were **oriented for a day about the concept, vision and goals of *Udaan*** and the expected role of teachers in realising the same. This was followed by an orientation on the proposed field visit to the villages from where the girls had been identified for admission. **Field visit to villages** was planned to make teachers familiar with the girls' surroundings as well as to make children and parents familiar with the teachers. The teachers were oriented on several aspects such as how to behave with villagers without any indication of any bias towards any caste or class; how to interact with people so that a trust could be built; how to understand the experiences that the girls would have undergone so far; and so on.

The teachers view these village visits as a very effective learning experience despite the fact that it was a tough task at that point of time. People at many places were not taking them seriously because of their relatively young age. More often than not these teachers were "interviewed"

by parents about their personal as well as professional background in detail - where do you belong to; whether married or not; whether has children or not; if yes, how could she leave her children behind to live at the *Ashram*; what is the educational qualification;.... and what not. It was relatively easier in the villages where the Mothers Group had been more active or the VLW had established good relation with the villagers. However, the whole exercise proved to be fruitful in developing a rapport with the girls and their parents, which played decisive role in their decisions to join the programme. The villagers were generally impressed with the teachers' behavior and could trust them to take care of their daughters. It also helped teachers in understanding the perspective and context of girls' lives, which is now helping them in dealing with them more effectively.

This training was followed by a **visit to *Banda* to study MSK**. The teachers, selected VLWs and others including the CARE's Field Officer were briefed about the visit and given a check-list. This provided tips on conducting themselves in such visit as well as the important points for observation and understanding. The teachers term this visit as useful in understanding following aspects:

- The teachers have to practically live with children day and night, which means children are going

to observe and learn from every little behavioral aspect of theirs.

- How to deal with adolescent girls; what kind of questions they could have; what could be their reactions - the teachers could visualise some of these during this visit.

There could be hundreds of big and small errands as well as problems in running any residential school for girls and for those who have not experienced these themselves, it is not possible to foresee all of these. The visit in a way helped the teachers in preparing themselves to face unexpected problems in *Udaan*.

The next step was to train teachers on basics of activity based method and readiness package. Almost all the children going to join the *Udaan* had never been to school and had no previous experience of participating in systematic learning processes. Therefore, it was considered essential to have at least a week long readiness exercise for them. Since *Halchal*, the readiness package prepared for FECs, is much more than a mere package and deals with basics of subject teaching, it was viewed as ideal material for exposing teachers to the pedagogical approach.

As part of training based on *Halchal*, the teachers received inputs on following aspects:

Steps of Orientation/Training of Teachers before starting of *Udaan*

One day orientation on the concept, vision and goals of *Udaan*.

Five day visit to villages from where the girls were identified for admission; with appropriate briefing and debriefing sessions.

Five day visit to *Mahila Shikshan Kendra (MSK)* being run by *Mahila Samakhya* at Banda district in *Uttar Pradesh*.

Five day training on *Halchal*, the Readiness package and basics of activity based teaching learning process.

Three day training on use of materials and means of communication in education.

Ten day training on teaching methods, basic pedagogical approach being adopted, transaction of classes I and II curriculum, use of Unit Cards and transaction of social learning.

Organisation of three day camp

- How do children grow, including the aspects of their physical/cognitive levels as well as socio-emotional development. They were also given inputs on the varying pace and nature of learning at different age.

- How to make children feel comfortable and break their initial hesitations by eliminating their fears and suspicions, creating known experiences, making all of them

participate and generating a feeling of achievement.

- Children's worldview and its relationship with learning as well as implications for teachers in dealing with children.
- How to teach Language including aspects of our own beliefs about Language teaching, what is the "right" language, oral and written languages and best ways of teaching language.
- How to make Mathematics an enjoyable subject through use of daily life's experiences and use of concrete materials. The use of appropriate language in Mathematics teaching was also highlighted.
- What is Environment and how to teach EVS more effectively by including aspects of known and unknown world for children.
- Use of materials in teaching all the subjects was deliberated upon including the issue of how to view all available things as teaching materials.
- Why evaluation of children's progress is important but examination is not the most appropriate means for the same. What should be the basis for periodic evaluation and how to use the results of evaluation for improving the effectiveness. The aspect of review and evaluating the teachers' own work was also discussed.

- How to plan the days teaching and how to develop week's plans taking feedback from review and evaluations as well as their experiences into consideration. Why planning becomes important was also discussed.

- Maintaining the *Udaan* premise as a learning institution as well as the second home of children.

A three day exposure to use of newspapers, books and magazines in education followed. The teachers were given newspapers to read and were asked to identify the ways this could be used for teaching girls. Discussion followed where they came up with some ideas. They were also told about using the materials in the newspapers for language, EVS and social learning contents. When children start seeing newspapers they become interested in pictures and then try to read the captions. This helps them in developing reading skills.

They were also given ideas about making puzzles by using coloured photographs in the newspapers and magazines. Any photograph could be torn into several pieces and given to children as a puzzle to make the original picture again.

Ten day residential teacher training at Lucknow was the next step in the series of activities designed to orient the teachers. This training was designed as a rigorous exercise following the same pattern as was likely to be there in actual *Udaan*

Main Sessions of the Ten Day Teacher Training

(Strong element of spiraling could be seen even in training design)

- | | |
|----------|---|
| DAY I | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Formation of Committees and distribution of responsibilities 2. Why <i>Udaan</i>; What is Education and Why is it necessary 3. Assumptions and beliefs about Children; Challenges in the are of Education 4. Importance of Games and Enjoyment in Education; Review of the Day's work |
| DAY II | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is Activity 2. Classification of Activities 3. The Process of Learning 4. Review of the Day's work; Screening of the Film "<i>Armaan</i>" |
| DAY III | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is Language 2. Steps and Means of Language Development 3. What is Mathematics and Discussion on Mathematics Learning 4. Activities for Mathematics; Review of the Day's work |
| DAY IV | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is Drawing; Drawing through local means 2. What is EVS 3. Mathematics <i>Mela</i> 4. Screening of Films "<i>Meena</i>" and "<i>Nakhusha</i>" followed by their review through discussion |
| DAY V | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction to Social Learning 2. The main concentrics of Social learning; the daily routine to be followed in <i>Udaan</i> life 3. Difference between Sex and Gender; What is Gender Sensitivity 4. Readiness and Class I curriculum - A Review |
| DAY VI | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Academic Objectives of <i>Udaan</i> and the constraints therein 2. The Role of Teacher in <i>Udaan</i>; Basic elements and types of Activities 3. Importance of group work and linkages between different methods 4. Assignments |
| DAY VII | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Comparative study of teaching language, Mathematics and EVS 2. What is EVS 3. Possible ways of handling Social Curriculum 4. Linkages and differences between two strands of Curriculum |
| DAY VIII | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Language teaching in class I 2. Mathematics teaching in class I 3. Weekly thematic and Session planning for Social Learning 4. Conduct of different kind of sessions for Social Learning |
| DAY IX | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers conducting sessions 2. Review of the last session and development of session cards for all subjects 3. Planning for <i>Udaan</i> management 4. Development of Session cards |
| DAY X | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preparation of Session Card for Readiness Phase 2. Discussion on Social Curriculum 3. Clarification on various management as well pedagogical issues |

The whole team went to a Theatre to see a Hindi Feature Film!

routine. This included morning prayers, four sessions of two hours each and formation of committees for conducting different tasks such as one for food and tea, one for arranging the training hall, one to take care of all the materials being used in training, and so on. The idea was to give teachers a first hand experience of the tasks ahead.

The basics of the *Halchal* training were taken ahead and the teachers were taken through experiences of learning several curricular items of the class I through a variety of methods - self learning, peer learning, small group and large group learning, etc. Use of means such as role-play, materials, games, puzzles, riddles, etc. were also given a lot of emphasis. This was done by using these in the training followed by a discussion on the advantages of such usage.

During the entire workshop, the participants were made to think and reflect on various issues. Many a times the participants were divided into small groups and given questions to find their own answers along with the rationale for their answers. These were later discussed in the plenary and resolved with consensus. These questions related to prevalent assumptions, beliefs and practices about how children learn as well as teaching of different subjects.

The training also focussed on the question why the typical method of teaching with textbooks was not

considered appropriate for *Udaan*.

The textbook method, as it is followed at most of the places, is rigid and tends to make children passive. As against this, the approach being followed at *Udaan* is flexible and allows active learning. This approach was considered relatively more empowering for the children as well as teachers. The teachers are not merely tools but active participants in deciding the activities and the methods for different curricular items. The whole exercise becomes more interesting and fruitful as children as well as teachers go through a variety of experiences while learning/teaching a particular concept/skill/information/attitude.

Organisation of three day camp with support of MV Foundation was the next and last in the series. As discussed earlier, this camp provided many very useful insights to teachers while helping in building community support. The teachers received hands on experience of running a residential camp for girls who have never been to school earlier. The experience came handy later in resolving several issues.

Going through this series of activities as part of orientation/training programme for about one and a half month was an enriching experience for all the teachers. "I was totally lost during the first two-three days of orientation. New approach to teaching, unique methods of handling subjects - everything seemed so novel and undoable in the beginning; but the scene changed and at the end of the

process, all of us felt much more confident and empowered," felt *Kalindri*, one of the teachers in *Udaan*.

Maheshwari, another teacher echoed the sentiments when she said, "we are now so confident that we can teach in any kind of school. The training programmes and exposure trips helped us shed our own hesitations and apprehensions, and we learnt so many new skills of story-telling, role-plays and games". *Kalindri* felt that encouragement received from all corners played a good role in enhancing teachers' confidence. Another teacher, *Kehkeshan* thoroughly enjoyed the experience and says that she was inspired to see MSK at *Banda* and today feels satisfied with the fact that she herself is actively associated with one such experiment. *Indrawati*, more popularly known as *Indu* agreed that this method of teaching is far superior to the one based on linear progression and rote memory. She felt strongly that these children's understanding of concepts are much better than those who are not made to go through such experiences.

The process of teacher training was not aimed at only building their skills for teaching but was also meant to enable a team spirit as well as to start a process of change in their attitude and beliefs. And this did happen to a large extent. The teachers came here as any other typical woman of that age with similar beliefs about caste and religion but today they do not

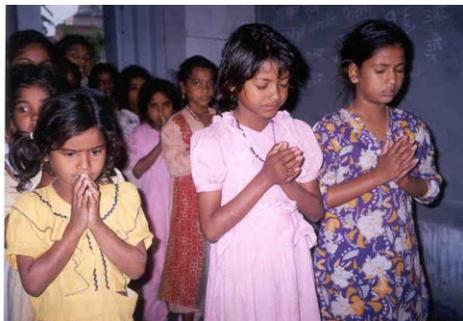
pursue the same beliefs. When they had joined they too believed in so called purity of caste and Hindu-Muslim divide and found it difficult to think that girls and teachers belonging to high and low caste as well as to Muslim community would eat together. Today they can laugh at themselves for having thought so and cannot think of following any discriminatory practice any more. However, at times, they have to follow these when they go home during vacations. Even in case of teaching methods, they could not imagine themselves as participating in games and role-plays. They felt they were too old to indulge in such acts and now are totally at ease with most of these.

This one and a half month of orientation/training provided organized before the starting of *Udaan* was followed by a series of training later. **Three to four day training on main strand and two day training on social learning were organized for teachers and coordinators before starting every new class- II, III, IV and V.**

The resource persons who were developing two strands of curricula remained the primary resource persons for the 10-day initial training and later continuous training. They used to come with detailed curricular plan/theme plan and discuss the conceptual as well as transactional aspects. These served the dual purpose of orientation to curricula and preparing to transact the same.

8. A Typical Day in *Udaan*

Morning. 5 o'clock. 5.45 a. m. is the prayer time but some of the girls are already awake. Most of them are still sleeping. 5.15 a.m. Half awake but it is still half an hour away, so why get up so early - why not pull their sheets to protect themselves from the light already coming from windows.



There are two big halls which houses fifty wooden cots each, spread in two straight lines of twenty-five each. These halls double up as classroom during the day along with the adjacent covered verandah, which are used for conducting various learning activities, playing indoor games as well as for serving meals. There is sufficient space on both the sides of the cots where classes for *Bulbul* and *Goraiya* are held at two ends of one hall and that for *Maina* and *Koyal* at two ends of the other hall. There are huge blackboards on the four walls and huge coloured charts are also hanging on all sides. The girls keep their belongings on the side of the cots.

It is time to get up - no excuse would work any more. Sounds are now coming from the kitchen also. *Didis* (teachers) are also talking. Few go towards toilet and few towards handpump to wash their faces.

The bell rings and the girls start assembling in the verandah (oh, this is used also as prayer hall!). The verandah has a number of windows and therefore, adequate light. The girls start forming straight lines for prayer but some are still in their beds. Friends have to shout at them, and at times pull them from their beds. But the moment *Indu didi* asks whether everybody is in for prayer, all reach in seconds. *Suman* of *Bulbul* group stands in the front and starts the prayer "*itni shakti hamen dena Mata.....*"

All the girls repeat with concentration. There is no trace of any laziness on anybody's face. All are disciplined, everything organised. Suddenly this discipline breaks as soon as the prayer is over. The day seems to have started now. Some of the girls started playing; some went to toilets and some to beds again! What to do, there is queue in front of toilet anyway.

A lot of noise could be heard in the area where toilets and handpumps are located. The girls are talking, even fighting among themselves. *Supasna* is reading a story book - "very interesting story, could not complete in the night". She is getting irritated with her friends *Aarti* and *Moni*, shouts at them for making noise and not letting her read. What can they do, they are discussing something very serious - the division of soap between themselves.

Suddenly *Kalindri didi* asks whose duty it is today. The girls ran to see the duty list put on the wall and the five girls immediately moved towards kitchen. There are several groups of five girls each who share some of the responsibilities such as the cleaning group who cleans the rooms, verandah and toilets, and the kitchen group that helps in picking cereals and serving meals. The duties are changed every week so that the same group does not keep doing the same job all the time. The duty list is put on the wall and the girls read their names themselves.

It takes almost two hour for this noise to subside - when breakfast starts being served. Today, it is porridge - most of the girls are happy who generally like anything made out of milk but some make faces. What do they like most in breakfast - *Tahri* and *Dahi* (fried rice and curd) - comes the reply. But this cannot be served everyday, so they better make do with porridge.





There is complete silence once the girls start eating. Porridge is the most commonly served breakfast. On Sundays, they get *Puri-sabzi* and on some occasions also get *Kheer* or *Tahri*.

The noise starts again immediately after breakfast is over. There is still some time before the classes start. Some of the girls are trying to read and see the books while other are making braids or putting cream on their faces. The girls get hair-oil after every two to three days and soap once a week. Daily bathing and

combing hair is part of the routine that has to be followed. *Ruby* has short hair still *Putti*, who comes from the same village, combs her hair with great care and affection. *Suman* and *Afsana* do not come from the same village but only *Afsana* can handle *Suman's* long and thick hair and make two beautiful braids.

The atmosphere is not as friendly everywhere all the time. At some places, few girls are also fighting among themselves over comb and ribbon. Somebody complains to *Indu didi* who has just entered that her comb has been stolen. As soon as she starts making inquiries, many girls volunteer to get their belongings checked. However, the need did not arise, as the comb in question was located beneath the cot where the girls were fighting. There have been instances of small thefts when spoon, comb, glass or slate of one girl has been found in the box of the other. However, the concerned girls are not punished but counseled.

The bell rings. 9 a. m. It is study time now. The first session of two hours starts. It is Mathematics time for *Maina* and *koyal* groups and Language time for other two. The girls in *Maina* group are relatively older and are copying all the sums being written on the blackboard by *Kehkeshan*. Most of the girls start solving those. But four to five girls do not seem to be enjoying the exercise. *Kehkeshan* realises this and goes to them to find that one of them was doing it the

wrong way. She sits with them and teaches them separately. What is happening in *Koyal* group? The girls are all engrossed and *Indu* is also sitting on the floor with them. She is teaching them addition with help of concrete objects.

Maheshwari is drawing certain figures on the board in *Bulbul* group. She keeps asking the girls what the shape looks like. The girls answer her at top of their voices - bird.....peacock.... When the drawing is ready, the teacher asks the girls to write the story. It is a known story; all of them have heard it before. *Moni* has started writing immediately. Some of the girls are trying to remember; some try to see the slates of those who are sitting next; some ask the teacher, " *didi*, was it not the peacock, the carpenter met first after reaching the jungle"; " *didi*, this river was not there, how come you have made this" and so on. Immediately somebody else points out - "of course there was a river" and tells the name of the river too. The teacher asks them not to discuss any more and write. And all the girls have written the story. Somebody has completed in four sentences and somebody in six, and someone else has filled the entire slate. But everybody has written something or the other. There are a number of mistakes of vowels - but it is all right. They are still in the process of learning vowels and sentence formation.

It seems no teacher is there in *Goraiya* - a lot of noise could be heard. But actually the teacher *Kalindri* is very much there, sitting between the girls and reading something. She had written around twelve words on the blackboard and asked girls to make a story with these words in six sentences. *Supasana* has written a beautiful story and everybody is trying to read that. Everybody has written something but not necessarily as good as *Supasana's*. *Afsana* has thought of a story but has not been able to write because of the same problem with use of vowels. She wants to narrate her story to the teacher but she refuses. *Kalindri* covers her ears with fingers and says that she would listen to her story only when she has written something - right or wrong. The girls start to write again.



All the four groups mix as soon as the bell rings at 11 a.m. This is free time for next half an hour. Soon the girls again get divided in small groups - some sit in the halls and chat among themselves and some start making their plaits - probably did not get time in the morning. But most of the girls have picked up books from the display in the office room and are sitting in the verandah. Few girls are trying to identify a huge coloured photograph of a film actress in a newspaper and one girl is trying to read the newspaper.

The next session starts at 11.30 and continues for two hours till 1.30 in the afternoon. All the girls go to their groups on their own. Now *Kehkeshan* and *Indravati* would teach Mathematics to *Bulbul* and *Goraiya*, and *Kalindri* and *Maheshwari* would teach Language to *Maina* and *Koyal*.

The bell rings exactly at 1.30 and the girls come out of the halls even before the teachers could. After all, this is time for lunch. Within minutes, the verandah was cleaned and mats were spread on the floor. Everybody seemed busy doing something or the other. The kitchen staff were bringing food in huge vessels and keeping those on one side. All girls except five responsible for the job of helping others come with their plates, glasses and spoons and sit there. Five girls with help of *Rajrani*, the incharge for food management and *Vijay*, the teacher incharge, start serving food - rice, bread, *dal*,

vegetable and curd. Again, there is no noise. The girls offer a *mantra* expressing thanks to God for food and start eating.

Many girls do not like to eat *dal* but they have to if *Urmilajee*, the *Udaan* coordinator is present herself. She insists that everybody would take second helping of *dal* because it is important source of protein.

Rajrani tells that the girls like to eat bread and that is why it is served both in lunch and dinner despite the fact that making *Rotis* for 100 girls is a tough job. Around 20 Kgs of rice, 10 Kgs of *dal* and 15 Kgs of wheat flour are consumed daily.

The girls wash their own plates, glasses and spoons after finishing their meal. There is still time left before the next session starts at 3 p.m. In between *Poonam* goes and brings *dholak*(drum). The girls make a circle around her and spontaneously start the session of songs and music. This happens often, as many girls love the beats of *dholak*. The teachers are meanwhile sitting in the office room and discussing some of the experiences over a cup of tea.

At sharp 3 p.m. starts the third session of the day. This is EVS time. *Maheshwari* is telling a story of jungle and animals. *Indu* is asking the girls about their knowledge of different trees. The girls started sharing their knowledge one by one and others listened with attention.

Kalindri started talking about her village, which triggered the girls also to talk about their villages. After some time, many girls started talking simultaneously and the teacher had to intervene. Then the girls started talking one by one about their village. After some time, they realised that all of them were talking about the same river. It was a discovery to know that the same river passes through the villages of so many girls.

The same topic of jungle and animals was being discussed in *Maina* group also. Suddenly one girl asked *Kehkeshan* - "but *didi*, squirrels live in homes, how could they reach jungles".

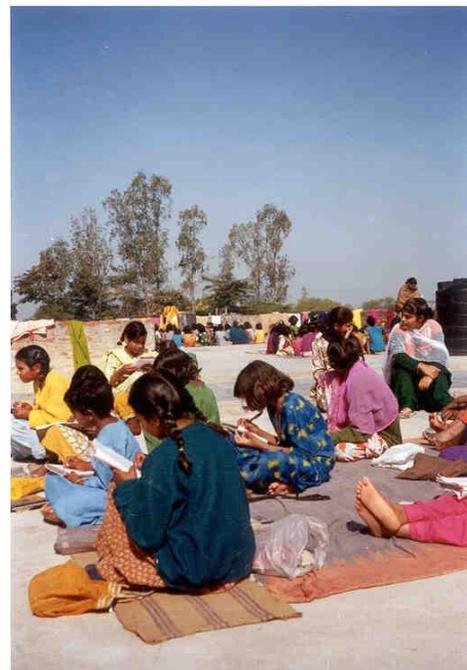
Suddenly one felt that there is complete silence in *Goraiya*. Going closer one could see that the girls were solving one puzzle by adding different parts of one photo - tearing a page of newspaper made the puzzle. One small group claimed to have solved it but the teacher had a look and said no, not yet, try again. All the girls were totally engrossed in the task.

The bell rings at sharp 5 p. m. Who rings the bell by the way? *Vijay* - the teacher incharge.

The girls are all running towards office room to collect badminton racquets, footballs and carom-boards. It is obvious that this is time for sports. Within minutes several carom games are in progress in the verandah, and badminton matches in the open

area. Tussle is on for their turn to play badminton. Some of the girls are playing football and it is worth watching them kick the ball. It is difficult to believe that they had never played these games before joining *Udaan*.

The teachers also join the girls in playing badminton and carom. Some of the younger girls get busy in gardening. *Shalia* is the leader and together they are watering the plants and making a house with flowers and leaves.



Suddenly, some girls start fighting for racquets. *Indira* and *Kalindri* try to make the girls see reason when suddenly somebody suggests, "let us play *kabaddi*". The idea appeals and immediately two teams are ready. The girls are shouting - "*Indu didi* is on our side" and "*Kalindri didi* is on our side".

At around 6 p.m. in the evening, few girls go to the terrace to collect their dried clothes. It is slowly getting dark and some of the girls are sitting and chatting. At 6.30, all the girls have again gathered in the classrooms in the respective groups - it is again time for study session, this time it is social learning.

In the *Maina* group, today's topic for discussion is dowry. The issue of marriage brings smiles to many of the faces but the expressions slowly become more serious as discussion progresses. *Kalindri* is sharing her experience of the opposition she faced when she had expressed her desire to continue higher study. She had taken a stand - if her brother could go out to study why could she not go. Health was the topic of discussion in *Bulbul* group and *Indu* was discussing the credit systems with children in *Goraiya* group. The girls knew about the village moneylender but had not heard of the Banks before.



After finishing the session on social learning, the teachers look tired. They sit together and have tea. The children do their self-studies, mostly out of their own choice. In case of any difficulty, they come to teachers. One of the girls, *Anjana* takes her handkerchief out where she had saved her evening snacks *chana* and *gur*, served after sports. However, all those who saw her taking this out wanted share and within seconds her saved snack was over. She could hardly have anything. But, never mind. This is the joy of living together.

The bell for dinner rings at 8.30 p. m. All the activities are the same as during lunch except that there is obvious tiredness on everybody's face. *Rajrani* felt that few children are missing and she was right. Around ten children had already gone off to sleep. She went and woke them up. Few girls helped her in bringing those girls for dinner.

The day does not come to an end immediately after dinner. The teachers have to see that all the girls have gone to bed. They have to switch off the lights also because some girls still want to read story books. There is still some whispers coming from some corners - friends are sharing intimate matters. Some other voice asks them to shut up and sleep. Slowly, there is complete silence.

The days are slightly different on Saturdays and Sundays. However, the basic routine remains the same.

9. *The last two days.....*

The examinations are over but the results are yet to be announced. Only two days are left in final winding up. These girls are not going to come back now. The girls get up at their regular time in the morning, get ready and take books and notebooks and start working. *Urmila didi* gives some exercises, which children readily do. When they are asked to sing they oblige without any hassle.

The teachers are ready in making report cards of each and every girl. Meanwhile the children are busy writing something - on close scrutiny it was found that they are copying everything that is written on the walls - be it something on Mathematics teaching, something on Language teaching or a mere duty list. This shows the desire to carry everything that had been part of their life in *Udaan*.

The girls are supposed to carry home the notebook and colour pencils that they had received this month. They have already filled the notebook completely! The girls do not even play in the evening. They can be seen chatting in small groups somewhere or the other.

The parting is becoming more and more difficult. "The girls have been crying incessantly every night, it becomes difficult for us too to hold ourselves", says *kahakashan*. The girls of *Bulbul* group are after their

teacher *Maheshwari* to give them her photograph. "What will you do with my photo, you all can always come to meet us" as soon as they heard her saying this, she was bombarded with questions - "can we come", Will we be allowed to come whenever we want", and so on.

Indu is trying her best that the children remain happy and busy. She tells children that they made the teachers cry initially because they were too difficult to handle and now also they are making them cry because it is too difficult to part. The children are following all the instructions efficiently. They have been asked to pack their things and clean the rooms for next day's function. They packed, cleaned the rooms, sheets, rearranged furniture - all with the thought of imminent parting inside them. They have heard about some plans of supporting their further education in their villages and also that they would be coming to SA after every three months - they want to know if this is true.

The teachers as well as *Urmilaji* are in the same boat. They all have become too attached to these girls and are finding it difficult to imagine how would they live without these girls around. In the afternoon, all the girls are made to sit together. The whole group offered prayers first. Then the results were announced. 94 girls had passed and some had done exceedingly well. Four girls who had failed were too young in age to complete class V

but still they were feeling bad. All the girls listened to results and tried to restrain themselves in expressing their joy for fear of hurting those who had failed. The girls were told to continue their education despite difficulties and hurdles.

The dinner is served early because the children are tired after the whole day's exercise of cleaning and packing. But nobody goes to sleep - children and teachers are all sitting together, there are about fifteen plates full of hena, which the girls are putting on each other's palms. Apparently, this is a regular practice - putting hena on each other's palm, prior to all the holidays. This is a special night anyway - "nobody is going to sleep tonight, this is the last night here". However, after about two hours, half the girls were asleep with hena on their palms and half were weeping "didi, we don't feel like going from this place, what do we do".

Next morning, the children get ready early morning in their best dresses. Some are busy making *rangoli* with colour and flowers for today's function. There is a silence though, nobody is talking, the silence is almost disturbing.

Parents start flowing in. They had come to take their daughters home. They were happy that their daughters had learn to read and write and had passed class V. but they were not prepared for what they witnessed here. The girls were all sad with their



eyes filled with tears. It was almost shocking for them but they soon realized the sentiments.

There was complete silence when the time came for welcoming the special guests. This included the resource persons who had been associated since beginning, the officers from the district headquarter, CARE personnel from Delhi and Lucknow, few journalists, senior members of Ashram and few Pradhan.



First, few children shared their experiences in *Udaan*. Two of the teachers, *Indu* and *Kalindri*, were next to talk about their experiences. Other members of the *Udaan* team and the guest also expressed their views. *Sunita* from CARE felt that this seemingly impossible task was made possible by joint effort and determination.



Subir, the external resource person, had spent some time with children before coming to the function. The children had readily answered all his queries. He felt that the children now belong not only to parents but also to *Udaan* team. One of the biggest achievements had been that the girls had learnt to live together without any jealousy or rivalry. The effort was to make the learning enjoyable and the children did enjoy the whole process. It was decided that the girls in *Udaan* would not be scared of mathematics and they are not. The teachers were not required to be terrifying or intimidating and they



had not been so. The effort was to make teachers and students friends and the same happened. These are the achievements of *Udaan*, according to *Subir*.

The report cards were distributed at the end of the function. The girls who had been sitting with patience all through, listening to all that was being said, could not control themselves now. They realized this is the end of the story and the moment one girl started weeping, others followed. The teachers tried to calm them down but ended up joining them. *Indu, Kahkashan, Kalindri, Maheshwari* and all children, all were holding each other crying together! The parents were simply watching -not knowing what to do.

After some time, it was time to go. Slowly, one by one, the children started picking up their luggage and leave. Everyone including *Rajrani*, and cooks said farewell to these girls. There was hardly anyone around without tears in her/his eyes. *Urmilaji* was standing at the gate and making an attempt to calm down girls. *Sunita* also tried but to no avail.

By evening all the children had gone but the teachers were still crying. Their eyes were swollen and they did not know how to control themselves. They were also slightly embarrassed to let their emotion flow. "This would not be repeated next time, it is natural to be get attached to your first born", said *kalindri*.

10. A Process of Change - Within and Outside

The *Udaan* has initiated a process of change in all those associated with the programme. Those who had seen these girls at the time of admission, it is an unbelievable experience to observe the changes that have cropped in - in their outward appearances as well as in their behavior and beliefs.

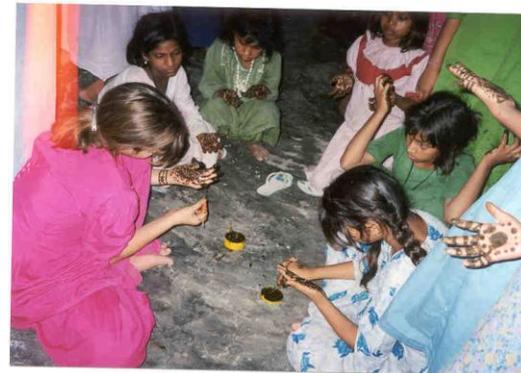
The girls who wore dirty clothes and looked scared, reluctant and unsure of themselves in the beginning are now clean, cultured and full of confidence. The community had a sense of apprehension regarding *Udaan's* functioning as well as their own decision to send the girls, but within three months this apprehension changed into aspiration after seeing the girls during their first vacation. Most of the parents felt a deep sense of satisfaction once they met their daughters who were learning not only to read and write but also the values and skills to face life. And now at the end of the session, their trust and satisfaction have grown deeper.

The first few days were the toughest both for the girls as well as the coordinator and teachers - most of the girls would keep crying to go home, many would resist any effort to make them bathe daily, some would hate to wash their clothes regularly and would not interact with each other. However, this testing period did not last long and due to combined

efforts of all, the sailing became smooth after two to three weeks of turbulence. However, it was not easy. "It cannot be imagined watching the same girls managing all the things so smoothly today, how difficult they were in initial days. We used to feel so helpless at times and also felt like giving up thinking this challenge was beyond us," says *Indu* - one of the teachers, " We survived because of support received from all sides and suggestions received to handle the situation worked". What helped the teachers most was to divide various responsibilities among different groups of girls. The groups were formed keeping age of the girls in mind - each group was a mix of older and younger girls so that older girls could be given responsibilities of

fulfillment of given task as well as help inculcate the sense of responsibility among others.

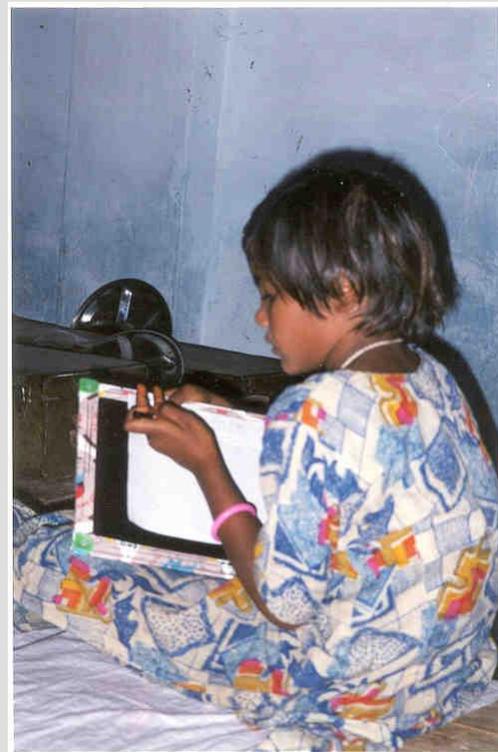
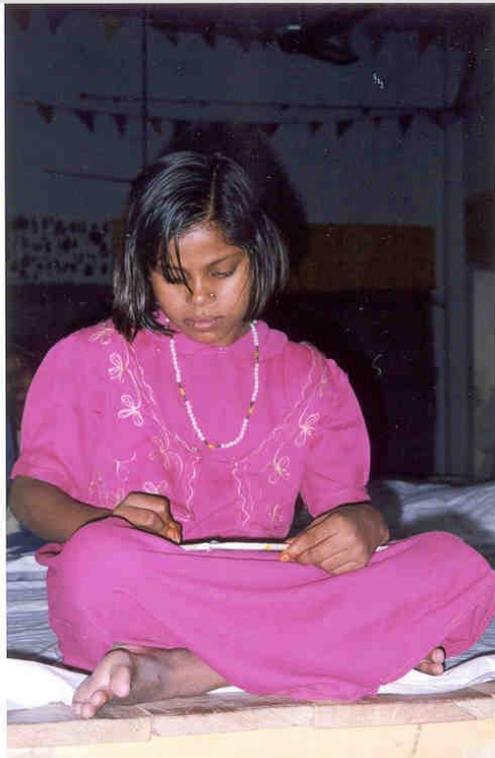
"These girls have changed beyond imagination. It used to be so difficult to interact with them in the beginning because they would not open up, and now the same girls ask so many questions that we feel scared", says *Mukesh bhai* - one of the GPE Training Coordinators. The experiences of others have been similar. *Ravi* and *Ramashray*, other two coordinators share the instances of being interviewed by these girls. The girls were often given assignments to interview others and range of the questions, many times formed by themselves, covered unexpected territories. On one occasion, they



It is just the beginning

For *Usha* and *Nisha*, the sisters who had never imagined that they would learn to read and write, this is now just the beginning. To add to the family labour in the fields, to graze the cattle, to take care of younger siblings and to help their mother in household chores - these occupied their days and nights till they came to *Udaan*. They never knew how interesting the books could be or how enjoyable a game of badminton could be. They had no clue of the possibilities that exist for educated persons in life and the choices that one can make. At the most, if time permitted they used to play with dolls with their friends. And hence, it was a challenge to learn reading and writing. "I found it so difficult to write words in straight line," says *Usha*.

Usha passed class V by securing more than 66% marks but *Nisha* who was young could not pass. *Usha* wants to study at least up to class VIIIth. But the mother has started seeing bigger dreams - "I want them to study higher classes and take up the jobs; I am in no hurry so far as their marriage is concerned nor am I concerned about what will people think; I care a damn for people's views", says their mother with confidence. *Usha* not only wants to study further but also wants to help her mother in work - "It does not feel nice to see her do all the work alone."



started asking - "how does a motorbike function; why does it not move in reverse gear; how does water move upwards whenever the water motor is switched on.....".

Within three months, these girls became so inquisitive about every big and small thing coming their way, and they were also confident of finding an answer to these questions. "It became difficult to find suitable responses for all their queries, they used to ask innumerable questions in EVS and Social Learning classes", says *Kalindri* - one of the teachers.

"Initially the girls used to miss the open environment they had been used to - they wanted to go home, to the paddy fields and to their pet cows, buffaloes and goats - everyday in the evening they used to repeat the same thing that they want to go back," says *Kehkeshan*, "and they started coming on Sundays to seek help whenever they found it difficult to understand some concepts in any subject or practice something new that they had learnt, and now they are determined to continue their education in whatever form possible."

This was the first and unique experience for girls to stay away from their parents and their environment. It was not easy to accept that girls belonging to all castes and religion would stay together and eat together. Initially many girls objected on these aspects refusing to eat or sleep with others on grounds of caste and

religion. But these slowly faded away with careful handling in social learning classes. In the process, the teachers also evolved in their thinking. They too believed in certain practices based on exclusion and discrimination. The process of training on social learning, the responsibility of orienting these girls and their own experiences changed their own perceptions and outlook. This is true for all the teachers. Today *Indu*, *Kalindri* and *Maheshwari* openly acknowledge the fact that they felt quite hesitant to share their food with *kehkeshan* in the beginning because she was a *Muslim*. However, now they all are very good friends and hope to remain so in future. The initial visit to villages and the strict instruction to sit with all the parents and accept any eatables offered also helped in shedding these inhibitions.



As mentioned earlier, it has been a pleasant surprise for all those associated that this issue of caste and religion was never raised by any of the parents. On the contrary, there have been explicit voices of support from many corners. "This is the most appropriate way of bringing up children, they would easily adapt to various situations in their future", feels *Sherunnisha*, the mother of two girls - *Reshma* and *Shama*.

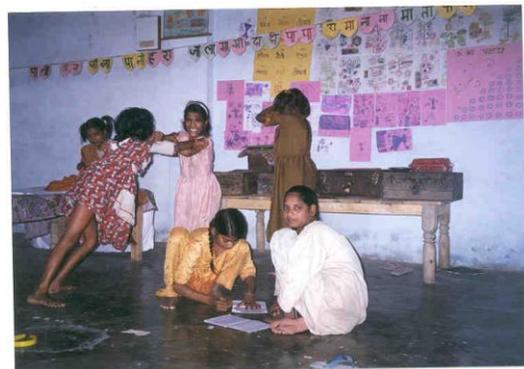
Sherunnisha also shares her experiences of how initially the two daughters used to dislike their stay in *Udaan* and how they now count the days to come back whenever they go home for vacation. *Sherunnisha* had made it clear to her daughters that she would not take them back at any cost simply because she strongly believed *Udaan* to be an opportunity to change their destiny.



It is only natural that however much they loved their life in *Udaan*, they used to look forward eagerly to go home. The preparation used to start days before the actual vacation - after all, there are so many new experiences to share, so many new stories to tell.

The fact that the girls got balanced diet with emphasis on proper nourishment and led a routined life full of mental and physical activities was reflected in good health of these children. Most of the parents feel very happy with the fact that their daughters now "look healthier with a distinct glow on their faces".

Education and exposure have also meant a change in the way they look and behave. The other villagers also notice the change immediately and parents feel proud.



A test of determination

The decision to send their daughters also meant facing social humiliation for some of the parents such as *Ruby Fatima's* and *Roshan's*. The neighbour started saying that the couple has decided to send two of their daughters "because they cannot afford to feed them at home". Of course, the situation has changed with *Ruby* becoming the president of *Udaan* parliament and her photo appearing in the newspapers!

Ruby's elder sister, *Marium* also lives with her parents because her husband does not earn for himself and cannot afford to look after her. *Marium* cannot opt for any job herself because she is illiterate. This made their mother decide to send *Ruby* and *Roshan* to *Udaan* as she does not want her other daughters to meet the same fate. Today these two sisters have already started teaching the younger sister and the nephew, which proves their mother's belief that "one educated woman in the family changes the whole character - with these two educated girls, there is no more the need to request anybody else to read any letter or notice."

Ruby wanted to study at least up to class Xth when she was asked after three months of *Udaan*. Today after completing the course, she has become more ambitious - she wants to become a doctor and she is also determined to study English, "I already know few words like *water* and *rose*." *Marium* is ready to work hard so that her sister realizes her ambition and helps her other siblings to get out of poverty and deprivation.





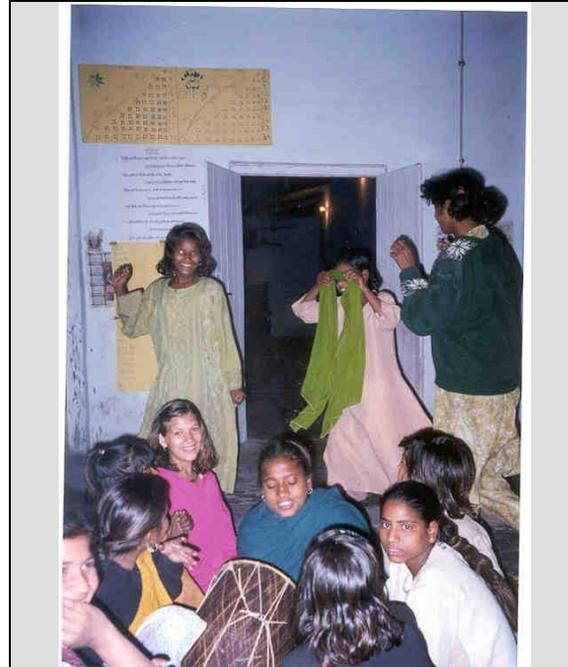
Regained childhood for Putti

"I never played even with dolls" says *putti* of *Lalpur* village. Only daughter of an aged couple had no time for anything other than taking care of her old parents, especially helping the father in farming. The loss of their only son, *Putti's* only elder brother made her parents "old" at an early age and she forgot her childhood in the process. *Putti's* father *Baldev*, seems to have realised this when he insisted on sending her to *Udaan* despite a lot of protests from community as well as *Putti* herself. This has given her not only an opportunity to learn but also her lost childhood - playing carom, badminton and football with enthusiasm.

Both the parents were thrilled to receive letter by their daughter and consider their stand to send her for studies vindicated. The only message *Putti* used to receive from her mother was to "concentrate on studies and not to worry for her aged parents". But she always worried because the mother does not keep well and the father is very old. Her father was a little worried when everybody started saying that he should not get this daughter married till she is eighteen years old. But he seemed a bit relieved when told to wait at least till she passes class VIII. "Those who were criticising my father for sending me here are today interested in sending their own daughters - one should not pay any heed to what people say", says *Putti* with confidence. She secured 59% marks in class V exams and is determined to continue her education. "We were not at all scared of examination - why should have we been scared, we knew everything" - she innocently responds when asked about examination fear.

Urmilaji finds it difficult to believe that the session has been completed and that too by achieving most of the goals they had set for themselves. "it looked impossible at every stage - in the beginning it seemed impossible to retain the girls, then it appeared impossible to make them follow any instruction and have a smooth management. By the time these problems were solved, we felt these kids would not be able to learn everything in this short period and by the time this happened there was this challenge of making them take class V examinations".

For *Kusum ji*, this experience has been a dream come true. "At the time of cross-visit to *Lok Jumbish* I was bewildered to see such experiment and now our own *Udaan* has performed beyond our own expectations. She feels that though everybody worked hard including CARE personnel, the coordinator and teachers, the maximum credit goes to resource persons *Subir* and *Jyotsna*, " they showed the path and the rest followed." *Ramesh Bhai*, who has founded the SA attributes the success is due to a combined effort of all - be it resource persons, CARE-UP personnel, *Ashram* staff, teachers or children. The teachers believe that children deserve the maximum credit. "Their desire to learn and determination to find ways for all hurdles had been so overpowering that we had to respond", says *Indu*. "There was a time when we used to count the girls in the night and again



Beyond Reading and Writing

Udaan is going beyond reading and writing skills and typical competencies followed in the formal primary school. It is teaching girls to take stands in life. "*Didi* told us why is it incorrect to pay or accept dowry and now I have decided not to marry anybody who asks for dowry", says *Poonam* who could come here because of her brother. Whenever she saw her friend *Sunita* going to school, she too wanted to go but parents never agreed. This time her brother put his foot down and sent her despite their parents' reservations.

It is not only dowry that *Poonam* has decided to take a stand on, there are several other issues including sustainable development and health of women about which she feels with passion and commitment.



Cycling ..a means of equality !

Suddenly the girls in *Udaan* became interested in learning to cycle. Everybody wanted to learn cycling. When *Urmilaji* saw this interest, she arranged one bicycle for this specific purpose. But there was only one bicycle and many aspirants. Those who already knew a little got first opportunity. Some learnt, some did not get the opportunity and some were scared of falls and did not venture.

But why did they suddenly felt the need to learn cycling? "So that we can also go to other villages for studying further - the boys can go because they can cycle", pat came the reply from *Kiran*. *Rajani* has already made her father buy one bicycle. She and her younger sister *Deepa* will need to go the neighboring village and without bicycle it would take hours. *Deepa*, however, is not ready to sit at the back "I am also learning. *Rajani* only will have to sit at the back".

Putti coming from *Lalpur* village - the *Udaan* experience has meant opening in the morning to ascertain that nobody has fled away", shares *Maheshwari*, " and then they became so responsible that started handling almost and the entire management, and now they are so involved that they are finding it difficult to reconcile with the idea of leaving".

The teachers relate the change process in the girls to the change process within themselves. "We became one family - "we learnt together, we laughed together and we cried together; the whole process was as much a learning experience for us as much for children", tells *Kalindri*, " we had forgotten whatever we had studied and moreover, this approach was new to all of us". *Kalindri's* young son has come to live with her few days and she feels that it would be nice if he could also experience similar education process.

The process of change extends itself beyond the girls attending *Udaan* as these girls carry the message to others in the family and community. Most of the girls continued to bathe regularly when they went home for holidays and communicated to others about advantages of keeping the self as well as the environment clean. Many of the girls narrated stories and poems to younger siblings and some of them also started teaching the elders. The story is the same for almost all - be it *Kiran* or her friend *Archana* coming from *Gangai* village or *Ruby* or

of a new, almost unbelievable world of aspirations and opportunities.

Although the social curriculum is making an attempt to prevent any alienation of these girls from their own environment, the challenge ahead is to play an enabling role in helping them meet their aspirations, examine the world around them critically and make their own decisions with appropriate tolerance and sensitivity.

The whole process of extension is not limited to reading and writing and evolving aspirations - it also involves more complex issues and *Udaan* has not shied away from raising those. One such issue was that of girls cleaning the toilets as part of their responsibilities to be managed through committees. Many of the girls resisted this as they believed that this is a job to be undertaken only by particular caste. They were particularly offended by the fact they had to clean the toilets used by others.

This issue was discussed in detail during the training for teachers on social learning. One view was to stop this practice to avoid any altercation and prevent reaction from parents. Others felt that it was important to continue with the practice to transact the values critical for social learning. The latter view prevailed upon the former and it was decided that though there would be an employee for the job to maintain cleanliness, the girls would continue to have this responsibility.

Three day Initial Camp....Then and Now

Unlike last year's three-day camp where less than 100 girls had come, this year there were 120 girls enrolled and 150 more girls had to be returned. Only 96 girls would be taken finally - older children who henceforth will not get an opportunity to get educated would be given priority. The probe regarding large participation suggested that the girls of *Udaan* had been the biggest advertisement. Parents seem to see these girls as what their children could be. The girls shared their experiences widely and seemed to take their responsibility as change agents rather seriously.

The children of the last camp had gone back to the villages and come to help run this camp. The confusion that was witnessed last time in terms of the children missing home, wailing at the thought of their cattle being alone seemed much lesser. The girls as well as the parents seemed mentally prepared to be at the camp. The increase in the contribution from Rs.300.00 to Rs.400.00 did not irk the parents at all. The camp was more relaxed the teachers did not let anybody miss the absence of support from MVF. The children seemed to get going into a routine pretty fast. Toilet training was once again an issue but the teachers were prepared. The *Ashram* team too seemed better prepared and hence it brought no havoc as it did last time.

The issue was raised by some of the parents in the first Community Workshop held after about one and a half months of stating *Udaan*. This was discussed threadbare and despite divergent views, it was agreed at the end that there is nothing wrong in the practice. This can certainly be interpreted as initiating a process of change in the thinking of parents.

The change is visible most in the demand for admission in *Udaan's* next session. "those who needed lots of pressure and cajoling last year for agreeing to send their daughters are now convincing others themselves", said *Ramashray*, one of the TCs who keep visiting villages to monitor FECs and other interventions of GPE. Parents did not expect their daughters to learn much more than reading and writing letters and their own names but the first shock came they received letters written by them in the third month. This was also the beginning of expectations and aspirations which have been fulfilled successfully in most cases.

The first year of *Udaan* definitely took off with right speed and momentum and then reached its destination by moving in the correct direction, which meant a flight from wherever they were for many - the girls, their families especially the mothers, the teachers and other GPE members.



Beginning....



Then.....



And now.....

11. *Achievements so far ...and Challenges ahead*

The achievements of *Udaan* have gone beyond the expectations of almost all those who were associated in more than one way. In general term, the fact that the girls did exceedingly well by any standard in class V is one indicator. But that is only one indicator. There are many more, and perhaps much more significant ones.

The fact that the girls learnt to live together with mutual affection, care and respect is no less valuable than passing class V. And still more critical is the fact that they are thinking on their own, confident of their own selves and have their own views. And all this without being condescending towards their families and circumstances. The initial alienation from their own context was not there by the end and the girls were much more sensitive and responsible towards their families, villages and society.

Their aspirations and determination to study further and their effort reflects not only zeal but also a general urge to learn and grow. There was an explicit emphasis on making these girls interested in learning and developing an exploratory attitude towards life and environment around them. All indicators suggest that the programme has succeeded in achieving this important but difficult target. The focus on encouraging self learning was also there with an aim to prepare

Meet these sisters

Vinay Prakash and *Shakuntala*, the parents of *Renu* and *Kiran* cannot hide their happiness and pride over the fact that both the daughters have secured more than 600 marks. *Renu* has, in fact, topped the list by securing maximum marks amongst all the *Udaan* girls. The father always believed that his daughters would do well and is committed to help them study further - "Now it would be sheer injustice not to let them study further."

Renu has a friendship band on her wrist which *Seema* has given, and a hairband which *Rajani* has given. He was also the Materials Minister of the parliament. These two sisters would study further in the *Ashram* school meant for SC children. They have also gone and seen the rooms where they would be staying. The mother feels too proud - "they teach me so many new things, they have opened a new path for their younger siblings".





Pinky



Results being announced



Alka

The results in the class V examinations

Nobody had expected that almost all the girls would be able to clear the class V examinations. *Urmilaji* always felt that at the most about 70-75 girls would be able to achieve this target. Even this level of achievement was not bad by the general trend shown by an average school. And after all, these girls had learnt everything in only 10 months. Also, these girls were here not only to pass class V but also to become thinking individuals.

Therefore, when the results were announced and 91 out of 96 were declared passed, it was difficult to believe. 95 % pass percentage had never been the expectation. And 20 girls had achieved more than 600 marks out of a total of 900. Following is the list of ten girls who attained top ten position on the basis of class V marks:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Marks (Out of a total of 900)</i>
1. Renu	677
2. Ruby	675
3. Ruby Fatima	664
4. Alka	648
5. Veena	625
6. Pinky	624
7. Saliya	620
8. Poonam	620
9. Deepa	619
10. Sarita	614

The results can be considered remarkable in view of the fact that the girls were prepared not only for the regular subjects that they had learnt (Hindi, Maths and EVS) but also in Sanskrit and English. These are the other two compulsory subjects of UP Board. All preparations were done in last 15 days. The girls could do it fast because they had by then learnt to learn.

them to give vent to their urge to explore and learn. The ease with which these girls talk about future education, the trust with which they feel that there would be some way for this and the confidence that they show in their commitment to their goal makes one believe that they are capable of making their dream a reality with some support from various corners.

The girls are not alone in their effort. The GPE is trying to respond to aspirations and need that it has facilitated to build. A tentative follow up plan of *Udaan* has been planned to some extent. The objectives with which this plan has been developed include:

- to create situations that allow children remain in contact, share experiences and derive support from each other in the face of environment around them
- to provide help to come to terms with conflicts in their minds, if any, about real life situations
- to develop a forum which makes the group feel like a group such that no girl feels alone when and if faced with conflicts of any kind
- to sustain the keen interest in the post primary education and promote mechanisms by which they continue education.
- To sustain the role the children have taken up as change agents
- To keep the community motivated regarding the capabilities of girls as well as their continuing education

***Tadiywan* - Ready to take the challenge**

Seventeen girls had joined *Udaan* initially from *Tadiyawan* village. One of them, *Salma*, dropped out because her father refused to send her after first three months. He apparently wanted her daughter to learn Urdu for which there was no provision. But *Salma* regrets not being there when she sees her friends. 16 other girls completed the *Udaan* successfully. This includes *Ruby Fatima*, the *Udaan* parliament president and *Kamarjahan*, representative of *Maina* group.

Kamarjahan wants to become a teacher but parents are not sure if they would be able to support the cost on commuting to the nearby village. But the girls including *Afsana*, *Roshan*, *Nasreen*, *Shalia*, *Ruby*, *Kamarjahan* -all feel that they would together find a way out. They will work hard and contribute to the *jardozi* work and share the cost of commuting. *Nasreen* who is both young in age and small in height reads newspapers to her father. The mother, *Munni Begum* feels very proud - "everybody is surprised that she has learnt so much such little time"



- To equip the girls to deal with school situations
- To work with *Mother Groups* to provide the necessary support for girls to continue to progress

A core team has been formed at the Ashram level to implement the follow up plan. These include 10-12 VLWs and 2 teachers of existing camp and 2 TCs and the Programme Coordinator. Several key interventions have been identified.

Each girl would be provided few books individually and a library will be placed in each village from where the girls had come. The girls would be provided self-learning guides to for their guidance. The children are expected to write post cards to the ashram in response to Learning Guides sent to them. The children would also be encouraged to write to each other and share experiences and maintain contact.

It is anticipated that few girls will come to the ashram on one Sunday every month. They would be sharing their experiences and also developing a newsletter on the basis of their own responses to learning Guides and other experiences. This will then be circulated to all children. In addition, three day camps would be organized after every three months at the *Ashram*. Academic support required for curriculum related problems will be provided besides being used for sharing of experiences and resolve conflicts, if any.

It has also been envisaged that VLWs would constantly follow up those girls who join formal schools in the first four to six months such that they are able to adjust to the new kind of environment. The VLWS are also expected to report any other significant development. The core group is envisaged to take required action in case of any imminent need.

One of the major achievements of *Udaan* is that this has provided a feasible model of implementing a curriculum that is based on equity, empowerment and joy, without any compromise on quality and content of learning. Many of the experiences can be easily replicated with suitable modifications elsewhere. This includes the projects such as Newsletters and developing own book of environment, etc, could be applied to FECs also. Some of the elements of social curriculum could be incorporated at other places and could be valid for all - girls as well as boys.

The experience has also provided a model for school management, especially for residential schools. The aspects of daily time-tables, the planning of weekly units and the use of weekends - all provide important inputs for developing a suitable school management model for any residential school. It is not necessary that the school should follow similar curriculum - the management experiences could be valid for those also that are following government curricula.

The Training Coordinators (TCs) who had not been associated directly with *Udaan* implementation feel that they have been deprived of an experience that could have helped them grow professionally and also in adapting some practices in FECs. The weekly sharing that had been planned earlier could not take place regularly as envisaged, agrees *Kusumji*. But then there were genuine problems of managing time - if all the TCs had participated in all the training programmes of *Udaan*, it would have affected FEC monitoring and other responsibilities adversely. "The feeling of being kept out seems to have emerged because of visible success of *Udaan*" feels *Jami*, the Field Officer. However, everybody agrees that there is a need for better planning right at the beginning so that positive and replicable aspects of *Udaan* could be introduced in FECs also.

Sarvodaya Ashram has already tried to adopt some of the practices in the schools they are running in the campus. This includes both Day schools and residential schools. All these schools are meant for Sc children only. The practice of project is the one that has already been introduced but there is an inclination to adopt some more practices by formally training their teachers.

Thus, there are a number of challenges to be faced this year. This includes development and implementation of appropriate mechanisms for follow-up as well as for replication and extension. However, the biggest challenge is to maintain the same quality of all interventions in the second session of *Udaan*. The aspirations and expectations have been very high at all levels and it would be a challenge to fulfill them!

