



## Auro-Mira Service Society

Sri Aurobindo Ashram - Delhi Branch, Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi - 110016

### Report of activities in Kechla, Dt. Koraput, Orissa during 2009-10

Kechla, a village of 6 hamlets, and a few surrounding villages with population of some 5,000 persons is an

extremely primitive but scenic region in the state of Orissa. Tribals living in this area from ancient times have had virtually no contact with the evolutionary changes over the centuries and were still living more or less the same way as their forefathers lived from countless generations. Their subsistence depended mainly on hunting, a little agriculture, cattle for dairy and ploughing, wild fruits and tubers, and cutting down trees for fuel and earning a little cash for other imperatives. The result today is that the rolling hills of the region are practically denuded of the forest cover and the people are extremely poor with no education or medical facilities. Until the present generation of children and youngsters, no literacy existed in this region.

Auro-Mira Service Society (AMSS) is a non-governmental organization with a charitable institution status. It started working here in 2004. The idea was to become an intrinsic part of the region and environment, develop one's own land holding on sound sustainable principles, and assist the native population help themselves to improve their own economic and social status through

education, environmental awareness, use of intermediate technology and wider contact with the modern milieu.

It is with this context in mind that the highlights of activities in the following report of AMSS can be more meaningfully perused.





## Education

### Primary Education

**A.** Auro-Mira Service Society (AMSS) was finally able to start a school, Auro-Mira Vidya Mandir (AMVM), on July 5, 2008. In its second year, the school now has 75 children in 4 groups. The school runs everyday from 7:30 AM to 4:30 PM except for the last Sunday of the month. In addition to breakfast and lunch, the children also get snacks twice daily. This is especially a boon for the many children who used to be malnourished.

**Hygiene:** As there is no tradition of formal education in this milieu, much more needs to be done with children. Thus the teachers themselves trim hair and nails of the children. They teach the children to wash their clothes, and ensure that they clean their teeth and take a bath. Many such activities have to be carried out in the school itself for lack of motivation or facilities at home. The incidence of skin disease is beginning to go down but it may still be a while before this problem is completely resolved.

**Health:** Poor living conditions, apathy and lack of facilities are big factors in the high incidence of mortality in the village. Figures for the last 6 years showed that child mortality may be as high as 20-25%.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Births</u>	<u>Deaths (0-8 years)</u>
2004	13	2
2005	13	1
2006	9	2
2007	14	3
2008	12	3

One AMVM student, Bhagu Muduli, was absent from the school for several days. Often parents don't inform the school when children go elsewhere on a family visit, so it was not considered a case for any concern. It turned out later that the child had died. Since then the school sends someone to the village to inquire about the welfare of any absentees. A couple months later, little sister of one of the students died due to negligence on the family's part. Nobody sought basic medical aid available in the AMSS main building nor took the child to town for medical aid. A team of competent volunteer doctors (Drs. Tarun Baveja, Surinder Pradhan, Debnath, Ramesh Bijlani, Avinash Bijlani, Shehla Agarwal) in Delhi is always available for phone consultation and prescription and the staff of AMSS often contacts them for advice. Frequently the child has to be taken to the hospital and the staff does so. In view of the recent casualties, we have now started enquiring about the welfare of all children, whether student or not, on a regular basis.

**Construction of Hostel building:** Work on construction of the 300 seat hostel and school building is progressing at a reasonable pace given the constraints of this remote and difficultly accessible region. By the end of the year, about 1/3 of the work has been completed.



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**Mirambika (New Delhi) teachers' input:** During May 2009, Sashwati, Niharika, and Rabindra, all experienced teachers from the Mirambika Free Progress School worked side by side in teaching the children of AMVM for a period of 2 weeks. They were also an inspiration for the teaching staff of AMVM.

**Activities & Methodology:** This year's group report focuses on the **Butterfly group** of 20 children:



comfortable in counting numbers, 1 to 20 forward and backward. They have learned simple operations – addition, subtraction, multiplication



and even division – up to the number 20, as well. drawing and painting with pen and brush. Mostly they draw and paint things seen in Nature all around – trees, flowers, leaves, sun, rainbow, and also animate creature like cattle, children, or characters from the legends such as Ramayana.



**Language:** The children can now understand and speak Hindi. They can be engaged in conversation even by strangers. They have now started to speak some English words and phrases – come in, go there, sit properly, run, jump, etc. –, and begun to understand even sentences such as: ‘what are you doing?’, ‘what is your name?’, ‘why are you talking?’, ‘where are you going?’

Children enjoy singing songs taught to them including Sanskrit chants. They even make up their own simple rhymes about fish, butterflies, peacocks, parrots, rainbow, stars, kites, rain, and the like.

Comprehension and imagination development is an ongoing process through activities such as watching movies, animated features, and listening to stories. Many themes of historical and cultural importance, such as stories from legends of gods like Ganesha, and Vishnu, and Ramayana characters Ram, Laxman, Sita, Hanuman, Ravan, have left a great impression on them during this period.

**Introduction to Mathematics:** For learning math, the children have been using stones, sticks, leaves, toffees, biscuits and the like. They are now comfortable in counting numbers, 1 to 20 forward and backward. They have learned simple operations – addition, subtraction, multiplication and even division – up to the number 20, as well.

**Arts:** This group of children has been learning with great enthusiasm drawing and painting with



They have now learned to work with clay to make diyas, fruits, birds, vegetables, etc.

**Skilled work:** To foster motor skills and eye-hand coordination, children have been making things like toys & furniture from cloth, paper, sticks and spoons. Cutting and pasting from paper and cloth various shapes such as flowers, fishes, garlands, leaves, etc. develop these skills. They are learning to even cook simple food items.

**Physical and mental development through games:** Games provide a fun way to develop a variety of useful traits – observing power, quick comprehension, instant decision making



and response, memory enhancement – in addition to improving physical fitness, flexibility, speed and agility. The games currently employed include football, touch ball, dodge-ball, dog & bone, kabaddi, sittin



kho, net & fish, fruit & salad, Ram & Ravana, etc. Sense of balance and confrontation with fear was developed through climbing tall ladder, tree climbing, and rappelling.

To get rid of timidity, word games and conversation in a



circle setting is being continuously practiced. The boys can be quite vociferous but the girls are still somewhat shy.

Puzzles and blocks are now being used to develop memory and manipulation skills.

Much of the knowledge about flora



and fauna is being developed through practical outdoor forays and putting what they learn on paper indoors as a project.

#### **There is a time and place for things and activities:**

Imbibing a sense of punctuality and regularity is not too easy but children are beginning to respond positively now. A sense of order in use of material things has been much more facile. The children have learned to use materials with care and put notebooks, books, tables, mats, toys, puzzles & blocks, etc. at their proper place after their use and leave the school premises neat and clean.



**Adventure Youth Camps :** During April and December 2009 and January & March 2010, six adventure youth camps were conducted for participants from the Birla Public School, Pilani, Rajasthan (2 camps, 51 & 50 participants), Mirambika and The Mother's International School, New Delhi (three camps, with 35, 25, and 44 participants). Activities of the camps included

bouldering, rappelling, swimming, rowing, trekking, asanas & pranayama, keep-fit exercises, talks & workshops on health including vision-care, western folk-dances, shramdan, meditation, and interactive talks on value based topics. Pranjali Jauhar, Dr. Nirankar Agarwal, and Jayanta Paul were among the resource persons. A few pictures are included to illustrate the manifold activities that form part of these camps.











## Plantation, Horticulture, Farming

Plantation: For the ongoing plantation activity, following trees were planted on AMSS land during this year:

Name of the Tree	Number planted
Mango	100
Pomegranate	50
Cheeku	5
Orange and Lime	300
Custard Apple	24
Cinnamon	24
Rose Apple	30
Jamuroll	50
Papaya	100
All spices	3
Karmanga	5
Silver Oak	15
Jackfruit	25
Coconut	2
Ashok	50
Neem	35

### Following tree saplings were distributed to the villagers:

Papaya	30
Mango, Jackfruit, Blackberry	60

## General Health Care

For the use of its own staff and of villagers, AMSS stocks homeopathic and allopathic medicines in its main building. This facility is available on a 24x7 basis. As mentioned earlier, phone consultation is always available from competent Delhi doctors. During the past year, some 900 villagers did use this service for myriad conditions such as cold, cough, fever, itching, loose motions, spasmodic abdominal pain, wounds, etc.

At the end of December, a medical camp was held at Kechla. Drs. Surinder Pradhan and Debnath from Delhi paid a pre-planned visit to a number of hamlets and villages, including Nangiput, Similia, Gulelput, Sirisi, Chenda, Telliguda and Gillaguda. A total of 278 patients were examined, and medicines worth Rs. 15,000/- were distributed free to the afflicted persons. Ten patients were referred to hospital for cataract operation, one patient was diagnosed with filaria and a 3 month course of medicines was prescribed and given. One imminent delivery case was taken to hospital in Koraput where a healthy boy was delivered.

Thorough health check up was given to 100 children, including 75 AMVM students. The doctors were ably assisted in all this by Sanjeeb Giri and Vipin Pandey of the The Mother's Integral Health Centre (Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch, New Delhi).

Irrigation: - The wind-mill installed some years back was not functioning properly due to inadequate







water in the bore well. A better site had to be located. On October 9, finally, Robi and his team from Aureka (Auroville) reached Kechla, and within a mere 4 days were able to shift the wind mill. Everybody was much relieved when the water flow started from October 13 onward. This supply of water now irrigates one third of the trees and plants on our land.

As more trees are planted, more and more clay pots need to be imported from Kechla for drip irrigation. As mentioned in our last report, we have found this to be the best method for conserving water yet nourish the plants adequately.



In May 2009, six new bore wells were dug on AMSS lands in addition to the one drilled for the new location of the wind mill. These range from the kitchen garden to new school building and hostel locations and additional ones for the village hamlets.



## Transport

Two new boats were purchased during this year. It has been recognized for some time that due to loss of rapid road accessibility because of the Kolab Dam Reservoir, a speedier mode of transport is extremely desirable. Therefore a semi-inflatable speed boat was purchased during October for dealing with any medical or other emergencies.

As the camp activities with scores of participants increase, the requirement for a larger boat was fulfilled



by acquisition of a double hull flat deck boat of 25x9 feet dimension during December.

Also during December, two skilled persons from Visakhapatnam came and repaired 4 of AMSS' boats. AMSS also had a major repair work done to the boat of the villagers.



## Alternative Energy and Electrification - Solar Lights

During 2008, AMSS was able to find a sponsor for 120 solar lanterns for the villagers in Kechla. One of the highlights of this year was the provision of solar lights to a sizable population of the village. A manufacturer



of solar lights in Delhi gave us 83 solar lanterns at a significant discount. Thus the villagers contributed a mere Rs. 600/- (about 50% of the normal price) each for the solar lantern and were delighted with the windfall.

Over a period of several months, representations made by AMSS to USAID (United States Agency for International Development) on behalf of the villagers bore fruit and led to grant of a subsidy for an additional 1,250 solar lanterns. Under this scheme also the villagers benefited by contributing only Rs. 600/- each for the solar lantern. We are naturally very pleased with its favorable impact on the school children also who can now read and study for longer hours.



### INSPIRATIONS

The visit of Circe from August 21-27 was a rewarding experience for the AMSS team of workers. She meticulously went through all activities, taught music, and got together with teachers for formal and informal sessions. She had many positive ideas and suggestions for the whole institution. As Circe is one of our

important fund raisers, we are all very thankful that she was able to spare these days from her busy schedule, observe all that is going on first hand and appreciate the problems of this region. Her parting comments were indeed encouraging. **“This place is so beautiful, and peaceful. You’ve been doing a great work over here since 2004. Kari had told me [about it] but seeing & living it is very different than just watching pictures or hearing or reading stories. It gives much more sense now to work for you in the West. Continue the great job in all areas, with the kids, with the tribals or constructions or nature. I had a very nice time with all of you here. See you next year. With Love, Circe [Circe Luginbuhl, Switzerland]”**

The maintenance team of the complex is highly dedicated, sincere, dynamic and devoted. They offer hearty hospitality to the visitors. The spirit of harmony, unity and cooperation is visible in their working. They exemplify the Mother’s words: **“WORK ITSELF IS YOGA IF IT IS DONE IN A SPIRIT OF DEDICATION AND SURRENDER”**.

The complex wakes up at 5.00 am with prayers, which continue till 6.00 am. Also, the evening time from 6.30 to 7.30, is devoted to singing and listening to *bhajans*, *mantras*, the Mother’s Music, Savitri recordings, and sometimes, silent meditation. I enjoyed my stay and have been benefited by the



environment. I pray for the material and spiritual progress of the maintenance team and also of the surrounding population. I also pray that the development and progress of this backward tribal area may become an example to others.

**- Y.R. Malhotra, Sri Aurobindo Bhawan, Saharanpur (U.P)**

During the short period of my stay here, I enjoyed the company of the sadhaks. The beautiful landscape, and the high and tranquil hills inspired my soul. It seemed to me that these hills aspire and await the advent of a new life upon earth. During this period, the magnificent way of the divine's working on earth (to some extent), was revealed to me. I pray to the Divine Mother to descend and manifest here with her full might.

**- Tapan Kumar Sahoo, Angul, Orissa**

What I feel from within and I tell all my friends & relatives that KECHLA project of our Pranjal bhai is the true work of the Divine Mother. Which can be seen and feel by an individuals and to understand how Mother's work is being done on grass root label. One can feel Mother's presence in the Kechla. Such a peace atmosphere and how they take care of whole villagers. My son Chaitanya enjoyed a lot the company of Mahi and he was very happy to teach some French to Kechla school students & he is telling us that every year he wants to visit Kechla on his vacation & teach French to the students because they are very sweet friends. Thanks to all members of Kechla.

**- Suman Kumar, Puducherry**