

# **Mosamat Budhiya Shiksha Nirman Sangathan (MBSNS)**

## **Annual Report 2021-22**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Mosamat Budhiya Shiksha Nirman Sangathan (MBSNS), was registered under the Trust Act on 11th October, 2017. The Board of Trustees include Magsaysay awardee Aruna Roy, Retired General Manager of Indian Railways Sri. Ashutosh Swami, Dalit Mahila activist Radha Devi and JJSS founding members Ashish Ranjan and kamayani swami. Though the registration is new, this educational initiative itself is born out of a ten year old struggle that started in Araria district of North Bihar. The struggle was a humble attempt to ensure that people's entitlements under laws like the NREGA were met. In the process we committed ourselves to building a better world, "nyay samanta ho aadhaar aisa rache ham sansar!"

The MBSNS started its work on the understanding that the struggle is as much within as it is outside. So we have in our own limited ways tried to keep our caste, class, gender, religion and minorities lenses on to ensure that we worked with justice in our heart and in our actions. This education initiative is to strengthen what we have instinctively known, as Dr. Ambedkar said "Shikshit Ho! Sangathit ho! Sangharsh Karo! Sangharsh Karo!"

Over the years, we have also started focusing more on the jeevanshala, our effort to help children get better access to formal education, along with helping women and adolescents continue their life long learning in terms of training, workshops and internships.

## **THE JEEVANSHALA – Our residential educational centre**

The residential educational centre has been a safe space for children, above the eighth grade, since 2017. However, in April 2021 we decided to run a more organised space, for younger children. Having worked with teenagers, in the ages of 13 to 18, usually enrolled in classes VIII to XII, we realised that the early years of poor formal education had not helped children learn how to learn for themselves. Usually they had learnt to get through exams, by rote learning, for most of them learning was reduced to reading textbooks and somehow getting through exams. We also realised that their base in terms of the three Rs (Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic) was so poor that sometimes a student in the eighth standard could not read fluently, even if they managed to read comprehension was very poor and vocabulary very weak. We therefore felt starting with formal education at an earlier age would help, also we found that it also helps push the age of marriage, because a girl who is interested in studying, usually is not pushed into an early marriage, but if she does poorly in studies, parents may marry her as early as the ninth standard. If we could ensure that our children started early and got into a culture of reading, writing, arithmetic, along with a desire to learn for themselves, to think for themselves we could go a long way.

It was with this in mind that 2021-22 has been devoted to working comprehensively with children in the ages of 10 to 13 years. These children have suffered greatly because of covid because of which schools were repeatedly shut down and the little chance to engage with learning that they had was also snuffed. Though we started with 12 children we now have twenty two children, living residentially with us, while three more come in as day scholars.

Some of the activities undertaken with the senior group, in this year included, a LED bulb repair workshop, music classes and songs for the bhagat singh jayanti, painting our own board games and learning science by doing with science teachers, including Manish Bhaiya, who dropped in to work with the children, on a voluntary basis. All students were exposed to regular storytelling sessions, a celebration of holi, with the traditional *dhurkhel*, ramzan and eid celebrations and learning by doing across subjects. All children also watch one weekly film which included films like cars, queen of katwe, cocoa, bajrangi bhaijan, i'm kalam and many others. The senior children also had a week of films, in which they watched a mix of thinking animations and feature films including shyam benegal's mammo, saeed akhtar mirza's saleem langde par mat ro and animations like lion king.

The centre takes care of the child's food and nutrition, three Rs and also their overall development, which include developing a love of learning, reading and physical exercise and sports. For more detailed report on learning at the jeevanshala please do see our website and read about the jeevanshala work at <https://mbsns.org/jeevanshala/>

## **AMBEDKAR NAGAR – A Non Formal Educational (NFE) centre**

The idea of spreading the desire for learning, and connecting children to formal mainstream learning has been one of the aims of the Trust. This need was felt ever more strongly during the covid period, when schools closed on and off, due to the waxing and waning of the covid virus. Plus marginalised communities, which were most affected by covid economically, in an economy which slowed down with covid, it was very difficult to ignore children's poor access to education. It is with this crisis in mind that in January 2022, we started a small non formal educational (NFE) centre in a Safai karmi basti, in ambedkar nagar, a mohalla near the jeevanshala. In the two hours that the facilitators spend at the centre, the children are acclimatized to the idea of spending time together, listening patiently, avoiding fights amongst each other, forming a routine in which they would come to the centre everyday. The method of learning at this centre is a play way method, in which children play games like leader leader chaal badal, blue blue blue akaash men, chidiya chidiya ghosla badal etc, listen to a story and then do game based work to improve their vocabulary and pique their interest in reading and writing. Almost 20 children come daily to the centre, and two facilitators spend two hours with them.

## HOSTING THE WOMEN'S WORKSHOP

The MBSNS, along with the JJSS hosted a group of 30 women involved with social work at the village level. Women volunteers were mostly from the most socially and economically marginalised communities, with their pains, sorrows, but above all joys, which were all commonly shared over a three day learning journey at the MBSNS centre. The workshops was held from 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> March, marking international women's day and Savitri Bai's death anniversary. The three days included, sessions on women's health, power relations in society, gender division of roles and how patriarchy results in normalisation of violence against women. Facilitators included senior women saathis of the JJSS including Saraswati Devi, Reena Devi, Phool Kumari, Neela devi and many others. Tanmay designed and coordinated the workshop, along with Doli and Jaimanti.



## TEACHER LEARNER'S READING CLUB



The teachers at the centre believe that they help children learn and that in the process we learn ourselves, and therefore we like calling our teachers teacher learners (TL). One of our learning strategies for the TL group was to start a reading group. Over the period of the last six month, we read together A S Neil's Summerhill, Giju Bhai Badheka's Divaswapna, Kuroyanagi's Totto Chan and many short articles shared by friends at Eklavya, Bhopal. Each day we got together for one hour, taking out time from our lunch break and reading aloud from the above books, discussing and sometimes sharing our surprise at the amazing personal confidence that these readings gave us, because suddenly we were not alone. Others had gone through struggles like ours in trying to establish a loving and enabling learning atmosphere.

## MASK MAKING WORKSHOP

Hosting the Mass making workshop for JJSS youth volunteers was a unique experience. The workshop was led by Jitendra Paswan, Secretary, JJSS and a cultural activist, from Katihar district



of Bihar. Jiten Bhai, has done workshops with experienced theatre and cultural artists, like Shankar Singh (MKSS), Ramlal Bhatt (SWRC) and Shiv Singh Nayal (Alaripu). With this rich experience and his talented personality, Jiten Bhai conducted a seven day theatre cum mask making workshop. And there is no way we can do justice to the workshop in words, and we therefore share a few photographs below. Some of the youth in turn helped the jeevanshala children learn making masks.



## ADVANCED INTERNSHIP

8 former interns were invited in April 2021 along with two young saathis from Jharkhand – Seema and Raju. Together, we spent a month together at the centre reading Ram Puniyani's "*Ambedkar aur Hindutva Rajneeti*" and Ambedkar's "*Brahmanvaad Ki Vijay*". This led to very interesting conversations around the workings of caste and religion in the country. Every 5-6 days, we interspersed the reading sprees with 3 day village visits where the team filled National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) work applications and job card

applications. There was also a social media content production workshop as part of the advanced internship. This was facilitated by Sabyasachi (pictured above).

## INTERNSHIP

After skipping the internship due to the pandemic in 2020, the MBSNS hosted the 6<sup>th</sup> batch of the internship program on a smaller scale with 20 youth from 15 July to 15 August, 2021. This internship was a unique opportunity for young people between the ages of 16-24 years to come together, make new friendships, learn new skills, find themselves and open their eyes to new ways of looking at the world. The annual residential intensive workshop is eagerly awaited by all in the JJSS and MBSNS as it is a time where promising young people from the villages come together for month of fun, challenge and learning. Whether it was stepping out of the house for the first time or finding their own voice and learning to facilitate games for children across communities, or doing the important work of questioning our own stands on gender, caste, religion and class, this internship was a huge learning experience for everyone involved.

This year we had external resource persons from Scientists for Society, Patna –Debashish, Mrityunjay and Vivek to take the session on the origins of the universe, solar system, earth life, and civilization. JJSS activist Sho and Phuleswar also helped with this session. The sessions on gender were facilitated by Doli, Sita and Abhimanyu, while Bhanwarji made us reflect caste in our daily lives with thoughtful exercises. Ashish bhai, one of the trustees of MBSNS took a session on communalism and fake news, forcing us to think about the waves of hatred consuming our nation these days. Each session was followed by visits to the village where the interns were given a research task related to the workshop they had just had. Additionally, interns were required to facilitate "play for peace " non-competitive games for the children in the villages they visited. Because of the pandemic and closed borders, we were unable to make our usual field trip to Nepal. However, we still managed to visit Patna - where we visited the Bihar Museum, Buddha Smriti Park, and met with the domestic workers' union.





The internship culminated with celebrations of Independence Day, reflections on what freedom truly means to us, eating buniya, singing songs and raising of freedom, equality and justice, while receiving certificates of completion of internship. The internship was managed completely by Doli and Deepak, former interns of this internship programme.

## **SESSION ON CASTE AND SUPERSTITION: BHANWAR MEGHWANSHI**



While Bhanwar Meghwanshi was visiting in July 2021, a workshop on caste and the need for scientific thinking was organized for the karykartas of JJSS, many of whom were struggling with applying the principles of scientific thinking in their personal lives, particularly when it came to the mental health of close female relatives. Since Bhanwarji is someone who was a diligent practitioner of many superstitions, many steeped in oppressive casteist practice, he shared his own struggle and journey with rejecting superstition. This was something many saathis could relate to because publicly denouncing superstition is one thing, but standing up to society against archaic rituals is difficult. Potential strategies to combat these



rituals and ways of thinking in one's own life were discussed. Listening to Bhanwarji's personal journey helped us look at the superstition in all our lives.

## WORKSHOP ON GENDER AND SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS IN VARANASI



MGNREGA Mazdoor Union, based in Varanasi, invited volunteers from the MBSNS to conduct workshops with young girls on issues of gender, health and rights. Three volunteers of the MBSNS – Doli, Krischam and Tanmay spent 4 days (24-28<sup>th</sup> September, 2021) to train over 100 young girls between the ages of 13-24 years to help them develop a lens that allows them to look at gender-based violence and gender-based discrimination in their own lives and the world around them.

Secondly, they took sessions on understanding our bodies, specifically our sexual and reproductive systems, menstruation, reproduction in humans, myths around menstruation and sex determination, its link to patriarchy, the dangers of shame around the reproductive health, the need to break silence around violence and reproductive health. The workshop was well-received and the team has been invited back to do more sessions in the following year. MGNREGA Mazdoor Union has

also pledged to send some of their young karykartas to be part of the internship programme.



## RECLAIMING THE REPUBLIC WORKSHOP WITH SAMBHAVANA

Using theatre of the oppressed techniques, two volunteers of the MBSNS – Tanmay and Doli helped design, envision and facilitate a workshop called 'Reclaim the Republic' for over 20 participants from across the country from 24<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> Oct, 2021 in Sambhaavana Institute, Palampur, Himachal Pradesh.

The fundamental questions such as – “who does the republic belong to, who \*should\* it belong to? Who does it mean to belong or be part of a republic? What changes need to be made to make sure everyone has their rightful access to the republic?” were wrestled with using plenty of theatre games and role play.

## REFRESHER WORKSHOP WITH BATCH 6 INTERNS

A two day workshop to refresh power structures of caste, class, gender and religion was conducted with Batch 6 interns. This was a great opportunity to check in with batch 6 interns, post internship and revise and deepen our understanding about some of the concepts introduced during the internship. Theatre games such as the machine were used to unpack these complex concepts.

## ACADEMIC EXPOSURE VISIT

The academic team at the jeevanshala is young and relatively inexperienced, though the TLs believe that children need to develop a love of learning, that they can not be commanded to study, but be brought to it through their own personal journey and desire, we had little know how of how to do this. When we started in April 2021, most of us had never been in a day to day formal learning setting. While Biswajit, Nisha and Chotu, were in the eleventh standard and had studied at the MBSNS centre, Sangeeta was a courageous woman, who had against all odds educated herself, after being married at an early age. Only Abhimanyu and kamayani, had had the privilege of a stable formal education, through post graduation, still with no exposure to a teaching learning situation.

It is in this context that after much discussion and help from those who had been in the area of learning for a long time, we narrowed down on visiting Eklavya and Muskan, two well acclaimed educational organisations in India. While we stayed for two days in muskan, learning about running a formal school for children from marginalised sections, and visiting their outreach learning centres in urban bastis, we were amazed to realise that though the children came from similar levels of marginalisation, as our children in Jevanshala, these children in muskan, had developed a yearning for learning and beamed wit confidence. In eklavya, we had a more formal and planned workshop on how to take the three Rs to our children, on understanding learning through various approaches and finding practical guidance in running learning centres.

It was in this trip that we understood the how and what of joyful learning, as against our vague ideas of what it meant. Since the trip, in October 2021, we have got continuous support in our work from both organisations, though it has been a long distance support and we hope that in this new year, we will be able to have some of the facilitators from these organisations visit our organisation.



A report prepared by Abhimanyu, Tanmay and kamayani, for the MBSNS, [mbsns.bihar@gmail.com](mailto:mbsns.bihar@gmail.com).