May & June 2013

It’s been a while since we were last in touch and this time there are two months to catch up on! So . . . . . . here goes . . . . .

In MAY while temperatures soared, ground water levels fell, forest fires wreaked havoc in the hills around us, and the nannari stalls did brisk business, the school remained silent and deserted - for this was summer vacation time! As always, part of this quiet time was used to work on the wear and tear that inevitably comes in the wake of 11 months filled with fun, learning, experimenting, and exploring. We shook our heads and cluck clucked at all the little things that had gone unnoticed amidst the day to day busyness – missing door handles, loose hinges, names artistically scribbled on walls, and all the myriad signs that evidence the presence of irrepressible energy and curiosity. Also, considering that we would be running Prakruti Badi only as a primary school from June ’13, there was much to be discussed and planned in preparation for it. This was going to be a new challenge and we looked forward to it with a mixture of nervousness and excitement.

And so we entered JUNE, with its accompanying overcast skies and strong winds, with a deep sigh of relief. It was a comparatively small group that returned to school on the 2nd and the first couple of days were spent in settling in and getting used to the newness of it all. With classes VI – X gone there was a sudden surfeit of classrooms and a luxury of space! The children of each class soon began to enjoy having a “proper classroom” to themselves. Class III in particular were delighted to inherit the old class X classroom and soon identified their favorite corners . . . .

There was a new and different kind of energy that seemed to fill the atmosphere. And while we missed the older children, it did not prevent us from enjoying the extra time that we were now able to spend with the younger ones. For those of us who had up to now only worked with middle and high school, our trepidations soon melted in the face of eager responses and a fresh quality of engagement. Yes – this was challenging, but it was also proving to be fun!

From the deceptively easy skill of holding a pencil to forming basic strokes to tracing the dotted line of an alphabet to creating new neuromuscular pathways that are the complex yet basic precursors of learning – an exciting world of hitherto unrecognized possibilities was opening up! And it was obvious that we were going to be pushed to keep up with these thirsty minds! Can you imagine a child sulking because he wasn’t given homework??

The State syllabus introduces Hindi and English only in class V. We figured that since the earlier a child gets exposed to a new language the easier it becomes for her/him to pick it up, it made sense to introduce both from class I. New and innovative ways of reinforcing learning began to be devised. The lines separating number work, languages, drawing, craft, gardening, and games began to blur.

Measuring and marking the badminton court to specifications became an exercise in Math for classes IV and V. A lesson on different kinds of leaves with class III culminated in a craft class.

Craft and drawing classes took on a fresh dimension. An instruction to use just 3 colors to fill a blank sheet of paper resulted in . . . well . . . take a look . . . These pieces of artwork were then
thrown open to discussion and interpretation facilitating the interplay between imagination and language.

Garden plots were allotted to each of 3 groups and work started in earnest. There was much to be done. It hadn’t yet rained and the ground was still hard. This made the task of digging a difficult one. Nevertheless, within 10 days or so the beds were ready for the seeds. In the last week of June some bird watcher friends were spending the weekend in Timbaktu. Chandu, who had this book on birds with the most gorgeous photographs, agreed to do an impromptu session with the children. The following 40 minutes were spent oohing and aahing every time he turned a page!

June was also the time for admissions into other schools for the children in classes 6 – 10 who were no longer with us. This took a while but finally got done and the children soon settled into their new environments. We continue to stay in touch with them and have included monthly visits to them in our plan for the year. That’s it from us for now. We will be back next month.
July 2013

Hello!
This month we thought we’d take you through a typical day at Prakruthi Badi. And what better way to do it than through pictures! Now, that’s going to be quite a few pictures! Ready?? Clang clang clang – the bell rings at 9:00 am! It’s time to kick start the day with half an hour of **assembly** that is organized and run by the children with each class taking turns to decide what should be done. While songs and dances are the norm, there is also the occasional ‘surprise’ . . . . A class II child walks into assembly with a bottle half filled with murky water in which are wriggling several mosquito larvae and launches into a presentation on the life cycle of a mosquito! Class IV narrate a story through a series of pictures that they drew the day before in drawing class. Each child narrates his/her part of the story along with the corresponding picture. In the brief interactive session that follows we discover that several stories can be made up using the same pictures and also that the number of possibilities increases by simple changing the order of the pictures!

Assembly’s over and it’s time for a morning of classes - **Arithmetic**, **Telugu**, **Hindi**, **English**, **Science and Social Studies**. Classes are often conducted outdoors and, whenever possible, teaching / learning is put into the context of our daily lives and immediate environment. Here is an English class with class I. They have just learnt ‘square’, ‘circle’, ‘big’, ‘small’, ‘inside’, ‘outside’. And now it’s time to put this learning into practice by making “a small square inside a big square”! Four clangs indicates lunch break. Everyone troops off to the dining hall. Hands are washed and many succumb to the irresistible urge to shake their wet hands in someone’s face – giving rise to indignant yelps of protest! As is the local practice, the first course consists of rice with vegetables. Rice or raagi mudda with dal or curry is eaten next followed in the end with rice and buttermilk. Yes – rice is the staple diet here. Chutneys, pickles and our famous Timbaktu peanut podi (a dry spicy mixture of crushed peanuts, red chillies, garlic and various condiments – delicious!) are hugely popular. Everyone decides where he or she wants to sit – inside or outside, on the circular stone bench or under it! The afternoon is reserved for craft and/or drawing, gardening, music or dance, and games. Class III is eager to learn to stitch and are now quite adept at hemming, chain stitch and buttonhole stitch. And then, depending on which day of the week it is, there is either chekkabhaja (a local folk dance of the region), music (vocal), or tabla. Class II loves their tabla class and make sure that the tablas are out of their bags and ready by the time “Kumar-anna” arrives so as not to miss even a moment!

After that follow gardening and games and by 5:00 pm the school day comes to an end. For the residential children it’s now time to have a wash and continue the serious business of having fun! Some improvise toys out of things they find lying around. We thought this top – made with the cap of a cleaning liquid bottle and a nail – was brilliant! And then, an hour later – clang! Books and bags are gathered up and, since it’s still light till 7:00 pm these days, the semi circular stage is used for study hour. Children sit in groups to finish the little homework they sometimes get. Occasionally someone might prefer to sit by him or herself and work in peaceful solitude. Those who finish early device ways to entertain themselves! Come to think of it, we have never heard a child (or, for that matter, a teacher) complain of boredom!! This time is also used to attend to all the minor bruises and scratches sustained during the day. One of our class IV girls enjoys offering this care and has been learning simple first aid.

An early dinner at 7 is followed by half an hour of library time and/or story telling with the hope that they will unwind and calm down before dropping off to sleep. Most of the time it works – and
then some need to be carried limply off to bed! But not always – and that’s when one can hear loud whispers and suppressed giggles from the dormitories! Shhhhhhh . . . . . . good night!

PRAKRUTI BADI
December 2013

It’s once again that time of the year when we find ourselves feeling urged to look back and take stock. So, while December had its own share of fun and excitement, it was also a month of critically reviewing processes and structures. Here’s a brief update . . . . . .

The month started off with preparations for our next balalakarikram (children’s cultural program) which was scheduled for Dec 13th evening. (You might recall that the last one was in Sept). Since it was important that classes not be disrupted, most of the practice took place in the afternoons and evenings. Some of our day scholars were requested to stay back in school at night so that the groups could rehearse after dinner too! The program consisted of songs and dances by all the different classes plus a play about 3 spoilt royal children by class III (courtesy Mallika) and a shadow show of Jack and the Beanstalk by class V (courtesy Ella).

One evening during games period Ella and Mallika organized a treasure hunt. The children had never done this before and it took them a while to understand that finding the clues was not enough – they had to decipher them too! But they got the hang of it and soon the school was filled with shrieking children dashing off to find the next clue!

Ella has not only finished painting the boys’ dorm, she has also finished the second girls’ dorm. The children are on cloud nine with the way their rooms are looking . . . . . .

Dec was also the time to say goodbye to both Mallika and Ella. This was not easy for, over the months that they were with us, they had become a part of the family and we would miss them. We wish them all the best and hope that they will come back to visit us someday.
The other day there was a flurry of excitement when . . . . but let me re-wind just a wee bit here. In one of the vegetable gardens a lauki (bottle gourd) vine had climbed all the way to the top of a nearby neem tree. As a result there were 2 laukis hanging dangerously heavy from the top branches. So a kitchen knife was tied to a long stick that was tied to yet another long stick and a bedsheets was brought to the scene of the crime. Look at what transpired . . . . . can you see the lauki falling?

There are also crops of mooli (raddish) and methi (fenugreek) that will soon be ready. For a while now we have been discussing the need to identify where each child is in terms of her/his own learning curve and then try and design a learning program that would address the gaps while taking the child forward. Thus, over the span of almost 10 days, each child was assessed in all the subjects as well as in craft, gardening and games/sports. This was done through worksheets and conversations.

Celebration of X’mas has been another highlight of the month. The children had a lively celebration on the 24th with songs, dances, dramas which ended with special dinner.

For a while now we have been discussing the need to identify where each child is in terms of her/his own learning curve and then try and design a learning program that would address the gaps while taking the child forward. This was designed by Sayonika in the form of an assessment over the span of almost 10 days to evaluate the teaching-learning activities of the school. The methodology of the assessment included using individual worksheets, group activities to gauge language ability and conversations. Comments of teachers on each child were also taken into consideration. The areas of assessment included academics and extracurricular activities like gardening, arts and crafts, sports, traditional dance forms, folk songs, dramas and tabla. It was observed that the learning goals of the children in cultural activities are very well met. However we figured that more effort needs to be put in the educational goals and teacher training which we hope to look into early next year.