

Getting ready for new academic year

The vacation in north India started with high heat waves, it has reached 50 degree Celsius in some part of the country !

Our both schools (St Anthony's school Dugawar & Rahrai) have successfully completed another academic year 2018-19. By mid- May we had the results of the Central Board exams of class 10 and 12. In *Dugawar*, the pass percentages for class 12 and class 10 are 92% and 96 % respectively. It is much ahead of the national pass percentage. Like the previous years, a team of teachers and coordinators worked day and night to support the students in their needs. Those who did not have a conducive atmosphere at their home to study were kept in the school hostel. Teachers were available to them in the evening hours and one teacher stayed up with them throughout.

Admission for the new academic year has started in the month of April, and is expected to continue till the end of July, when the school re-opens after the vacation. Around 300 students are expected to join in *Dugawar* and around 120 in *Rahrai*.

The news about the good result of our school has spread in the region and this might be one of the reasons that students from other schools, after completing their class 10 are seeking admissions in *St-Anthony's Dugawar*. This year, for the first time, we have given admissions to more than 10 students in class 11. The quality of their schooling compared to our school is much lower, however, we have kept our door open to these new students. The main challenge will be to get these students ready for the final exams and bring up their standard.

New transportation requirements

India's road infrastructure has seen consistent improvement in the last few years. Connectivity has improved and road transportation has become a focus of rapid development.

The main road in our project area of *Dugawar* also has gone through transformation. The narrow broken village road has been replaced by a good road. Though there are no public buses, rickshaws connecting to the neighboring cities are available. The accessibility of our school to the people has really improved. The senior students of *St. Anthony's Dugawar* make use of these rickshaw service.

However, the smaller roads going to the villages from the main road remain bad. Some villages are far away from the main road and nothing is yet done to improve their accessibility. Villagers still have to walk a long distance to reach the main road. The children still rely on the transportation provided by our school. Without our bus, most of these children wouldn't be able to reach the school. Each year, there is a request to extend transportation facility to more villages, but sadly we have to refuse. The increasing number of children from the villages where we provide transportation itself force us to increase the transportation facility there first.



At the moment, in *St-Anthony's School Dugawar*, each vehicle takes three trips. For next year, we need to buy a new bus.

Government rules for school transportation has also undergone changes during the last few years. Local administration regularly control the condition of the school vehicles. This control has made the villagers to stop using all their illegal vehicles, like *Jugad*, a locally made vehicle. Private parties who are still bringing children have tough time to meet the requirements of the authorities.

Some years ago, we encouraged and supported villagers to get buses or small vehicles. Our plan was to slowly involve more villagers who could engage in this service. *Rajesh* was one of the villagers who came forward. He bought a second hand bus with some loan and was managing well his business. As per the new *Uttar Pradesh School Transportation rules*, a school bus can run only for 15 years. He was not able to renew his bus's registration last year as the bus completed 15 years. His bus was in a good condition as he himself maintained it well. He was heart broken but the school had no say in this. So, he abandoned his bus and back again, he took up a drivers job as he couldn't afford to buy a new bus. To adapt to this shortage of bus, the school had to increase the number of trips for all the vehicles.

This year, we were, ourselves, in the same situation. The first bus owned by our *St Anthony's school of Dugawar* was purchased in 2004, just a few months after the school was opened. So it completed 15 years and we couldn't run it any more ! In the month of April, 2019, we bought a new bus to replace the old one. The new bus's price was around 25,000 €. The price of the bus we bought in 2004 was



Risking life for education ?
Strict new transportation
rules are coming.



The newly built road in front of the
school is new to villagers. Due to
over speed and unsafe travel, fatal
incidents are on the increase.



around 15,000 € at that time. There is a big hike in the prices during the last decade !

So, how to solve the issue of transportation for this year with the number of students increasing ? One option is to limit the number of admissions. But it is painful for us to refuse children who wish to join the school. The temporary solution we found for the coming year, until we have another bus is to end the class for the kids from class Nursery to class 1 one period early, so that we can first have a trip to drop those children and then another one to drop the bigger children. Meanwhile, we encourage more and more boys and girls to use bicycles.

Increasing number of parents are bringing their children by motor bike now that the road was fully rebuilt. However, it is really scary to see that most of them carry 4 to 5 kids at one time on their motorbike. Most of the time, they do not use a helmet and in case of an accident, it is certainly fatal.

To meet the increasing demand for the transportation, we had to go for a new bus in our school of *Rahrai* as well (The school of *Rahrai* is 60 km from the one of *Dugawar*). The second-hand bus we bought for *Rahrai*, though looking profitable at first, is not very assuring. Often there are problems with it and we have to do a lot of repairs. So, it doesn't seem to be a good idea to continue buying second hand buses. A new bus, 42 seaters, was bought for the new academic year 2019-20.

Election 2019

Parliament election 2019 had been held in seven phases from 11 April to 19 May 2019. About 900 million Indian citizens were eligible to vote in this *General election* and there was an in-

crease of 84.3 million vote from the last election in 2014, making it the largest -ever election in the world !

As in recent elections, the 2019 voting has relied on EVM (*electronic voting machines*). The counting of votes was conducted on 23 May, and on the same day the results were declared.

India is known as a land of Unity in Diversity because of its various religions and the unity among the different communities. The interdependence of each communities of this country on each other forged a link of bond and unity in the past. During the last 5 years of the BJP rule (*Bharatiya Janata Party*, an hindu nationalist politic group), the forces of communal polarization and majoritarian nationalism have shaken this unity. The secularism and many of the democratic Institutions have been at threat.

Never in independent India's history have we seen so much hatred for *Gandhi* and what he stood for. The assassin of *Gandhi*, *Godse*, has gained lot of support during this Modi's Period (*Narendra Modi*, from BJP, is relected as the prime minister of India). Though the whole country's opposition leaders tried to unite and fought to bring down the ruling government, they couldn't succeed. The ruling government won the recent election. The *Election Commission*, a trusted institution, has already lost



Our staff members from Orissa, Bengal, Kerala, are now residents of Dugawar. They participated to the elections.

its credibility, there is a widespread fear that the advanced technology has enabled massive electoral fraud.

Voting is not compulsory in India. To increase the percentage of vote, awareness programs were conducted all over the country. Students all over India were asked to spread the message about the value of voting. The local administrations monitored these activities. As per the direction received from the local administration, *St. Anthony's School* held a rally in the near by villages and did bring in awareness. We were even asked to take videos of the rallies conducted to the local administration offices ! Children prepared many slogans and they were enthusiastic about this outdoor activity.

A group of armed forces used our school building to lodge during their election duty in the region. Besides that, all our school buses had been send for election duties for these days. School had to be closed during these days.

