

### **What a Memorable Experience!**

My first visit to Ekal Vidyalaya: 8<sup>th</sup> Jan'2018 – U.P. – Mathura – Chaumuha Sanch and Village.

Organised with Vijay Sethi Sir Ji (Ekal Delhi), Shri Parsuram Ji and Raviji (Ekal Mathura)

For Ms.Sheetal Gupta (from Canada).



Bubbling with excitement, when I heard that I was to go for my first Ekal school visit on 8<sup>th</sup> Jan'2018 with Vijay Ji, I connected with Sheetal Ji before we actually met to coordinate the visit with her. We had scheduled Sheetal Ji's visit to an Ekal Vidyalaya in Mathura, after our visit to BankeBihari temple. Leaving home at 8am, I reached Hauz Khas by 8:20am, Vijay Ji picked me and we headed straight to pick Ms.Sheetal from GK 2. She was eagerly awaiting our arrival, carrying her basket of Bengali mithai, fruits and of course her exhilarated self to meet the Ekal children and interact with them. From the moment she boarded, we experienced her energies, wisdom, intellect, joy and extraordinary sharing and giving nature. Her connect with Ekal could be felt very strongly. Her involvement with Ekal was evident from her discussions, focused fully on her ideas, plans, projects, events channelized on the growth of Ekal in Canada. She bought out the deep interest, concern and passion with which the community in Canada responded and wanted to see the change and transformation in rural and tribal India.

Shri Vijay ji, with his brilliant experience on life as well as life at Ekal, opened a huge Pandora box of learning for us. Embarking on a learning journey, I kept listening to the two most enlightened souls. Sheetal Ji from Vancouver, was passionate about her gems and jewellery business, her Indian, spiritual, annual sojourns and her deep passion to enhance Ekal's reach in Canada and its total development in terms of activities, goals, marketing & social media campaigns, reaching big donors, engaging them for a lifetime with Ekal, its sense of purpose for holistic development of Indian villages through empowerment of tribal (vanvasi) and rural communities in

India with basic education, digital literacy, skill development, health awareness, learning modern and productive agricultural practices and rural entrepreneurship. Sheetalji's focus would be Punjab at the moment, as she shared that a large Sikh community in Canada wish to develop their motherland through Ekal. She also shared the Ekal gala event was organised in 2017 by her, with the help of her Uncle Shri P. L. Gupta Ji, who is the central force for driving donors in Canada.

It was time to disembark at 11:20am at Vrindavan, where another set of our energetic focused Ekal team, Shri Parsuram Ji and Ravi Ji (Ekal Karyakartas) met with us to take us for a visit to Bankebihariji's temple for the benefit of our esteemed Canada guest. A VIP darshan of the jhanki of bankeji for a good 15mins, was in store without struggling in queues – thanks to the efforts of our Ekal Karyakartas. I could see the contentment that Sheetal Ji showed after a divine darshan. Sheetal Ji then fetched Bankeji's murti and loads of Pedhas for the Ekal children. She also took enough biscuits, chocolates to distribute. It was 1p.m. when we resumed our journey from Vrindavan to Chaumuha Sanch in Village Chaumuha, where Ekal Vidyalaya was running between 3-6pm.

We reached Chaumuha a little before 3pm, the school was in full action with Acharya –Kantaji conducting her prayers. Children saw us from a distance and seemed so animated, as much as we all were, seeing them. Sheetal Ji was thrilled to meet them. They stood up to greet us. Like an Ekal school with a mat spread for children to sit, a black board, Saraswati Devi photo, Ekal alphabetic and number charts, the display was picture perfect. To add to the open school's existing challenges, there was jarring background music due to bhandara – a religious tradition that caught us off guard in the vicinity of Ekal School. Entire Chaumuha Sanch children stood around to witness Ekal's unique activity. The already super excited Sheetal Ji took centre stage and introduced herself –where she lived, worked and then asked every child to introduce themselves. She made sure every child spoke and she listened to each one very carefully. She asked them about their dreams, aspirations and what they would like to become when they grew up. When they shared their hope to become doctors, engineers, teachers and some wanting to get into the Indian army or police, Sheetal Ji was ecstatic. Sheetal Ji conducted a short awareness activity on Canada and North America by drawing the world map and asking children to locate India and Canada in it. This was like an eye opener for the children. Every child was focused on what would Sheetal ji share next while patting them. The interaction lasted for an hour. She spoke to Kanta Ji – the Acharya and asked about her experience with Ekal. Kanta Ji shared that she took over as the Acharya 2yrs back, from her elder sister who earlier taught at Ekal. The family bond with Ekal Vidyalaya was very strong with her brother too helping the school.



Sheetal Ji recorded interviews with 3 Ekal children, Kantaji, Vijay Ji, Parsuram Ji and me, on what brought us to Ekal. Sheetal Ji's interview questions were class apart as they brought us closer to Ekal and our own purpose to join the Ekal movement. Vijay Ji too did a number of recordings of the ongoing class, pictured the live session, took stock of the number of children (30), with the number of girls more than the boys, their attendance sheets, other registers and record checks, knowledge

and background of Kanta ji and her future plans. I also conducted a fun game for all the children. After all the interactions, Sheetal Ji distributed her stock of Pedhas, biscuits, chocolates that she had got for all the children, who were mighty thrilled to receive. We now had to leave, as our purpose was fulfilled. After saying good bye to the little bright ones, we were about to get into our cab, when Kanta Ji's brother (also working for ekal) took us to his home, for evening tea and snacks. We met their family and this was the most touching, immensely hospitable gesture we experienced. Sheetal Ji spoke to the family and told us that the hospitality that they greet us with, follows the – Atithi Devo Bhava tradition so profoundly.

We had to tell Sheetal Ji that it was time to leave. Finally at 5pm, we waved our final good bye to all at Chaumuha and left for Delhi to get back to the hustle bustle of a metro, leaving the fragrance of the yellow green mustard fields, clean crisp air and an honest humane touch and feel. Surely Ekal's school visit stood high and mighty in our minds and heart to add a meaningful drive and determination to our own busy lives. Sheetal ji's excitement and energy multiplied, as she was all set for her Ekal school visit to Punjab, the very next day. She was delighted with the experience of Ekal school, our passionate karyakartas and most important our Ekal children whose bright sunshine smiles and warmth touched her the most.

Archana Mathur

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