

ARTICLES OF 1998

Letter from Kausar Khaja

Dear Friends,

The board of Developments in Literacy (DIL) has initiated this newsletter in line with its policy to keep its members and friends fully informed of the project. We believe in developing a long term relationship with you based on conviction and trust. In this, our first, newsletter we would like to reiterate our philosophy and our goals and to present a short synopsis of our activities and achievements to date.



An English class in progress in Madarsa-Dil

In context of Pakistan's 50th birth anniversary, we felt mobilized to do something positive to mitigate the yawning gap of illiteracy in Pakistan. In December of 1996 DIL was created as an affiliate of Society of International Help (SIH). By February of 1997 a board was formulated and your donations sought.

In the short period of six months 40 non-formal schools have been established in the Mianwali district. This project, which currently involves 1073 registered students, has been implemented in collaboration with Malik Maula Baksh Trust (MMBMT), a Pakistan based non-government, non -profit organization. MMBMT has shared in our objective of community participation by hiring local teachers and obtaining school space from within the community. Teachers receive periodic training under our project to ensure quality and effectiveness of curriculum. This first project has been geared specifically towards provision of primary schooling for girls, although boys are not turned down. Having successfully overcome entrenched negative social attitudes towards female literacy this project stands tall and full of hope for the future.

In addition, our contract with MMBMT is based on a participatory methodology through the formation of community based organizations in every village where our schools exist. This system entails the utilization of available local human and organizational resources. Thus going beyond mere service delivery, we hope to provide tools and proper training to those involved in the school projects so that they can function more effectively and eventually become self sustaining. Keeping in mind the imperative need for credible monitoring of the project and complete financial transparency of all matters involved, a team of monitors headed by Professor Tahir Andrabi of Pomona College of Claremont, California is doing excellent work. Our continuation with the project is strictly contingent on reports provided by the team following their quarterly visits to the project site.



A five year old student reading at Dil's Sabeen Sarwar school

The DIL board has full emotional commitment for the betterment of the underprivileged children of Pakistan, but we are acutely aware of the pitfalls of operating long distance. The board is critic and supporter rolled into one and we demand a policy of total openness in every area of activity. We believe this will enable us to apprehend and correct laxity at various levels. For example, there was a surplus of funds sent by us, caused by the devaluation of the Rupee which will be utilized, under authorization of the board of DIL, to pay for further training of teachers.

We are currently soliciting funds for the second project, which we plan to establish in the interior of Sind, and have initiated negotiations with NGO's in the area. As previously, we are counting on your support to successfully launch this project. Please send in your donations as soon as possible.

We look forward to your continued support and involvement which alone will ensure the success of all current and future projects. We thank you all most sincerely for your generosity and concern.

Yours Sincerely,
Kausar Khaja

MERE DIL, MERE MUSAFIR

Professor Tahir Andrabi's report on the DIL Project -
Mianwali District - June 1997

We went through the length of the historic Pothwar plateau as we journeyed from Islamabad to Mianwali. The jagged mountain range of the Chakrala valley arises on the horizon after three hours or so of driving, signifying the end of the plateau and the beginning of Mianwali district. The Jutting mountains are quite a sight, as one sees the dusty shrinking shoreline of Nammal Lake to one side and the mountains of Soan Sakesar further in the distance. Going over this mountain range, one enters the Thal desert, parts of which are irrigated by the massive canal system.



Professor Tahir inaugurating Madarsa-e-Dil, 2/3 Chak no.22 DB

This was my third trip to Mianwali district and I maintained my record of taking a leisurely ride on the creaky homemade boat on the Indus River under the stars. I endeared myself to the local teacher when they asked me what I would like to be if I was to come to life in a non-human form. I replied without hesitation, "the mighty Indus." Given its enormous geographical variation, this one district provides us a glimpse of the rural society of Pakistan in a nutshell.



Many images are encased in my mind from the days of these hot summer afternoons in June, before the monsoons hit the dusty plains: The little boys jumping in the canals and posing for our pictures; a camel cart, a horse cart, a bullock cart, a Honda motorcycle, two bicycles, three pedestrians, a few goats and our van in a mini traffic jam on an otherwise completely isolated road; the beautiful, musical names of the towns--Musa Khel, Piplan and Waan Bhachran--our project office; the hospitality in smaller hamlets such as Tibbi; then there were the Chaks, areas of irrigated settled lands with no names but just numbers assigned by some bureaucrat



The Malik Maula Bakhsh Memorial Trust (MMBMT) van that brought us from Islamabad, was a Toyota Hiace that had certainly seen better days. Colonel Sahib (chairman MMBMT) was always in the front seat. Our research/monitoring team consisting of: Mehnaz Akber, my associate in the DIL monitoring, Leena Ved my student and recent graduate, magna cum laud from Pomona College, California and Haaris Gazdar, from London School of Economics would sit in the back, usually chatting away with the other MMBMT staff members who were with us.

Colonel Sahib is an impressive figure, with a majestic white beard and an outwardly gruff manner. He is out there working in the fields when most men his age are living a comfortable retirement life. He used to get exasperated with us young folk because we were having so much fun and were clearly in the mood to ask all sorts of irreverent questions to all in authority. But he tolerated us as an older bazurg might. He has tremendous energy and an obvious commitment to his projects. Colonel Sahib has a district office in Mianwali town that houses a female master teacher trainer, a district coordinator and a woman responsible for developing income generation projects for the Villagers.



Dil Adams Karimjee school at Chandiwala VILLAGE

The DIL project of forty schools has a coordinator, Ghafoor and a brother sister team of supervisor/organizer-an MMBMT innovation-who visit the schools and are the principle monitors. There is usually a group of village activists, both male and female associated with every school. One of the challenges of our project is to formalize these activities into functioning village education committees. The schools are usually one room--one teacher schools with thirty or so girls. Boys are not turned back if they want to attend. The curriculum is approved by the government of Pakistan and is supplemented by MMBMT's own civic and national spirit projects.

I visited the project site twice. I attended two different teacher-training exercises where I met all the teachers and visited/ inaugurated seven schools. The entire research team also attended one of these training sessions and visited four of the schools. We have computerized the list of all the students in the project-more than a thousand-and have

information on their parents' income, occupation, their education, number of siblings. We also have a record of the teachers' credentials and their experience. The idea behind this data collection is to do statistical tests that will allow us to follow the student's progress and see how the home environment affects performance relative to the school environment.

I joined the DIL project because of my strong belief that the future of Pakistan lies in the transformation of the Pakistani village. The DIL- MMBMT collaboration shows vividly that there is a large number of people in the villages of Pakistan who when identified and provided with outside resources form the basis of a functioning project that successfully delivers education and contributes to the uplift of all. The villages of Pakistan are not a fragmented mass of people who are lying paralyzed in abject poverty. While there is an extreme dearth of public services such as clean water, sanitation, health and education services, the public is defiantly struggling to live an ordinary, decent life. I found the people in every village to have high aspirations for their children including girls. The DIL teachers were very bold, forthright and full of questions for our women researchers. They were confident that they could manage the schools. They were well prepared in the formalized speeches that they gave before our group.



The parents we met said point-blank, that our girls should have the same opportunities as your women have. Education for them was the only means of upward mobility--of joining the ranks of the civilized, access to which is denied to them by an uncaring class-conscious society. For the record, all of our conversations with the villagers were taped and transcribed into English. Anybody who thinks of these people as shy should note that our tapes would run out but their comments would not stop.

I found Ghafoor, the DIL project coordinator, a seemingly ordinary man of modest means to be an extraordinary operator. He was remarkably articulate about his operational style. He had a simple rule for connecting with the community. "In each village, we have to make a friend." His experience told him that every school needs a champion within the community. I learnt a lot through the free floating gup shup we had with all the project staff on wagon rides between the villages. We were very curious how villagers would trust their daughters to a school and appoint one of their women as a teacher. Ghafoor's simple but profound answer was that one has to enter the village with a meethi nazar. He was of the view that sharafat and strength of character were the key to a successful operation. He said that he once spent three hours arguing with a villager convincing him about the value of education in Islam. He pointed out that in every village, there were two or three key people that were considered trustworthy. Once they were convinced, the villagers followed their lead. The DIL project is a success because so many people helped to



Munawar School

establish the schools. One example was a local hakeem, Salim Sahib, who helped establish three of the schools.

The villagers were very frank in their expectations from the schools and had as many questions of us as we had of them. I asked some villagers why they were spending so much time answering my questions. They replied that I would act as advertisement for their village and resources might come into that village as well. In every village there are people who really have a plan. They have crafted and deliberated over these plans, for themselves, their families and many times for the entire village. They, not us, are the true heroes of this story.

I recall clearly our last moments in Mianwali as we were contemplating going back to Islamabad after inaugurating our last school. We were an odd group standing in the courtyard of the school--residents from California, Islamabad, London, Mianwali, amidst the villagers from this Chak with no name, only a number. I remember the look in the eyes of the villagers as we talked about their futures. I knew then that these people would not be stopped. I was witnessing merely the opening act.