

Update from Aghor Foundation

Bal Ashram, Varanasi, India

February 2014

Rebuilding the Ashram

At the time of the last newsletter we had just begun the task of minor repairs of the Bal Ashram after the summer's floods. There was a lot to do and we have been working hard these last four months to get the Ashram Back on its feet.



Since the flood we've paved the path to the temple and the distribution center and repolished much of the ground floor marble.



With the help of some of the older boys - our in house carpentry team - we also replaced many of the first floor doors.



More than just repairing damage from the flood, our goal has been to come back stronger than ever. With that in mind we made sure to take precautions against future flooding. We lowered the Ashram green to promote better draining and built retaining wall in front of the hospital to protect it in any future floods.



Recently new grass and flowers were planted in Ashram's garden. The roofing of Darshan hut was fully redone.

Amrit Sagar too faced difficulties during the floods.



But now it's coming into full bloom. The golden yellow mustard flowers are nearly shoulder high. Broccoli and cauliflower are beginning to sprout amongst whirls of broad leaves. Round heads of cabbage are cradled in leafy mangers. Under the ground potatoes and onions become plumper by the day. Looking at it now, one can hardly imagine that just five months ago the whole park was underwater.



Events at the Ashram

Deepawali: we took all the boys on an evening boat ride. On this day residents of Banaras decorate their city with thousands of lights and from the boat we could see the whole river front lit up for the occasion.



New Princeton Intern: In October Zach Feig arrived. He will be with us until mid-April, and our fifth Princeton intern. He has been working with Ramesh in the distribution center where, among other things, he has created new labels for all our products. In addition, he tutors some of the boys in English.



Magic! In November, Magis, a French organization which sends aspiring magicians all over the world, organized a magic show at the Bal Ashram. The two magicians were consummate show men and the children loved the show!



After their performance they shared the secret to making a small ball seem to disappear and reappear. Then they gave all the boys a ball to practice with!



Visit of Baba Priyadarshi Ram ji.



Children's Day: the boys and girls of the Anjali School opened their own snack store where they sold everything from pakora and peanuts to biscuits and lemonade.



Afterwards the children competed in long jump, high jump, and several relay races.



Visit to Sudhanshu's village. We received a warm welcome and got to help prepare a delicious meal.

On our way back from the village stopped in at an SOS children's village near Varanasi. SOS is global organization that, like us, works to support orphaned and abandoned children and we have always admired their work.



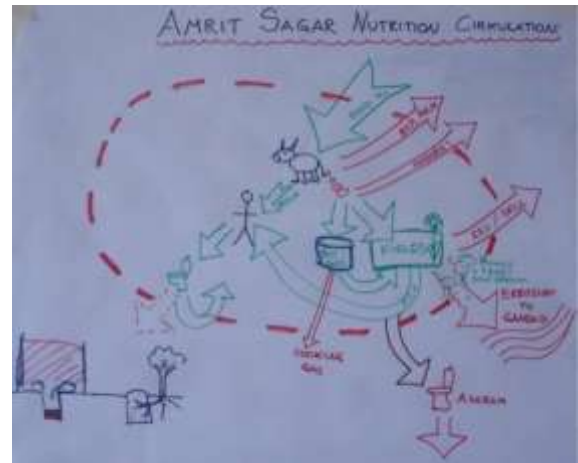
Later we had the opportunity to repay their hospitality when a group of 75 boys and girls from the SOS village joined us at the ashram for lunch and eco-park visit.



Harmonium and tabla concert at Bal Ashram



Permaculture In January we had the pleasure of hosting Christian Odberger and Margaretha Stuguland who teach an Urban Agriculture summer program at the Stockholm University. They told us about their research into Permaculture - the development of a self sustaining perennial based farm. Based on their work they helped us map the sustainability of our own eco-park.



On the last day of their lecture we were joined by three Professors from the Banaras Hindu University along with some of their graduate and undergraduate students.





Republic Day

We celebrated Republic Day in Anjali School with raising of flag and singing of India national anthem.

Afterwards children showed singing and dance performances.



Kids are playing on a ship that stopped at Ashram's ghat for fresh water.

Bal Ashram Boys: Main focus of Bal Ashram is raising of 19 boys. We are happy to introduce here one of the boys.



Darshan, now 12 years old, arrived at the Ashram two years ago. He is studying at fourth grade in Anjali school. Darshan enjoys learning and excels in studies, English being his favorite subject. In the future Darshan wants to become an English teacher.

The boy readily helps in Ashram's kitchen and with clean-up.

In his free time, Darshan likes to play with his school friends and Ashram's dogs.

Darshan's real passion is music and dance. He shows his talents at school performances.



Sponsor a child! Be a part of Bal Ashram's family!

On the Other Side of the River

While the ecology of Sweden is different from that of India, we decided we would try to implement some their ideas into our own eco-park. We will have to wait for the harvest to see the full value of some of their tips, however, we did notice some immediate results. For example after mulching in the fashion they recommended we saw a substantial increase in the water retention of our soil.



Another we now conserve resources at the eco-par is with our new solar pump. Since its installation, we have been able to irrigate our fields in a much more sustainable manner.



In other Amrit Sagar news, our composting project is going strong. In fact we may actually produce more organic fertilizer than we will be able to use this year.



In the Distribution Center

At less than a year old the Amrit Sagar distribution center is one of the newer projects here at the ashram. The creation of a formal store was a vital step in raising awareness for our efforts across the river. The distribution center is a sort of outreach program for our eco-park. It provides a forum not just to sell our produce, but actually demonstrate the effectiveness of our agricultural methods. We therefore see the store as the key to promoting our vision of sustainable agriculture in Varanasi and we are constantly working to improve our services. In the last four months, in addition to making post flood repairs, we've re-arranged, restocked, added more products, put in a new counter, and even redone the floor.



WOW



We've also created new labels for all our products. The labels all feature original artwork by the children of the Anjali school and the Bal Ashram.



We've started home delivery.



After renovations to the shop and changes in packaging, we think the store is ready to take the next step. Our next major goal is to start getting our products outside the ashram, by partnering with local businesses. Our hope is that the increased prevalence and visibility of our products will help spur a long awaited push for sustainability in Varanasi!

The Hospital



Dr. Ivor Wolf has been at the ashram this winter with a determined mind to complete his project.

The Hospital building is nearing completion. With the recent installation of the stained glass windows, all that remains is to paint the inside. After the construction, next stage is getting dedicated staff and equipment to make the dream

of Vision Varanasi come true. We are truly grateful for Dr. Wolf for his effort and dedication to manifest this vision.

It is all possible because of the love and support of friends and well-wishers around the country and world.

- Learn more about Bal Ashram and Aghor Foundation at <http://www.sonomaashram.org/ghor-foundation-about.php>
- Give a financial gift to support Bal Ashram and Aghor Foundation at <http://www.sonomaashram.org/how-you-can-help-financial-contributions.php>

Bal Ashram and Aghor Foundation were founded in 2000 by [Baba Harihar Ramji](#), a disciple of [Aghoreshwar Bhagwan Ramji](#). The Foundation is registered in India as Aghor Guru Seva Peeth, an 80(g) non-profit organization, and is managed by an actively engaged and socially responsible Board of Trustees.

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