

Sonoma Ashram Foundation

A report from Bal Ashram, Varanasi



Dear friends,

After the absence of this fall, Baba Harihar Ramji, founder of Bal Ashram, came back and stayed for three weeks. His words' echo still reverberates in the Ashram. During his visit, he openly referred to the difficulties that in his opinion here are more arduous to overcome. We all are striving in order to put in practice his advices. Thanks to him, many roles have been blended and new spaces have been created for an open and clear communication. He challenged us constantly inviting us to unite social work with work on ourselves.



Few days after his departure we saw unexpectedly scrapers and workmen in front of the Ashram, on the Ganga side. The government is working in order to build an underground net that will link several areas of the city to a water purifier, so that the sewers drains won't flow directly into the river. It's a great idea (if it will be seriously completed) but we saw our walls, terracing and part of the staircase being destroyed in a moment. It was a necessary dismantling for the development of the work, but we were astonished seeing the work of so many years devastated in few hours! What is build is destined to be destroyed: an effective lesson on impermanence!



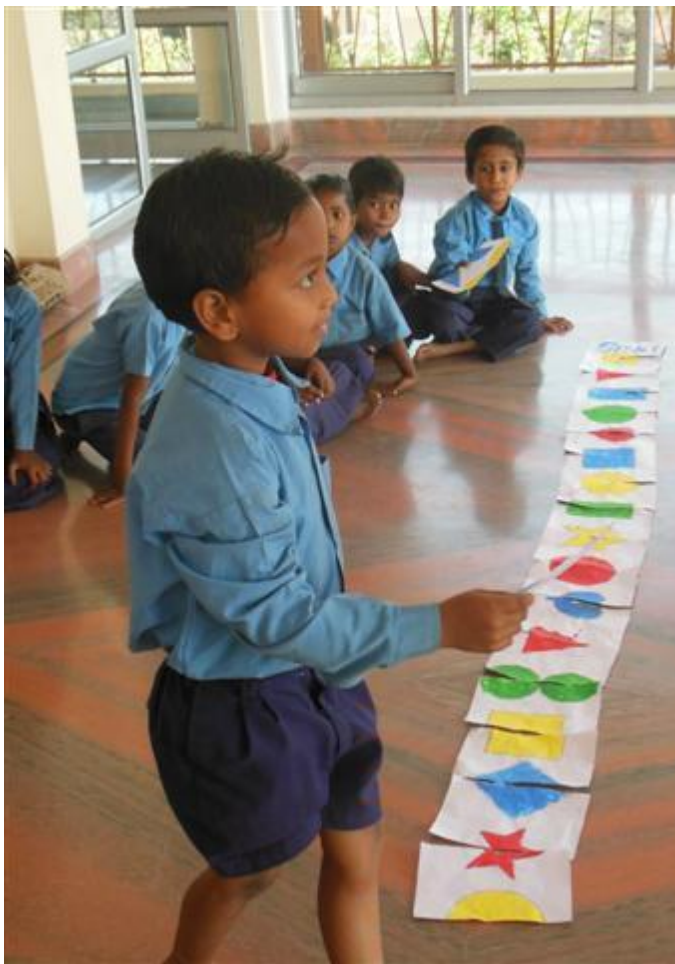
We

immediately regained thanks to the laughter of the group “Performance without borders”, European young artists touring in the schools of India to offer performances for children.

It's not easy to see Annapurna, our most serious teacher, smiling but when an impertinent clown sits next to you it's impossible to resist.



Students have been ‘seized’ by the one-hour show: stunts, plays, recitations, art of miming and dances. And in the final part, also the students took part.



At the Ashram we had also Cristina, a kindergarten teacher, a very precious presence, who spent some personal time with baby Indra, and offered a little educational itinerary to the children.

Let's build a path made of stars, squares, triangles, circles, and most of all, hearts!



It was a beautiful experience

for the children, and a professional and personal enrichment for the teachers. Now Cristina shares her talents with "Project Alice" 's school, in Sarnath.



Celebrating Holi, the festival of colours marking the new Indian Year.

Again entertainment in the annual celebration of Holi, the colors' feast... Also this year, a real battle of colored waters during the whole morning ended with a creative match similar to rugby. In place of the ball, we used the old clothes of the past years (we store them for this purpose).

Ottavia, who studies Hindi in Torino, during her first Holi with the children...



For the last day at school, students of the 5th class of the Anjali school were sad and cried a little bit.. This year we moved up the examinations so that they will be able to enroll in a different school. The two best students (a little girl and a little boy) will be followed and supported economically by us, so they will be able to continue their studies. The first cycle of studies has ended. We were astonished noticing the sense of union of the class. The 4th class organized a farewell party, and everyone of them shared his experience of his five years at the Ashram. They will find a very different environment in the new school. Anyway, we trust some of the seeds we sowed will blossom. In the end, nevertheless what we technically learnt at school, we remember how we have been loved and respected!



Three children from our Ashram ended the 5th class: Amit, Soham and Suraj are “leaving the fold”! Thanks to the last months contacts with the Varanasi South Rotary Club, we met Mr. Nalin Gulati, whose father founded one of the most prestigious school of the city: the “Little Flower school”.

Today Mr. Gulati, who is the director, generously proposed to admit in class 6th not only the students coming out from Anjali School, but also to move all the boys of the Ashram that now are studying in different schools.

This is the beautiful building where the boys of the Ashram will study (maybe the only school with such a beautiful garden in the whole city!). Mr. Gulati also granted an enormous discount in order to help the children/boys of Bal Ashram. It's not easy to find at all such sensitive persons ready to concretely help in the local community.



This is the group of the new students of the “New Flower School”: from left, Santosh and Sumit (9th class), Deepak and Samyak (8th class), Shiva (11th class) and Suraj, Amit and Soham (6th class), all very happy for meeting the new friends and teachers of the new school.



At the end of this month, we will be in Italy again: another Indian year has almost ended!

In the meanwhile, we greet you with this picture (a little bit out of focus, but beautiful for us) of

baby Indra sleeping on the cool floor... with our little dog Ganga!

See you soon,

From Bal Ashram,

Camilla e Lorenzo