



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

Kasturba Balika Vidyalaya (Kasturba Girls School)

Faiths/Traditions Represented: Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jain

Location of CC: Ishwar Nagar, Okhala. Delhi-110065

Key Areas of Focus: Impart quality education to the Harijan girls.

Summary:

Kasturba Balika Vidyalaya (Kasturba Girls School) is located in Okhala, Delhi, India. The CC primarily works with Harijan girls, a lower caste in India. The school offers a variety of programs and classes in Humanities and Science taught by staff from different faith backgrounds which include: Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Jain faith traditions. This educational setting places an importance in interfaith prayers, and collective dining, and with these practices offer an open space for the girls to be equal and responsible to each other and humanity at large.

1. *What is the current religious/cultural/social context in the area where the CC is working?*

This school was established in 1944 with the inspiration of Kasturba Gandhi the wife of the Mahatma Gandhi. It was one of the pioneer schools for the girls education during pre-independence India where girls from all sections of society were imparted education with Indian values as propounded by the Mahatma Gandhi. It is a residential school for 6th to 12th standard. The hostel has capacity to accommodate 200 girls exclusively for the lower caste Harijan girls. This school offers humanities and Science stream to 630 students of Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Jain religious community. Similarly the school has 27 teaching and other non-teaching staff consisting of Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Jain faith tradition working together for 'promoting non-violence and communal harmony' through Gandhian values. In doing so the CC holds daily interfaith prayers and collective dining.

2. *Why is interfaith/intercultural bridge building needed in the area where the CC works?*

Education is the major force that brings social change. Social condition of this section of society, to whom Mahatma Gandhi called Harijan has been pathetic because the traditional brahmanical social structure disallowed education and other social privileges rather they were pressed into menial jobs.

To uplift their social condition and also bring them into main stream social development along with other groups is an attempt to create a harmonious social co-existence. This



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educational institution is an ideal place which offers space for all to be equal and responsible for humanity at large.

3. Please briefly describe the main activities or programs the CC is carrying out?

The main activity is to provide quality education and boarding facilities to the Harijan girls. Along with formal education we use Gandhian and Sarvodaya ideology that goes hand in hand with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles of URI. Daily interfaith prayer, celebration of International Day of Peace and Interfaith Harmony Week are the activities this CC observes.

4. Between which specific religions or cultures are bridges being built?

Since this CC as a school is functionally affiliated to the directorate of education in the government of Delhi, therefore a conscious attempt is not needed to campaign for communal harmony as such, but interfaith cooperation is always advocated and appreciated at the work place. Hindu-Muslim cultural bridge-building remains an issue of concern to everyone.

5. Please explain the method or strategy that the CC uses to bring together people of different cultures and faiths that would otherwise not interact or cooperate with each other.

This CC being an educational institution does not promote religious identification. The student, teachers and staff work and pray together but most of the time they hardly share food. Now they not only sing interfaith prayers together but also celebrate Eid, Diwali, Guruparva and share food together. The CC celebrates festivals and organizes cultural activities that brings everyone at a common platform to enjoy together. The Kasturba CC believes that prayer strengthens their inner power and boosts mutual trust and cooperation among their colleagues.

6. Given the current context you described, what does the CC hope to achieve (goals)?

The Kasturba CC believes students after passing out of the school will carry forward the moto of interfaith and social harmony and fulfill the responsibilities we expect from every conscious citizen of this mother earth, says Ms. Rekha, the warden of the school.

7. How do you see this CCs work improving cooperation among people of different traditions?

This CC is ideologically related to the Gandhian values that inculcates a sense of inclusive global view among the young minds. It also infuses how an individual need to know and remain deep-rooted with their own tradition. Therefore, with growing awareness and education these young people show remarkable presence of interfaith values in society wherever they go and work. Moreover, these girls come from different states with different social values and here live together as family. The warden herself is the product of this very school and committed for interfaith activities.



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8. How is the work of your CC helping to prevent religiously inspired violence or transforming conflict?

This CC is not located in area where communal violence happens often. In this way it is safer and well-regulated with daily interfaith prayers and activities.

9. What are some observations or signs you see that relations are improving between people of different faiths/cultures in the area where the CC works?

Kasturba CC is known for interfaith prayers. Their participation in national and state interfaith held at Rajghat, Gandhi Smriti is known to others. Interfaith prayer composed by Vinoba ji , 'Om tat sat....' and Narsing Mehta's ' raghupati raghava.....' are the most popular prayers everyone loves to listen to. These prayers instantly connect the public. The school does not begin without morning interfaith prayer and similarly the hostel does not go for meals without prayer. Thus, CC is creating cultures of peace and promoting daily interfaith prayer and cooperation.

10. Do you have a specific short story you can share about your work, that might inspire other CCs or teach us a lesson about interfaith?

Warden Ms. Rekha narrates; it is a usual practice for the girls to go to a nearby interfaith temple (this temple displays images of all religious masters) before going for any examinations. Only after having red mark (tilak) on their forehead do they feel assured now they are ready. For them it is kind of festive occasion. Once, a girl due to high fever could not join her friends for the temple visit. She was upset. Those girls who went to temple collectively prayed for her and also brought her "Prasad" the blessed sweet from the temple, to her. She was glad but not so happy. Next morning when she was leaving for exam the warden saw her in tears. On asking she told that she will definitely flunk as she was unable to secure blessings. She was reminded that all her friends prayed for her better performance and advised to do well. She wrote well and passed with good marks then reported warden she not only secured good marks but also secured many new friends.

11. How is your CC's work helping to achieve the mission of URI?

This cooperation circle offers wonderful opportunities for all the three components - the students, teachers and the non-teaching staff "listen and speak with respect to deepen mutual understanding and trust". The CC feature of collective interfaith prayer acts as a cementing factor and brings every community closer and generates mutual trust and cooperation.