

Radhasoami's to the rescue

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One of the completed school buildings that the Radhasoami helped build

No one can forget the tragedy that devastated thousands in the Bhuj earthquake of January 26 this year. Almost 16,000 were killed and 50,000 trapped. The nation was shaken up, Republic Day celebrations were cancelled and the whole country rose as one to help Gujarat cope with the grief. Core groups were set up to monitor and coordinate relief operations. It was a sorry sight at hospitals. Communications had become a problem. Not only did the victims need monetary support but moral support as well.

Several NGOs offered help. One such was the Radhasoami Satsang, Beas (RSSB). The RSSB approached former chief minister Keshubhai Patel to build new villages. But the locals were reluctant as they didn't want to be dislocated from their original

homes. The RSSB then proposed to build schools which the chief minister accepted. Under the leadership of the present Master, Gurinder Singh Dhillon, RSSB, this huge project was undertaken.

The Master put forward three conditions:

* RSSB will work in an area where no other organisation is willing to take up rehabilitation work.

* No compensation would be accepted. (All other NGOs were given 50 per cent of the total cost)

* No publicity.

Based on this the RSSB took up the exercise of building 91 schools in Taluka Santhalpur, Dist Pattan. The education department offered the use of the Block Research Centre at Virahi, (a training centre for school teachers of Gujarat), to set up base camps. The project work began on May 1.

The planning of schools was made by RSSB engineers, submitted and approved by the department of Roads and Buildings. A precast factory was put up at Chandkheda, at the premises of RSSB at Ahmedabad.

Here ferro cement curved sheets for roofing, precast columns, gutters, interlock tiles for flooring, cement poles for fencing, were produced and transported to Santhalpur.

Seven hundred sewadars worked daily for 16 hours to meet deadlines at Chandkheda. All MS doors and windows were fabricated at their headquarters in Punjab and sent to Santhalpur.

Each school has a minimum of three classrooms, 6,000 metres (one and a half acre) of land, so that a playground can also be accommodated. Amenities like separate toilets for boys and girls, sintex tanks for drinking water etc, complete with all electrical fittings and fans have been provided. The size of each classroom is 15 feet x 24 feet.



At the Virahi camp



Members of the Radhasoami Satsang, Beas hard at work building a school in the devastated areas of Bhuj in Gujarat

The structures constructed are earthquake resistant, with ferro cement curve roofing and interlock tiles. The schools have been internally and externally painted with cement paint. Except for the land, everything else was taken care of by RSSB.

The climatic and living conditions in Santhalpur, like the scorching heat drove most NGOs away. At RSSB, no paid labour was employed. Right from the architects, engineers, doctors, helpers, plumbers, masons, truck drivers, all were sewadars. Project work at one time was on, simultaneously in 35 villages.

Every morning at 7 am the sewadars were taken to different sites and returned only by 11 pm. Round the clock langar arrangements (free meals, snacks, tea, milk etc) were made for the sewadars. All the sewadars from different walks of life

are treated alike. The sewadars say it was great fun and an experience of a lifetime to be involved in such a project.

Most of them are thankful to their Master for giving them this opportunity to be of assistance to their fellowbeings.

Seva makes you humble and brings about humility. Two thousand sewadars worked on this project at Santhalpur. The project which was scheduled to be completed by March 2002, was completed by October 31, 2001 with the Grace of Master.

Instead of 91, as originally planned, 73 schools were built, as some of the neighbouring schools were clubbed together because of the short distance between the villages. Sewadars of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan participated in this sewa.

About Radhasoami's

- It was started in the year by Swamiji
- It was succeeded by Guru Jaimal Singhji
- Who was succeeded by Sawan Singhji
- Sawan Singhji was succeeded by Jagat Singhji
- And later on by Huzur Maharaj Charan Singhji
- Present Master Gurinder Singh Dhillon
- The followers have mainly increased during time of Huzur Maharaj Charan Singhji.
- The present Master believes in modernization and most of the latest technologies in Dera Beas, which is as beautiful as the English countryside.