

Working silently for the poor

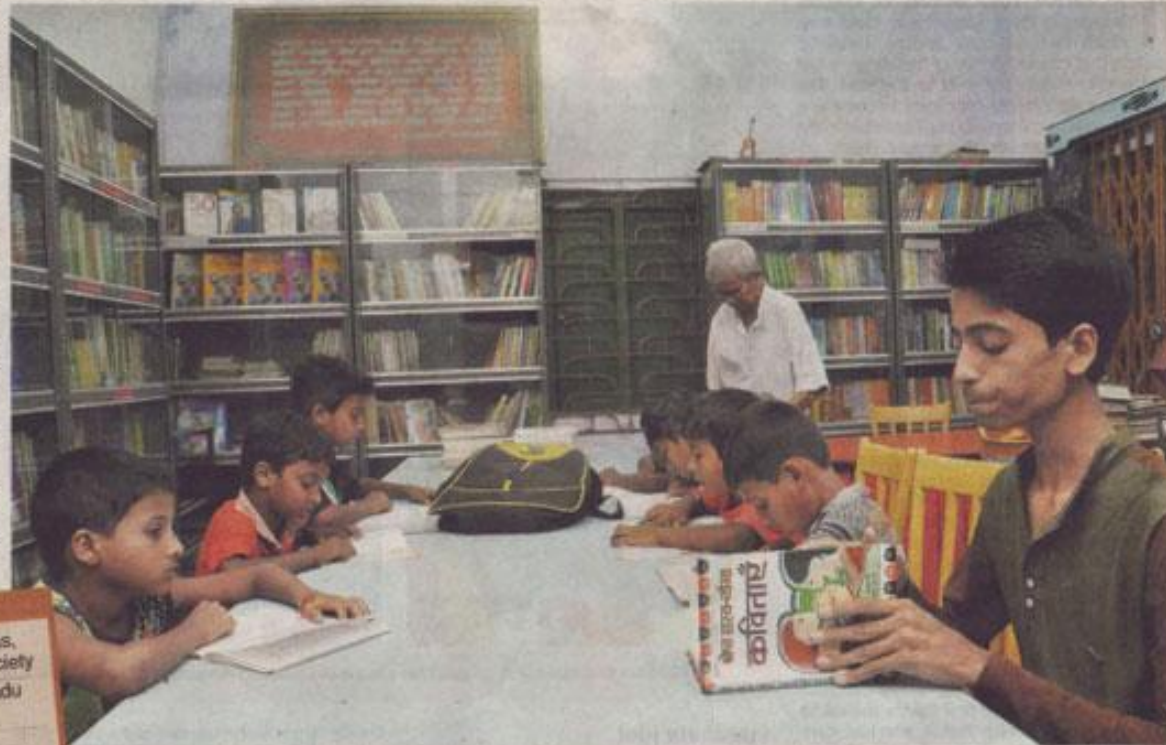
In the narrow by-lanes of Howrah, many people silently work for the underprivileged people of society without seeking to come into the limelight. The members of Biren Roy Ajit Das, Bula Banerjee Book Society have been carrying out their activities for several years. The society's philanthropic activities are focused on the underprivileged but meritorious students that are everywhere in Howrah town.

The slums, lanes and by-lanes of Howrah are ridden with poor families, who do not have the means to educate their children. Offsprings of domestic helps or rickshaw-pullers or labourers are often lost in the crowd once their parents give up and say that they cannot afford to buy books for them to study.

The members of this society had taken up the task of finding such meritorious students and taking over the responsibility of their education. They distribute books free of cost and run all expenses of their education till the students are capable of running his or her expenses on their own. The recommendation, however, must come from the school where the student studies.

"We have roped in many Bengali-medium schools in Howrah where we request the head of the institution to let us know if there is any such child who needs help. We do not accept any individual recommendations," said Subrata Banerjee, a founder member of the group. "When we started the society there were few of us who would look for such meritorious students. Now, we do not need to go anywhere, because we get countless requests for assistance," said Banerjee. Most of the students belong to the minority and Hindi-speaking communities.

The book society also runs a textbook library that is listed among the private



Underprivileged children at the textbook library of Biren Roy, Ajit Das, Bula Banerjee Book Society. Picture by Anup Bhattacharya

FACTFILE

Name: Biren Roy, Ajit Das, Bula Banerjee Book Society

Address: 101, Kali Kundu Lane, Howrah

Activities: Educating underprivileged children free of cost by providing them books, tuition fees etc

Fees: Free for children

Books: Text books and reference books

library is a free reference book library where students can find books that they require for reference. All kinds of guide books, including those required for competitive exams are available at this library. "This is like a community book bank where students can come and use the books as they wish," said Banerjee. The library runs from a room of Durgacharan school. "The school has let us use the room, but we will soon shift from here once our own building comes up nearby," said

Donations are the only source of income for the society. "We are able to carry on with these activities because of the donations that come from many people in the locality," said Banerjee. Gour Kanti Ghosh, a local trader, is one such person who helps the book society. He often donates grocery items like rice grains, lentils, eggs and soya chunks to distribute to students who are undernourished. "We take all-round responsibility of the children who come to us. Teachers from schools often tell us that there are students who do not get proper

they cannot even write an exam properly. We provide the necessary food grains," said Ghosh. At present, 10 such students are being assisted by the book society.

Another important wing is the Milk Club where several underprivileged families in Howrah are supplied powder milk tins. "This wing is five years old and we distribute milk to 52 families. Not just the underprivileged, there are those who were well off at one time, but cannot afford a proper meal today. They request us for milk too," said Banerjee.



Members of Milk Club distribute milk packets to underprivileged families in Howrah and (right) members donate money towards the club funds every month. Pictures by Anup Bhattacharya

Milk of human kindness

It all started on a chilly winter morning five years back in Howrah Maidan. Subrata Banerjee, a social worker, stepped out of a bus near Bangabasi cinema hall and spotted a young mother trying to cover up her infant in the cold. Banerjee wondered if he could give a little milk to the child. He must be hungry in the cold, he thought. He returned to the spot later in the day and gave the mother a small packet of milk for her child. The thought lingered on in Banerjee's mind. He spoke about it to his philanthropist friends. What if such a service could be provided to several other unfortunate infants in Howrah?

The thought was enough to start a Milk Club. The aim was to supply milk to various economically backward households around central

Howrah, where infants or children need to have milk for their nutrition, but their parents cannot afford it. The club started with just one member, three cans of milk and three beneficiaries. However, with time, as people came to know of this work, the demand multiplied.

At present, the number of beneficiaries stands at 55, the number of donors or members of the club has also gone up to 380. To ease the pressure on the members, the Milk Club committee members have formulated a simple rule. "The members are asked to save Rs 2 everyday in a container and at the end of every month, they bring the money to the club that runs from Kali Banerjee Lane in central Howrah. The money is used to buy the milk which is secretly supplied to various households every

morning," said Jarawa Bhattacharya, the secretary of Milk Club.

Confidentiality is strictly maintained at the club. "The purpose is to supply the milk to the concerned person on a daily basis. We do not let anyone know who is getting it. There are many senior citizens who seem to be well off. However, in reality they can hardly make ends meet. Some have children who live elsewhere and do not look after them. Their condition is pitiable and we do not like to embarrass them in any way. Even our members get to see the list of beneficiaries at the annual general meeting," said Bhattacharya. The quantity supplied is usually a minimum of 200ml of milk per day per person.

The 55 beneficiaries also include

those with emergency needs. "Sometimes we get requests from people who have just had a surgery and are recuperating. They cannot afford to buy milk, so we arrange for it. Many pregnant women, who probably work as domestic helps or those women who have just delivered a baby, need to drink milk for their own health. We supply milk to such women for a period of six months. We cannot afford to do more than that," said Bhattacharya.

The main constraint at the Milk Club is funds. Although membership has increased mainly by word of mouth, the number must increase further so it can run successfully. "There are still many people in need, but we cannot oblige because of funds," said Bhattacharya.

Dalia Mukherjee

Road renamed

Although the ongoing beautification of Drainage Canal Road is praiseworthy, it is disheartening for Howrah residents to see that the road has been renamed as Bholanath Chakraborty Sarani.

Earlier, the road from Delepole to Natun Rasta More was named after professor and historian, Asit Bandopadhyay and from Natun Rasta More to Shampur crossing was named after former industry and



food minister, Kanailal Bhattacharya, who belonged to Babu Kedarnath Bhattacharya's family.

Bholanath Chakraborty was a well-known homeopath, but some other road in Howrah could have been named after him. The family members of Kanailal Bhattacharya feel insulted by this decision of the Howrah Municipal Corporation (HMC). I would also like to add that Dr Sital Ghosh was also an eminent doctor from Howrah. Why was the road not named after him, instead of the mayor's father?

Subhasish Bhattacharya,
Rameshtala

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63, G. T. ROAD (South), Mullick Fateh,
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বস্তির পড়ুয়াদের স্বপ্ন দেখাচ্ছে হাওড়ার বুক সোসাইটি



লাইব্রেরিতে পড়ুয়াদের অধিকারের দল।

উম্মুল শাম: হাওড়া, ১৪ই জুলাই - অপিও বনানী, দুর্গেশ সানি, সুখমা ভাটসোয়াল, মনি খাঁ, সোবাজন সেন, পূজা বর্মা, সুব্রত মিত্র এইসকল অসহায় শিশু কয়েকজনের নাম ধরেই মাঠে ছাড়াছিলেন তাইলুভার প্রায়কোটি ইন্সটিটিউট। হেলে মেয়েদের প্রতিভাভাষেই নিজস্ব পছন্দের জগতের দিকনির্দেশনা আছে। এরপর শুরু হলো প্রায়কোটিস। একেবারেই এক কলা গৌশল দেখানো। যা কোনো তাইলুভা প্রতিষ্ঠান পছন্দ করে। এটি আসলে দিনের বায়, অতিথি শাস, বুল পানার্ভি বুক সোসাইটি। এলাকাতেই হিন্দুজনের বিশেষ অধিকার নামে ২০০১ সাল থেকে চলছে এই বুক সোসাইটি।

বুক সোসাইটিতে তাইলুভা কেন্দ্র বেশ বিদ্যমান আছে।

ওরিয়েন্টাল ইন্ডিয়ানসি-এ এখানে অসহায় শিশুদের নিয়ে প্রতি বছর সুযোগ পেয়েছে। জামালো উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক পরীক্ষার আগে প্রতিদিন দু-তিন ঘণ্টা সময় তো এখানেই কাটাতে। লাইব্রেরিতে এসেই বই পড়ানো। প্রয়োজনীয় আশ্রয় কেন্দ্র করেও নিয়ে গেরি বাড়িতে।

অসহায় এখানে যে সমস্ত মেয়ে মেয়ে আসে তারা প্রায়কোটি বুক পরিচালনা থেকে। কারো কারো শিক্ষাগোষ্ঠ, কারো মেলা গোলক, বাস কল্যাণের কেউ বা খণ্ডের কল্যাণের সেকেন্দ্রে কাজ করেন। কারো মা পরিচালিতার কাজ করেন কেউবা সেলাই মেসিনে সাজিয়ে প্রতিদিন সেলাই করে সংসার চালান। এই সমস্ত পরিবারের মেয়ে মেয়েদের হাওড়া প্রতিভা হাওড়া। সেই সময়ের