

VEERNI PROJECT



**NEWSLETTER
JULY - AUGUST 2020**



THE UNPRECEDENTED ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF THE VEERNI GIRLS

Dear Friends,

Greetings from the Veerni Project, Rajasthan- India.

In these challenging times, we are all navigating through uncertainty for ourselves, our loved ones and our community. We hope you and your family are healthy and safe during these uncertain and unprecedented times.

India's Covid-19 count recently crossed 2.153,000 including 43,379 deaths, with no end to the horror in sight. Experts predicted that soon India will have overtaken the US and Brazil to have the most Covid-19 cases in the world. More than 62,000 cases are occurring daily throughout the India. Rajasthan's Corona-virus's tally reached passed the 51,924 with 784 deaths as of today. In Jodhpur, Covid-19 tally is 8,013 with 117 deaths.

NEWS OF THE VEERNI PROJECT

The date of the re-opening of the schools has been extended by the Indian government. According to the new guidelines, September 1st is the new date of the re-opening the schools. The Veerni Project is ready to reopen both the program called the Veerni Institute and Veerni Balika.

An Unprecedented Academic Achievement:

Girls of the Veerni Project (Veerni Institute and Veerni Balika) have performed exceptionally well this year. Results of board classes (10 and 12) have been declared and girls have cleared their exams with good marks. It is the hard work and commitment of Veerni staff, girls' parents, school teachers and, above all the girls that made this possible. We wish Veerni girls hearty congratulations and pray for their bright future. The class-wise result is given below:-

Veerni Institute			The Veerni Balika Program		
Class Details	Number of Girls	Passed	Class Details	Number of Girls	Passed
Class 6th	13	13	Class 6th	08	08
Class 7th	11	11	Class 7th	05	05
Class 8th	16	16	Class 8th	06	06
Class 9th	17	17	Class 9th	01	01
Class 10th	15	15	Total Girls	20	20
Class 11th	11	11			
Class 12th	7	7			
Total Girls	90	90			

Veerni's Initiative for Distance Learning:

Veerni will start online education gradually. To begin with, it will be done in two phases. The first one is offline (we call it School at doorsteps for Veerni girls) and the second phase will be digital education offline.

Phase one: School at Doorsteps: Veerni has developed study material for all the classes (6 to 12) with the help of the school managements and has distributed study material to all our students. We have provided lessons with the help of schools as homework, promoting independent distance learning.

The Veerni staff along with a teacher will visit students home to monitor their studies and solve any problems they may encounter. The completed homework will be collected and new lessons will be distributed to the girls.

Phase second: Digital Education with Offline content: In a second phase, Veerni will distribute Tablets; in these tablets, all the study material will be installed. Class 10 to 12 will be covered in this phase. At a later stage, Veerni will make a portal for Veerni students and these girls will be shifted to the Veerni portal on which they will get regular new study material from the Veerni portal. It is worth mentioning that Veerni girls are well trained in computer technology so it will be easier for them to use this portal for their study, as over the years, Veerni have been teaching computer education to all the girls at the Veerni Institute. Now all the girls are computer trained and they will be easily able to use it for distance learning through the online portal. There are about 60% of girls' parents has smart-phones and they will help us in online education.

Distribution of School Kits:

The Veerni team has distributed school kits to the girls of class 6 to 10. For distribution of the school kits, Veerni girls were invited along with their parents at the Veerni Institute. The school kit contained, books, school bags, notebooks, stationery, and subject wise study material prepared by the school, have been given to the girls. In the next stage, the Veerni staff along with a designated teacher will be visiting the houses of the Veerni students to monitor their progress and distribute the new study materials and books to the girls.



New Admissions at the Veerni Institute:

Due to Covid-19, Veerni has not started the process of the admission of the new girls in the Veerni Institute and Veerni Balika. Since government guidelines are not clear for the Project relating to the re-opening of both the Veerni Institute and Veerni Balika, it was decided that the process of new admissions should not be delayed. Hence, Veerni has started selecting new girls for the next academic year. Application forms have not yet been issued but around 191 parents have approached the Veerni office for the admission of their daughters. As mentioned in an earlier newsletter, this year parents from lower-middle social-economic background have also been approaching Veerni for admission of their girls. This is due to the covid-19 situation affecting these families in numbers. As a result, they cannot afford their daughters' education and are seeking help from Veerni. However, we have requested from a majority of the girls' parents to bring the required documents to the Veerni office.

Due to the Covid-19, the entrance test will not be organized. Admissions will be based on interviews of the parents and the girls to be conducted by the Veerni team. Based on the interviews, the new girls will be selected for this academic year.



The Social implications of COVID:

Child Marriage: Veerni girls who are child brides are in more danger than ever of their parents sending to their in-laws below the legal age of marriage; or of parents organizing early marriages for their daughters if these girls remain out of education. However, on the positive side, Veerni has observed over the last few years that the fathers have become more supportive of their daughters, which wasn't the case earlier. This may prove life saving for the Veerni girls.

However, parents can still be put under extreme community pressure, and may be powerless to stop the practice of child marriage during the COVID times, as girls have to stay home. Hence, it is vital for Veerni to keep the girls engaged in education so that parents can have a say in their communities stating that their daughters are engaged in their education. In this case parents may not be forced into such marriages.

An added problem is the return of young men who had migrated for work to towns to their villages putting extra pressure on the safety of girls.

A global charity said on Friday that four million girls are at risk of child marriage in the next two years because of the Corona virus pandemic, as campaigners warned that the crisis could undo decades of work to end the practice. Deepening poverty caused by the loss of livelihoods is likely to drive many families to marry off their daughters early. "If we don't start thinking about how to prevent it now it will be too late. We can't wait for the health crisis to past first. A U.N. report last month predicted the pandemic could lead to an extra 13 million child marriages over the next decade.

Veerni girls' Motivation:

The Veerni girls want to come back to the Veerni Institute and the Veerni Balika. They are missing their schools. There are so many reasons: they are bored in their villages with nothing to do except for chores. They miss their friends. It's hard for them to make friends in their communities. They live in caste communities as a result social interaction is limited. The Veerni project is caste blind so at Veerni, they interact with all castes. Friendships play a large role in their lives. In fact the girls discover friendship in the project. Most of all, they miss the routine of their day, the structure, going to school, the sports programs, the English classes, the computer classes, the excursions. Importantly, they find no privacy in the villages - having a bath with men and boys around is an ordeal for them - they find menstruation a problem. Also the constant and major concern of being married off.



Distribution of Hygiene and Food Kits:

Veerni team has been continually distributing the Hygiene and Food Kits to the Veerni girls, their families and needy people of the villages. So, far Veerni has distributed 120 Hygiene Kits and 135 Food kits.





Health Outreach:

Veerni team is continuously providing general information about Covid-19 to the Veerni girls and villagers to ensure understanding and awareness of the virus. The Veerni team shifted their priorities from their normal work to making efforts to spread awareness and education on taking precautions against the spread of Covid-19. Veerni has been sharing verified informational videos and explaining preventative measures like proper hand-washing to the What's-App groups, created by the Veerni team for the Veerni girls. Apart from general information, Veerni is educating them about the social stigma associated with Covid-19 patients as people may be tempted to conceal their symptoms. We need to take Indian socio-cultural factors into account to fight Covid-19.

The Veerni team has been distributing information leaflets to the villagers and shared health advice and information.

Finally, and importantly, as it is proving a life saver for continuing the education of the girls in their villages, we would like to acknowledge the grant given to the Veerni Project by the Butterfield Trust (Switzerland) in January 2018 for the establishment of a computer laboratory in the Institute. Computer education of the girls was started in 2015, but it was not until 2018 that a professionally run computer lab could be implemented. As a result the girls have the technical knowledge-how to work though this pandemic with the tablets that will shortly be issued to them. Our grateful thanks to the Butterfield Trust (Switzerland).The Veerni Project is at the forefront of teaching girls through technology and ensuring their education in the coming months.



No girl will be left behind.

Date: August 11th, 2020.
Place: Jodhpur.

Mahendra Sharma and Jacqueline de Chollet