

leading light

# Mission Possible

The Vivekananda Jana Seva Kendra is an educational institution with its sights on community development, says **Gitanjali Prasad**

We set off at the crack of dawn to keep our date under the big clock of Howrah station at 8 a.m. There we meet Vishawanath Singha Roy, the project co-ordinator of the (VJSK) whose contagious enthusiasm for uplifting the people of Midnapore had motivated us to take this long trip. Set in beautifully landscaped grounds, with winter flowers of every description, VJSK is doing yeomen service for the people of the backward district of Midnapore. Dhirendra Nath Bhanja, the secretary and founder of VJSK himself belongs to this area and comes from a poor scheduled caste family. He was educated at the Ramakrishna Mission School by Swami Lokeshwarnanda who is his inspiration. The message that Bhanja imbibed was that he who helps others is actually serving God. Says Singha Roy, "It is remarkable that Bhanja who overcame all odds to graduate and do his Masters degree, turned down good job offers and decided to devote his life to the upliftment of people of his own soil."

He goes on to tell us how Bhanja started with a school for adults and soon progressed to a full-fledged, government-recognised school with a residential facility for children. The children who study here are mostly from Midnapore but there are a few street children from Calcutta and handicapped children too. We arrive while the school is in progress. The school has a strength of

1,500 students with separate hostel facilities for girls and boys. Last year, students had a 100 per cent success rate at the secondary exams.

This educational organisation with a heart, adopts a multi-pronged approach. Poverty, illiteracy and a complete absence of medical care were a few of the problems that they encountered and had to tackle to make a difference to the lives of others. The VJSK is therefore doing everything, from organising awareness camps to providing vocational training to women, promoting social responsibility and building infrastructure.



The VJSK is therefore doing everything, from organising awareness camps to providing vocational training to women, promoting social responsibility and building infrastructure.

They get funds largely from the government and also from 'Goal' in Ireland, from the Japanese Consulate for supply of drinking water and from the British Deputy High Commission for the new school building.

Awareness camps are held on health, hygiene etc. The road building projects are taken up with the help of the community. Low cost housing is made by using materials that are locally available. This activity helps provide employment to local architects. The good work done by the Vivekananda Jana Seva Kendra has benefited thousands of people in Midnapore and more or less changed the outlook of the villagers. Sums up Singha Ray, "I am inspired by the sound and the sight of the little children saying their prayers at assembly. This makes everything worthwhile." ■