

Visit to Nature on 24 Feb 2015

(Amita from Nature NGO
Klaus and Doris from noon.ch)

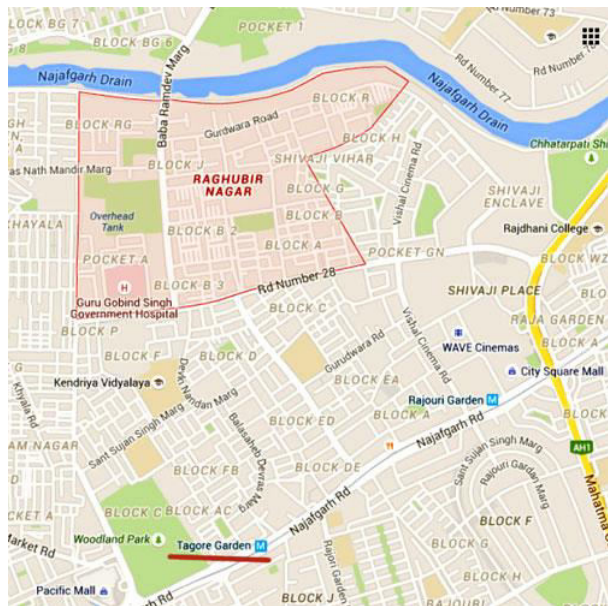
Yet another winter saw our meeting Amita at the metro station Tagore Garden, near pillar 440. On our arrival in India we had exchanged last pieces of information before meeting her: "Welcome back to India, Doris. I will see you on 24 Feb at 10:00 o'clock. Amita, which place shall we come? I will meet you at Tagore Garden metro station at 11 am near pillar no 440. Ok"

Both the mobiles, which are widely used in India and our Indian SIM card have made communicating much easier, although communicating with Amita is generally still a little cumbersome.

Thanks to Rohini Muthuswami from "Asha for Education", we were able to solve our communication gap with Amita perfectly last year.

It was easy to find Amita at the pillar 440 in her bright yellow dress. On our way to the classes we visited this year, she told us about the current situation.

We learned that our promotion in the school year 2014-15 was focused - as planned - on two classes with a total of 70 students. These are in the district Raghur Nagar, which is located about 1 km to the north of the big school of Nature at Tagore Garden. Coordinated with the special needs of the children, our previous promotion applied to both the school at Tagore Garden, where the children of the surrounding slums are taught, as well as individual classes, which are taught right in the slums. Since Amita had received financial support for the teachers of the school at Tagore Garden from the government coffers (SSA) again, our funding in 2014-15 was planned to go to the small school in Raghur Nagar with 70 children for teachers, room, school uniforms and school material. Most of the children living in Raghur Nagar are second-generation migrant-children from Gujarat whose parents found work in Delhi.



In the school year 2014-15 a total of 340 children were enrolled at the school of Nature, and 170 children could be enrolled at the government school. All of the children of the small slum school in Tanki Wali Jhuggee Khayala and Kathputali Colony Pandav Nagar, which we had visited last year, could - as Amita said - be enrolled.

Classroom in Raghur Nagar with the children, Amita (yellow), her sister Manisha (striped) and the teacher (red).

Nature will visit the enrolled children for another year in order to check if they manage to attend classes at their school regularly.

It is not always easy for the children, because the classes in the government schools are too big, and the teachers do not have the time to care for individual children. 25 of the children have returned to Nature for another year. According to Amita, most of the children stay with Nature for 2 to 3 years.

The district Raghur Nagar does no longer consist of the tiny slum huts, we had seen last year, but of small simple brick houses. The dwellers are mostly migrants from Gujarat. Although this district does not look all that bleak, there are still children who do not go to school there.

The stairs to the upper floor were very steep and narrow, so that we felt like an elephant on a chicken ladder. The children were sitting crowded together and waiting for us in the two small rooms whose floors and walls were covered with tiles. There was even a toilet on the floor. Amita told us that she wanted to look for somewhat bigger rooms for the coming year.



We had bought bananas and oranges on the way and had brought them along for the children. The fruit was accepted with pleasure. Much of it was eaten up straight away after we had encouraged the children. But some of them put a piece of fruit into their school bag, and replied to our question that they had siblings at home, with whom they wanted to share.

The children were bright and attentive and enjoyed communicating with us. Not only are the children taught the basic skills in arithmetic, reading and writing, but Amita has taken on a teacher to rehearse songs with the children

once a week and - at our request – they gladly gave us a sample of them. As in all Learning Centres we visited in Delhi this week, our question if the children would like to learn English, was answered with an enthusiastic “Yes”. Amita said, “The children learn some English.”

When we asked about the children’s nutrition status and their health, Amita replied, all children from Nature had had a medical check-up in a hospital, which had been financed by a company that year. The doctors were satisfied with the children’s health - (whatever that means, because most children in India are anaemic with all the resulting consequences). Amita proudly reported that the children at the school at Tagore Garden receive a meal with vegetables every day. Unlike the school at Tagore Garden, the small school in Raghur Nagar has no kitchen and that is why the children only have biscuits. Our suggestion to give these children bananas and oranges regularly was favourably received. A rough estimate showed that with 60 bananas currently costing about 250 INR, we could contribute a banana every other day for about 500 CH a year.

Asked how many siblings they had, the children put their hands up and showed the number with their fingers. Thus, we found out that these families have 4-6 children, which is a lot for India these days. This could explain why the children do not go to school. For a day labourer in a seven-person family, it is difficult to finance school attendance for all the children. According to the present Indian law, children are allowed to go to work from the age of 14. Due to poverty, they often work at an earlier age, help their parents or look after the younger siblings.



We then asked Amita what in her opinion had changed in the situation of the children she cared for. She said that the parents were trying to send their children to school and that the awareness was growing that an education would be helpful for the future life of the family. Unfortunately, the food situation and the hygienic standard have not improved.

In order to find out which children are really socially disadvantaged, the teachers visit the families at their home and the results are later “cross checked” by Amita. She compares the names of the children who have applied for the Nature school to those of the children registered in and attending the neighbouring schools. Amita also maintains contact with the head mistresses.

We finally asked Amita, where she herself saw the strengths of her concept. She thinks that they lie in the quality of the teachers and the lessons. But we discovered many more strong points in her: She realised that there is a connection between the learning ability of the children and their nutrition. She boosts the children’s self-esteem with uniforms and cares for them with all her heart. Amita encourages the children to always try solving a problem themselves before asking for help. She is convinced that this will strengthen their self-confidence. Not to mention the contact she maintains with the parents as well as with the teachers and head mistresses in the vicinity.



Visitors' report by Doris, noon.ch