

Visit to NATURE on 11 Dec 2013
(Amita from NATURE
Klaus and Doris from noon)

Amita is the extremely dedicated **head of the NATURE NGO** who started the Gyan Jyoti project with 15 'out of school children' in 2004. Although communicating with the blind Amita can sometimes be a little cumbersome, her enormous successes make us forget this small trouble as soon as we have established contact with her. Amita "charges ahead" and her huge enthusiasm is inspiration to both the young teachers and students.

From left to right: Amita, Doris, student, Amita's sister Manisha; Award for special achievements



Data of the Gyan Jyoti School as of 2013:

NATURE / Gyan Jyoti teaches

268 children at a public school at Tagore Garden in the afternoon,
77 children in a small room in the slum Tanki Wali Jhuggee Khayala,
103 children in a small room in the slum Kathputali Pandav Nagar.

The aim of the Gyan Jyoti project is to fill a gap for the 'out of school children' and to integrate them into the public school system, if possible.

This aim was achieved:

For 10 children in 2008; for 10 children in 2009; for 43 children in 2010; for 87 children in 2011; for 156 children in 2012, and for 27 children in 2013.

Gyan Jyoti has developed into a school which is partly supported by the state and partly by donors from noon.ch. The rooms at Tagore Garden are now made available in the afternoon by the Higher Secondary School for Girls of the Department of Education. NATURE has rented rooms in the slums for the two small slum schools. Currently, the exams up to the 7th form of the Gyan Jyoti School at Tagore Garden are recognized by the state. The children must change to another school from the 8th form onwards at the latest.

The development programme of the state is called SSA. Only the teachers are paid from this pot. SSA just as FCRA (* 1) are only ever granted short-term and have thus not been offering any security for NATURE NGO so far. Only in November did the granting for the teachers' salaries for September to March arrive. In the previous year, NATURE did not receive any support from the SSA programme at all, since a new education director in Delhi had been appointed, and it was not clear how he would handle it.

So this lack of support from SSA is why in 2013 only 27 Upper Primary children were able to change to the state school. The children of Primary are to make the change in June 2014 instead.

(* 1) FCRA - Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (all organizations that receive donations from abroad must receive this grant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Visit

We met Amita and a boy accompanying her at the metro station Tagore Garden, Pillar No. 435 in the morning, and went from there to the **Slum Tanki Wali Jhuggee Khayala**.

Our driver, a young, yellow turbaned Sikh was quite shocked about the destination and did not want to stop there, because he was worried about his nice car. This slum is in the city centre, and the homes of the dwellers are tiny rooms, all closely packed together. Despite its narrowness, the district has the advantage of being near the desired jobs. The way to get there may be negotiable for motorcycles, but all junctions are just tiny clefts between the houses, really. There were people all around, and to follow quick Amita and her companion through the alley was not an easy feat. We felt no hostility at all on the part of the dwellers. Amita said later that she was well known by them because she often visited the classes.



Arriving at the tiny school room, we met a group of lively, happy children eagerly awaiting us. Between 8 am and 1 pm, three age groups have lessons of two hours each successively in this room. After we had introduced ourselves, we tried to get talking to the children. They have no English, and so a teacher or Amita translated for us into Hindi. They were little children, who were either not yet attending formal schools or were 'dropouts'. NATURE tries to reintegrate the children into the official schools. Obviously, quite a number of pupils "drop out" from

the overcrowded classes of 60 pupils at government schools. Therefore, the 10 teachers of NATURE visit the government schools every month in order to check whether the children are still attending. In case a child "dropped out", they contact the family and the child will be readmitted to NATURE. For the children to advance to higher level schools, they must have made it to the government school by the 8th form at the latest. The teachers have noticed that the children seem to learn more in the two hours in the morning than in six hours at the government school.

We readily believe this, because they easily solved our little math problems with numbers up to a hundred.

The next class we visited was right in the middle of the **Slum Kathputali Colony Pandav Nagar**. In the morning, the teachers who give afternoon lessons at the school at Tagore Garden teach here on the same principle as above.



Unfortunately, it is too expensive to get these children to school at Tagore Garden. The minimum price for one tour and child is 15 rupees, which would mean approx. 750 Rs for one child and 135,000 Rs for 180 children per month (100,000 IRs are currently approx. 1400 Sfr). Amita dreams of a small van, but there are no funds for it at the moment. So she is

having talks with a public school near the slums, in walking distance for the children. Amita's sister Manisha will take care of this branch of the Gyan Jyoti School.

The third school we visited was the Gyan Jyoti School at Tagore Garden. There, too, the children were already waiting for us. It was nice to see almost all of them wearing their uniform with the red sweater, bought thanks to Nicole's commitment last Christmas. Wearing a uniform is a very important sign for children in India, saying: I am not under-privileged. Besides, the winter nights and mornings in Delhi are very cold. A fixed programme had been planned for our visit. After a couple of speeches from the rostrum - by Amita, NATURE NGO and a short one by Doris from noon.ch - a play about Bhagat Singh's - the Indian freedom fighter's - life was performed by pupils from Gyan Jyoti. Then, prizes were awarded to pupils with special achievements, after which Klaus and Doris from noon.ch distributed even more hats and gloves to the children.



Unfortunately, there was no opportunity to interact with individual children. Before our next visit, we will explain to Amita that we would prefer to go into the classes again, and talk with the children. Of course, we are aware of the fact that in India these functions are very important for everyone concerned, and that both the promotion by and the attention of a Swiss NGO are taken very seriously. On stage, a poster of NATURE and the noon-logo were displayed.



Report, January 2014, Doris Eckstein,
noon.ch