

## Visit to the poor fishermen's children at the St. Elizabeth Convent School in Kattiparambu

9 January 2011

Prior to our visit, Sister Rose Paul, "Mother Superior" of the St. Elizabeth Convent, had invited the children and young people supported by us for Sunday afternoon. Almost all of them came, and when we arrived, they were sitting on the benches of a classroom, waiting expectantly. All of the children live in the village of Kattiparambu, which is situated about 5 km south of Fort Cochin on the lagoon between the sea and the backwaters. They attend the school of the St. Elizabeth Convent in Kattiparambu up to the 7th class. From class 8 on, they go to different schools in their neighbouring villages.

In order to brighten up the meeting with the children and young people, the nuns and we had mounted a programme, offering cakes, tea, a little competition, and the subsequent awarding of prizes:



After presenting us, Doris sketched a map of Switzerland - with rivers, lakes, mountains, cities and neighbouring countries - on the blackboard. After that, we distributed a little present we had brought along, namely: drawing material. Every single one of them received a pencil, a rubber, a sharpener and a collection of coloured pencils in a small bag, as well as some drawing paper. The children's task was to draw a map of India along the lines of the model of the Swiss map.

We noticed that most of them had a very good, although not always perfect, idea of India and its federate states. Obviously, they immediately understood what the task was. As an incentive, we had displayed the prizes right in front of them. In every age group, the winner received a calculator, and the second an English-Malayalam (the local mother tongue) pocket dictionary. As regards the prizes, we had previously informed ourselves about what would be considered appropriate and useful.



Already at their age, the girls' behaviour differed very much from that of the boys. While the girls were showing great interest and full attention to what was going on, the boys, sitting on the bench right at the back, were laughing and cracking jokes.



After about 45 minutes, the nuns chose the winners, and the children enjoyed tea and cake.



So we had the chance to talk with some of the children attending the English-Medium School in the neighbouring village of Toppumpadi, about their way to school and the transport costs, school dinners (rice and green gram), as well as about the subjects and their interests. They assured us that they liked going to school, and we were simply amazed to learn about their having favourite subjects like chemistry and mathematics! The awarding of the prizes was universally accepted and, after all, those who had not won could take their little school bags and pencils home. One of the older girls got up on behalf of the group to

express their gratitude for the sponsoring of their education.

We met again in the playground to take the photos of the five age groups according to their classes: - 8, 9, 10, and 11/12 -. The fifth group consisted of 5 young people whose education at college resp. education as technicians we are supporting.



*Photo 8th class*

Here we had the opportunity to get talking with the now smaller groups and we were truly amazed at the way most of them could communicate with us in English.

Sister Rose-Paul grabbed the chance to describe the difficult social situation of some of the fatherless young people to us.

*Photo 10th class*



*Photo 9th class girls*

There were also some mothers who had come along and were waiting outside. One mother was accompanying her **three** girls (this is a disaster for a family here in Kerala), one of whom we are supporting. Even here, and even to the poorest of the poor, the subject of education has become central. This was not always the case. The mothers' only wish and hope is that a useful training will enable their children to lead a better life than they do.



*Photo 11th and 12th class*

This wish is most likely to become true, at least for those young people who are in our programme, because they live in the draw area of the big, upcoming city of Cochin. As an example, two of the girls in class 12 want to start training as accountants after leaving school. Considering the foreseeable need for workers in this field, they will certainly be able to find employment. With this, they will have

achieved a tremendous social advancement. Their main problem will be the challenge to avoid being married off too early and having to stay at home at their husbands' or their mothers' request. However, more and more girls and mothers are finding out in today's India that this way is a dead end.



*Photo boys of class 9*

As for the boys, we are supporting especially those who do not break off their education to make quick money for the family, but are eager to keep learning for one or two years and thereby qualifying for a good job, instead. In this respect, we are more worried about the boys than about the girls. After all, the families' pressure on the boys to contribute to their upkeep by means of fast-earned money in untrained jobs is intense.

*Photo college students*

But here too, the attitudes have been changing relatively quickly, and we have some very positive examples both of boys who, after finishing the 12th class, are now attending a meaningful two-year training at a so-called ITI (Indian Technical Institute) and some others who wish to become accountants or fishery technicians.

We met Sister Rose Paul several times during our stay. She - assisted by Sister Elsy, the head mistress - is responsible for our programme and she makes suggestions about which children should be supported. She knows the village of Kattiparambu and the people living there. She and the nuns of the Convent are well respected persons who are asked for advice or for help in the hours of need.





We agree with Sr. Rose Paul that our aid programme has already succeeded noticeably. One of the reasons for this is that the people living there - often disparagingly called "drunken fishermen" by their environment (and feared as well) - are finally noticing that their attempt to create a better future for their children is taken seriously and supported. This visit has proved yet again that our project in Kattiparambu is very useful, and that we have found competent partners in the nuns of St. Elizabeth Convent. It is a real pleasure to work with them.

Klaus Glashoff

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