

Visit to "Gyan Jyoti", a school for children from the slums in the west of New Delhi, funded by the association NATURE.



On our arrival we were expected by Mrs Amita, manager of the school project Gyan Jyoti, and Mrs Rath who is also an active board member of the nonprofit association NATURE.

In the photo they are showing us how the attendance lists for children and teachers are kept.

Mrs Amita and Mrs Rath tell us why the children do not go to a regular school as required by Indian law. Then they explain the concept of their work at NATURE to us as follows:

The social workers of NATURE talk to the children in the alleys of the slums in the vicinity of the school. They try to convince the parents, most of whom are immigrants from Gujarat and Bihar, to send their children to school.

The children do not attend the regular school because many of them have no birth certificate. Another obstacle is that due to their lack of learning they would have to be put into first class, although they are already 10-12 years old. With the programme of Gyan Jyoti they try to integrate the children into the regular school.

The responsible people at NATURE noticed that the children sitting in the afternoon lessons seemed to be very tired and exhausted. This was because on some days the children had not eaten anything by then. Therefore, NATURE decided to provide the children with one meal a day. Amita explained that because of the lack of funds, at Gyan Jyoti the decision had been made to rather give the children something to eat for free than a school uniform, although the latter is very important in India.

On the day of our visit 135 out of 224 enrolled children were attending school. It was a week before Diwali, the most important Hindu festival, when many immigrants travel to their families in their homelands. Amita told us that at no time all students were at school, because they often had to look after their little brothers and sisters during their parents' working hours.



The children had just arrived at school which usually starts at 1:45 pm. They were all standing in the schoolyard. Every day, lessons begin with gymnastic exercises just like in British schools. At the end of the exercises a prayer is said. This prayer is deliberately kept so general that both Hindu and Moslem children can relate to it.

A teacher introduced us to the children. We had brought along a world map and asked the children if they were able to find India and Delhi on it. Immediately, the older ones crowded around the map and found the locations. The next question was more difficult: where is Europe and where the little country Switzerland? Though the name is written out in the map, it was hard to find, but with some help it was enthusiastically searched for and finally found.



After this, we could visit the children in their classrooms. The learning contents were reading the clock, grammar, painting and clay modelling. A group of children and their music teacher sang a welcoming song for us. All the teachers were very dedicated and active in teaching. The children took great pleasure in demonstrating their skills to us. Though they were in a lively mood they were also disciplined at the same time. Right then, lessons for classes 1 to 6 were in progress. In addition to the employed semi-skilled female teachers, NATURE also has several male and female volunteers and a big support group. This enables the group to take on more children and to rent better schoolrooms.



The last part of our visit led us to the slums where the children of the Gyan Jyoti school live. Our small group was marvelled at in a kindly way by the slum dwellers. The women of NATURE knew their way around the maze of alleys, and we were able to speak to the parents of some of Gyan Jyoti's school children.

This lively group of children accompanied us on our way.

Visitor report
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