

## Visit to “St. Elizabeth’s Convent”, Kattiparambu, March 2015

Visitors: Doris and Klaus; Report: Klaus

For this year's stay in India, we had arranged a meeting with those young people sponsored by us who are either currently completing a college education or will start their education in the coming school year 2015/16. The meeting took place at the St. Elizabeth’s Convent. Besides the 7 students and us, the head of the Convent, Sr. Metty Devassy, was also present.



During the meeting, we were able to learn from the students about the main problems and obstacles they have been confronted with in their studies. It was also an opportunity for the students – studying at various institutions - to exchange views about their experiences.

*March 2015 St. Elizabeth's Convent*

Despite feeling generally quite happy and satisfied with the progress of their studies, we also talked about problems that almost all students face:

- lack of a contact person for subject-specific problems
- difficulties in the transition from school to college
- lack of access to modern information services (internet)
- lack of a quiet workplace for studies

The lack of contact persons in the close family environment is one of the problems encountered by all the young people we sponsor. This situation could be improved, if appropriate persons connected to the Indian partner organisation (in this case to the Convent) were to intensify their supervision of the students. It seems worth-while to consider, if financial support should be budgeted for future projects of this kind, thus, also alleviating the difficulties mentioned in the second point. Despite the disadvantages these students face because of their background, we could still see that all of them had achieved their goal of the school year - some even with very good grades.

And we mentioned another important issue at the meeting. While also in Kerala the average marrying age of girls is increasing slowly, and it is no longer uncommon for young women to get married only after the completion of their training, it often happens that women give up their jobs as soon as they have their first child. If they want to resume their career, they often face considerable difficulties. The "joint family" in which the mother-in-law can look after the child is no longer as common as before. We talked to the girls about this problem and recommended to lengthen the period between the completion of the training and the beginning of the “child phase” as far as possible. The girls listened carefully to our explanations but they did not comment on them. It is not customary in India that young women plan their own future, as all

marriage affairs are still mostly decided first by their own parents, then by the parents-in-law and husband.



Once again we visited the annual school celebration, where students of all forms performed dances and theatre plays. As usual, we really enjoyed the diverse and colourful costumes that are made by the children’s mothers.

*Annual Day Celebration Feb 13th 2015*

We were also impressed by the English language skills of

the students of the forms 1 to 7. Unlike the long speeches of the politicians present, given without exception in the local language Malayalam, we were well able to follow many performances of the children.

Incidentally, we were able to establish contact with some of the local and regional politicians who, like us, had been invited to the event as special guests. We learned that the head of the Convent, Sr. Metty, had called their attention to the unsatisfactory condition of the school toilets. This is a subject we had mentioned to Sr. Metty a few days ago. The Member of Parliament in charge of the district in which St. Elizabeth's Convent is located, spontaneously approved the means for 10 new school toilets from his personal funds! It may well be that our clear commitment to resolving this issue has encouraged his decision. In addition to that, the toilet issue has recently stopped to be taboo and is being widely discussed by the press and the politicians in India.



During our visits to the Convent, we admired the new school bus, purchased with funds from the Convent, as well as private funds or credit guarantees of the Sisters and parents. The school bus enables the school to enrol the children who live along the narrow causeway between the sea and the backwaters. Besides, due to the decreasing birth rate, almost all schools are struggling with a dwindling number of students. Better-off parents have their children taken to school by rickshaw. These children generally go to school in the city or in one of the private schools. Taking public buses is difficult especially for the little children and the girls.



It is only the very poor children who attend the Convent School although the numerous awards won by its students are something to be proud of.

As always, we visited the kindergarten, for which we had set up another extra nutrition programme in the school year 2014/15. The children showed us how much they appreciated the regular supplementary food consisting alternately of bananas, milk and eggs with their rehearsed "banana dance".

*Nutrition programme for the kindergarten*

Neither did we forget to visit the embroidery workshop affiliated to the Convent, where many of these children's mothers make beautiful embroideries with endless patience and generate income by selling them.

*Visit to the Convent's embroidery workshop,  
Kattiparambu 3 Feb 2015*



Visit report from Klaus, noon.ch