

KALIGHAT PRATHOMIK VIDYALAY - A SYNOPSIS

The set up named 'KALIGHAT PRATHOMIK VIDYALAY' which literally translates as KALIGHAT PRIMARY SCHOOL had its humble beginning in JUNE, 1997.

The brief history of the start up is as follows :

During my visits to KALIGHAT for personal reasons in early 1997, I was distressed to see a number of children of school going age playing on the street with marbles almost through out the day. I also realised that these children, as they grow-up would add up to the number of antisocial elements, frequently engaging themselves in cruel street fights cutting each others checks with razors. I recalled that Mother Teresa, with whom I was associated since 1978, during her visits to 'NIRMAL HRIDOY', her KALIGHAT CENTRE, had told me to do something for these street children. I also recalled that SWAMI LOKESWARANANDA of RAMKRISHNA MISSION, whom I had met through a close family-friend late Dr. M.A. WALI had also told me to start Model Schools for Calcutta's street children. I could neither arrange the funds nor a proper place to start such a set-up earlier.

In 1997 however, the following coincidences enabled me to make a beginning :

'DHRITIMAN', son of a friend MRS. KRISHNA BANDOPADHYAY an ex-student of St. Lawrence School of Calcutta, presently settled in USA, told me that he wanted to fund a set-up for educating the under privileged children of this country ; and Father IGNATIUS, of the GREEK CHURCH at KALIGHAT provided a room within the Church premises on request from Fr. WAVREIL of ST. LAWRENCE SCHOOL, whose guidance at every step made the set up a possibility.

Like minded friends came forward to help in organising the set-up. Two lady teachers were appointed, the school hours were decided to be 7 AM to 10 AM for five days a week. It was also decided to provide some nourishment to the children who come to attend the school.

Initial stages were difficult. The teachers had to visit the parents in the slum areas to convince them to allow their children to come to the school. I recall that during one of my visits to the school in the initial period, I found the teachers sitting dejectedly with hardly any children around. On enquiry I was told that the children had gone to the KALIGHAT TEMPLE area to earn money from begging from the large crowd visiting the temple that day being an auspicious day. I felt disgusted and not knowing what to do to stop the children from begging went running to Father Wavreil. On being appraised of the matter and my feelings, Father told me not to disturb the children since their economic gain could not be matched. He further told me that only through proper cultivation of moral values over a period these children would realise that begging is shameful and would stop doing so on their own.

Under Father Wavreil's guidance the basic aim of the set-up is to cultivate education with moral values, so that these children grow up to become responsible members of the society.

Around 40 children of different age groups and class levels are on roll. Since class level demarcation is not possible, the present effort is to guide them in their studies, arrange and fund admission to regular schools, buying books papers for them, some entertainment including taking them on outings to see educational/entertaining movie shows. They are also taken out to participate in sit and draw competitions. A number of children found good at drawing/sketching have been admitted in an art school named 'Nandan' run by a benevolent

ex-Shantiniketan lady. May be these children will grow up as successful commercial artists in life.

The children, quite a few of whom suffer from diseases caused by malnutrition, are sent up for medical check-up done free of charge at his chamber-Calcutta Medical Centre by DR. MILAN CHHETRI. Further diagnostic check-up, medicines and tonics are provided for.

The first annual function of the school was held in December 1998 in the auditorium of St. Lawrence School. The function was well attended by a selective group of like minded ladies and gentlemen besides parents of the students. In addition to performance of songs and dances the children narrated the life and work of great educationists, social reformers and spiritual leaders.

The second annual function was held at the same venue towards end 1999. The theme this time was 'National Integration'. A short narration of this function and about the school was published in a well known Calcutta newspaper, 'Ananda Bazar Patrika' in its 10th January, 2000 edition. A literal translation reads :

Funds amounting to Rs.4,000/- a month provided by an Indian student presently NRI, a couple of rooms provided by the authorities of KALIGHAT CHURCH, some donated books and papers, form the assets of Indrani Ganguly. A long time co-worker of Mother Teresa, this lady had started KALIGHAT PRATHOMIC VIDYALAY with the mentioned assets, a couple of years ago. Children attending morning 7 to 10 are from slums and red light areas. "Earlier, they used to go away for begging quite often, and had to be brought back again and again. Now they don't go", said Indrani. This

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school had its annual function at St. Lawrence School auditorium. Subject - National Intregation. Each region of the country was represented by a child dressed up in that regional dress. Each child pointing to the next said - "he is my brother, I love him".

In January 2000, Dhritiman's mother conveyed their inability to continue providing funds for the school any further.

A meeting was held with Father Wavreil and like minded friends and it was decided to form a 'Society' to take care of educational, health and other development requirements of these children. A society has accordingly been given shape with a Governing Body and is presently waiting registration. While the present school, in the meantime continues running through personal contribution of the members, once the society is registered the members intend to start similar institutions/development centres for the under priviladged children of various slums/streets of Calcutta once sufficient funds are generated through the contribution of patrons and well wishers.

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