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A fighting chance

It's tough when you're born in the wrong place at the wrong time.
But all is not lost



It's mealtime in the Parikrma family — Photo: V. Sreenivasa Murthy

IT IS noon. About 160 children file past in an orderly fashion to the lunch hall. At the foot of each stair, a pair of students monitors their progress. One by one, the children, aged between five and 12 enter the wash area to clean their hands before sitting down to eat the hot meal after saying their prayers.

Till a few months ago, these students were leading aimless lives in the slums of Koramangala, Adugodi, Ejipura, and Viveknagar; some working as maids in houses, some doing odd jobs in small shops. All of them come from families that subsist on Rs. 600 a month on an average. Today, they are part of the Parikrma family.

Started in May last year by Shukla Bose, the Royal Parikrma, part of the Parikrma Humanity Foundation, offers ICSE syllabus to students who were unlettered till a few months ago. Today they are comfortable with the English language.

Their achievements are not confined to acquiring merely language

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skills. They have been trained to keep their selves clean, eat properly, and use a toilet, besides sporting good manners. Their academics range from imparting language skills to maths along with a small dose of general knowledge.

Says Shukla: "What these children need is good education and equal opportunity. Equal opportunity here does not translate into reservation. It means placing these children on the same level as their peers in terms of knowledge and social skills so that they will not be at a disadvantage when they compete with them. Parikrma aims to serve that purpose."

To emphasise this, she calls her students "under-served" and not "under-privileged". She believes that if Parikrma meets this objective, there would be no need for concessions or special measures from the government. According to her, education is the only dividing line between the haves and the have-nots.

The children are all first-generation school-goers in their respective families. They have already made their parents proud by their achievements. Says one father, Mayavan, a cobbler: "I am glad my son is not going to grow up to be a cobbler or any other odd-job man. By offering education, Parikrma has opened a bright future for him and made us proud parents."

For some parents, going to school means staying away from trouble besides ensuring a good future.

Says Champa, one of the mothers: "Now that they are going to school, they are staying out of trouble and are using their time productively. I can now hope that my child will settle down well in life and escape poverty."

Education is not the only thing that Parikrma offers. Comprehensive healthcare, including dental care, ENT, and immunisation, is made available. This includes minor surgeries for some.

Initially, the staff had to simply concentrate on disciplining the children and teaching them basics like hygiene. The children have come far since then.

Says Vijayalakshmi, one of the teachers: "Everyday here is a new day filled with new experiences. I am not only teaching these children, but learning a lot from them."

The children have different levels of understanding, and the school has found a novel way of placing them in classes named after planets. This way the children are made to feel on par with their peers.

It is fine to have a vision to provide education to such children. But where do the funds come from to run the establishment? Says Shukla: "Finding a sponsor for this project was not difficult. But this is just the beginning. We have another such school in Yelahanka with 200 children. We plan to extend this to other areas of Bangalore such that by the end of two years we will have another four centres providing similar kind of education."

She is currently working on this mission through a programme, Change Your World Series, where she proposes to approach corporate houses and others to donate half a day's salary. "The objective is to make each individual to participate and contribute a little to make a difference in these children's lives".

"I want to become a doctor," says one of the children. "I want to become a pilot," chips in another. "I want to become a reporter like akka," says another looking at me. With Parikrma's help, why not indeed?

Those who want to know more may contact Parikrma Humanity Foundation, 1846, 3rd Main, Block C, Sahakaranagar, Bangalore 560 092, Ph: 3635781/225.

NANDHINI SUNDAR

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