

I reached Gudalur on the afternoon of August 3rd. Since I went via Ooty, the journey took more time than anticipated. The head was not there; they waited till 2 PM & thereafter left for home, because of their sick mother. The assistant showed me around. I believe in the afternoon all the children do craft work for one hour & thereafter play outdoor for one hour, depending on weather conditions. The day I went, because of inclement weather, the children were playing inside the school only. I was able to take some photographs of the children "at work". The interesting part of this session is that by & large the children are grouped according to their interests & not according to age or class in which they are studying. The photographs taken during my round are sent herewith.

The next morning I was at the school before they could start the session & took some photographs, since it was not raining then. They have an assembly which starts from 9' O clock onwards. The "onwards" is because the children kept on coming in ones & twos till about 0930--may because of the rain.

During the assembly, in addition to a short prayer, they do lot of activities. Wednesday was singing. A girl from "Just Change"--an offshoot of another NGO who works for tribal welfare, had come & played on a guitar & sang some English songs & the children accompanied her. Actually they have an English girl, Liza, who has come as a volunteer from U.K. (for one year) to teach them English & songs. The kids were singing with lots of gusto.

Thereafter, the children dispersed to their respective classes. The school is actually a study center, recognized by the Govt of India, under the " National Open School policy". After 8th standard (ESLC--ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEAVING CERTIFICATE) government examination (for which the students go to Coimbatore for writing) their formal education in the center stops. The results are published in the Gazette. Thereafter the children are on their own. They go to other schools in Gudalur--which are in plenty there.

Some Information:

There are 116 students in all; 89 girls & 27 boys. All the children belong to one of the following tribes:

- Mullukurumba
- Paniya
- Kattunaicka
- Irula
- Bettakurumba

Out of 14 teachers employed, three are from the above tribes. The kids are divided into primary level (6 groups) & upper primary level (3 groups). They call them groups instead of classes.

Most of the children come walking, by auto, or in rented jeeps. The school has a minibus, which they cannot use due to instructions from Police. If you recall, a school in Kumbakonam caught fire (it was a thatched hut) about 3 years ago & children in hundreds perished in the fire. Thereafter some guidelines were drawn up & as a result of that it was decided that only one child will sit in one seat, irrespective of its age & size. Since the organization has only a 12-seater bus, they found it beyond their means to run the bus. Instead they have hired 3 jeeps for which the children are paying as much as 125/- per month to come to the school (max. distance being 16 kms).

Incidentally Asha is not the only sponsors; they get donations from other sources as well.

Before I sign off, something about the school building. It was not constructed as a school building; it was a hospital of the Accord Group. Last year after taking over the premises, Ramdoss has made some changes. The children sit on the floor & have a small desk in front of them. They would like to have some carpet to put on the floor. Then the children can be comfortable in winter, according to Rama. I believe the temperature goes below 10 degrees C then. At present there are few small mats on which the children sit.

Let me know whether you want any clarification on what I have mentioned above.