

Greetings from a very hot, humid yet green Shikshayatan.

The academic year that was, was a mixed bag of fun, joy, visitors and visits and heart-breaking moments of results of Gaja cyclone. First the bag of fun:

The children did well academically. They learn with great enthusiasm and focus. Our little ones in the kindergarten continue to delight us. The kids got together and asked us for an India map to take home so that they could teach their parents! That is to be their gift to be given at the beginning of the new academic year. The parents have asked for an orientation this June. Exciting times for us because this is the first time the request has come from parents.

In the primary, the children had a good year - other than texts, they signed up to attend various clubs including cookery, knowing our planet, arithmetic, recitation, chanting... They had a great time and the pride when they presented their work to the school, was very moving.

In the middle school, the challenge was to read their texts and answer the questions; the teacher acting as a facilitator. It led to the class working as a unit to finish set tasks. For them, the clubs included learning about the universe, the connecting threads of subjects...

The oldest group that opted to stay with us and do the NIOS 10<sup>th</sup>, were asked to spend the first year learning data entry operation, basic accountancy, languages, maths and creative writing as necessary skills. We also ensured that they took up a hobby, with the hope that it would at some time convert into something serious. So that they would also be well informed, we made the study of Ancient Indian Culture and Heritage and general science compulsory for their 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Since NIOS offers a number of options, the children have opted for various subjects for the 10<sup>th</sup>, their board exam being in March 2020. So, in 2020 we expect to put out our first 10<sup>th</sup> graders. We shall work hard to ensure they do well - but we will need all your prayers.

This year saw a number of visitors - the chief among them being Mike and Meta Weimann from Germany. They are the pioneers of Democratic school in Berlin and after attending the International Democracy in Education Conference in Bangalore, they stayed with us for almost a week, energising the students into more and more self-initiated tasks, taking responsibility for themselves and gently nudging the teachers into moving to becoming better facilitators.

Our teachers also attended the Learning Network Conference (LN) at Bangalore. The LN is made up of many NGOs and alternate schools from all over India. Jayashree and Ashok who lead the LN made it a stimulating experience for all. One of the outcomes was conducting a two day workshop for teachers at Kedi, a residential school for tribal girls in Dharampur, Gujarat. It is an amazing school, run by Aparna and her husband, with some very dedicated and committed teachers. 5 of their teachers came down for 5 days - to learn the teaching techniques used by us at Shikshayatan. Again, it was an eye-opener for our teachers that there were places even more difficult - in fact, they were appreciative of the fact that eco - social structures are better here.

Two groups of students of the Mass Media from Xavier's College, Mumbai visited us for a week. It was fun having them here. Learning was the key; our children learnt dance, to play the banjo, Hindi songs, beginners Hindi... While the children learnt about a life that required commuting, fast trains, buses, no power cuts and that people spoke so many languages fluently the students learnt that our kids love to learn and that they play and fool around with the same enthusiasm as sitting in a class.

Mr Michel Evaux of Raffine Medicals, Lyon, visited us. A friend of ours, Palaniguru, manufactures medical first aid supplies that is bought by Raffine. Wanting to do CSR in those countries that they deal with, Mr Evaux of Raffine asked if there was any work that he could do in Tamil Nadu. We were immediately suggested...

Then Gaja cyclone happened to us. It razed 25 years of hard work in greening the campus and the sight of fallen trees stilled our hearts for a moment. We lost almost 200 trees, the road was all shambles. But the miracle was that not one tree fell on a building or caused harm to any, though some leaned against them. A small appeal and with all of your help, the campus once again wears the look of green with dots of yellow and red flowers.

Prizes won this year:

Our children did well in the zonal sports meet and 4 of our children have been chosen for a summer camp of sports. They are to be placed in a sports school if they clear various events in the next two weeks. We do hope they make it, the main reason being they would actually have enough on the table. Our children did well in the State yoga meet too with 2 of them standing first in their group.

The high light of the year was **the exhibition on the Indian Railways**. An idea that was born to integrate science, history, geography and tourism in India, was loved by the children enjoying the entire process. The senior children [in the NIOS] told us during the review meeting, "All these years we were only involved in art and display parts; this is the first time we did everything including writing scripts, plays, information sheets, painting... When are we having the next exhibition?"

Vasudevan, Raghavan's brother, was the chief guest. He is a member of the Indian Railways Fan Club and is a walking talking encyclopaedia on the Indian Railways. After having visited every block his comments were, "The information was meticulous and the kids spoke with such confidence. And the kids who wrote about the toys trains? When did they travel?" I told him that that was imagination and good language put together and he replied that he thought they had visited the places. He was quiet for a few seconds. What moved Raghavan and me? That 113 children from grade 2 upwards, 25 staff, 6 alumni worked on a single project for a whole month learning and teaching each other with the greatest harmony imaginable. We have for you a short movie on how we put up the exhibition, we do hope you like it.

The result of the exhibition: parents have - within their limited means - taken their children as far as Trichy [130kms from here]. Children wanted to take the Himsagar express!

Come July, we shall be taking the school from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade up on short trips by train:

The 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> go to Coimbatore and from there to Ooty by the toy train.

6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> go to Kollam [Kerala] via Shengotta [ after seeing the Courtallam falls] and Aryankavu to see the Paalaruvi falls and the deer reserve.

The NIOS group, that has 9 students and 3 teachers, has been sponsored by Mr.Vasudevan to go to Goa to see the Dudhsagar by the Konkan railway, then on to Jog Falls and back via Mumbai to see the Western ghats. Since all this is scheduled during the monsoons, we expect that the children will love the excursion.

That was the year that was. We had a great low - the Gaja. We had a few highs - the prizes won, the exhibition. But the greatest high was how Shikshayatan was brought back to its feet after Gaja. We thank you all and hope to continue to be worthy of your trust and affection.

We have a short clip for you about the making of the exhibition on India Railways. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-6DjTz1\\_6e7xWlh5ttPivPkOk53bVOzl/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-6DjTz1_6e7xWlh5ttPivPkOk53bVOzl/view?usp=sharing)

