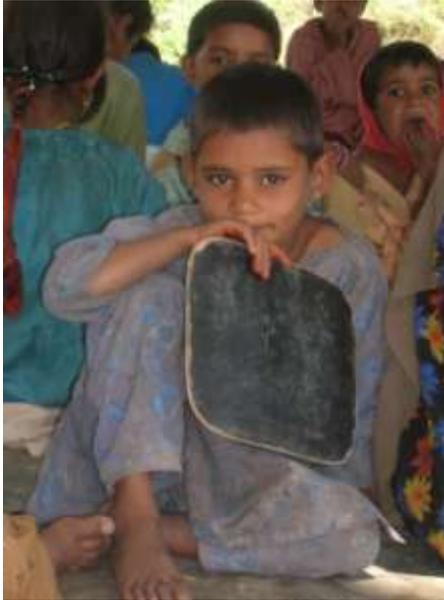


Nirvanavan Foundation



November 2005

ALWAR – A BRIEF VISIT

By Krishnadhyanam/Richard Roberts

When Satyajit Ray, the Indian film director, visited Alwar he was overwhelmed by the beauty of the region. He wrote: "In a country where for miles one sees nothing but sand and rocks and brambles and camels, I have seen a seven-mile stretch of marshland.....I have seen fortresses perched on hilltops, fortresses rising out of barren plains, fortresses in forests.....I have seen palaces and havelis of marble and stone.....with exquisite carvings on them.....women stepping out of miniatures, decked out in brilliant reds and greens and yellows....."

I too found the area stunningly beautiful. Travelling around on the back of a motor bike I saw the incredible hill-top fortresses and the vibrant colours (captured on innumerable tourist postcards) – the women in their superbly colourful saris and the men sporting their often even more brilliantly coloured distinctive turbans.

What I was also privileged to see was some of the work of the Nirvanavan Foundation. I saw some of the (ten) schools which they have built in the villages surrounding Alwar city. I saw the local women drawing water from the wells which have been bored, carrying it away with such elegant dignity in large earthenware pots balanced finely on their heads. I saw some of the ponds which the local communities have dug to conserve the rainwater. I saw some of the trees which have been planted to nourish the earth. The children in the schools proudly showed me their school books, holding them up to be photographed in ways which can only be dreamed of by teachers here. I saw the work of the 'Save the Tiger' campaign – street theatre presentations which they tour round the local schools and communities both in the city and the surrounding districts. I sat in the local Childline office with the volunteers who answer the phones.

Baba (Nirvanavan Bodhisatva, who founded the organisation) showed me the land at Advaita Gardens where the much needed children's homes are going to be built. At the moment vulnerable children needing such care and accommodation have to be sent miles away to the government orphanage in Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan. On the same plot of land is going to be built a home for older people who have no family to care for them.

First on the priority list for building however is a toilet block for the school, which will cost about 50,000 rupees. One hundred thousand rupees will build a large hall which will serve as a focal point/meeting place/meditation hall/venue for community events and accommodation for visitors. Another hundred thousand will build a shower/toilet block for the hall. One more well needs to be bored – this costs 100 rupees per foot and needs to go down about 300 feet.

All this sounds like a lot of money, but bear in mind that one hundred pounds sterling is almost eight thousand Indian rupees. So the new toilet block for the school will cost just £600. Recent donations resulting from our fundraising activities earlier this year mean that we can send this money straight away. Further donations received recently (or promised within the next few months) mean that we are well on our way to financing the building of the hall and shower block.

In some of the villages surrounding Alwar (those of the Nat and Kanjer communities) it is traditional for the young girls to be sent as prostitutes to the large cities of India and the Middle East (the boys become pimps). This may sound shocking but it is important not to make moral judgements about a community which has come to accept this as normal. The villagers are proud, hardworking and dignified people who are deserving of our respect and support. We can channel our discomfort into positive action by supporting the work of the Foundation. The schools which Nirvanavan has built are an attempt to help break this pattern of exploitation and to give these young women and men alternative choices in their lives. It is a slow process – such long-established traditions do not change overnight. But much progress has been made already. Our giving is not charity. It is a sharing of what we have. And it is not just about money. We have arguably much more to gain than we have to give.

Swami Sivananda told his followers to “serve, love, and give.” Swami Satyananda has followed this teaching all of his life, founding Sivananda Math and devoting the rest of his life to the villagers of Rikhia and the surrounding area in Jarkhand. Not everyone can give in this way of course. Many of us have homes and families to support. But we can all give in some way, either of our time, or our money - and not least of all our goodwill.

Nirvana Bodhisatva (Baba), who lived with Swami Satyananda at the ashram in Munger for many years, continues this long tradition in Alwar, Rajasthan. Visiting Baba and staying in his home half way up the mountainside helps me to appreciate how incredibly fortunate I am to have grown up and lived in one of the richest countries in the world. And

when it comes to giving and receiving, I know that I have just as much to receive from the villagers of Rajasthan as I have to give.

Baba and the Foundation welcome visitors. One of the reasons for building the hall and shower block is to be able to provide basic accommodation for visitors who can come to stay amid the beauty of Rajasthan and to share in some way in some of the work which is being done here. Volunteers are always appreciated in the schools for instance – listening to children read, playing games, singing songs, teaching basic craftwork etc. It is possible at the moment to stay with Baba in his modest home at Shyam Shah. Luxury accommodation it is not – no running water, minimum electricity provided by a solar panel, no toilet (but who needs a toilet when you’ve got a whole mountainside to shit on????)

I shall be returning to Alwar in December for another brief visit and early next year for a longer stay.

Several people have expressed an interest in visiting the Foundation next year. It is always possible – and welcomed – to organise a visit for yourself. However, hopefully it won’t be too long before we are organising a group visit. Stay in touch, either with Swami Pragyamurti at the Satyananda Yoga centre in London, or with Krishnadhyanam via e-mail: krishnadhyanam@hotmail.com

“Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and the daughters of Life’s longing for itself.

*They come through you but not from you,
and though they are with you yet they belong not to you.*

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls.

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,

Which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.”

From ‘The Prophet’ by Kahlil Gibrain.

ADOPT A SCHOOL

It's nice of course to send a lump sum of money. It is greatly appreciated. The Foundation now has ten schools in the area. But what in some ways is more important is to know that there is a regular income to support the work of the schools.

The Foundation is an N.G.O. (Non-Government Organisation – the Indian equivalent of a charity) and receives no funding from the Indian Government.

Each school costs Rs.3,000 per month. This provides all the materials for the teacher and children (chalk, paper, writing materials etc) and basic school equipment (mats, chairs, blackboards etc).

Rs.3,000 is about £40 per month.

By committing to pay a certain amount each month you can help guarantee that the children have the necessary 'tools to learn',

Please make a regular contribution (minimum of £5 per month). You will receive information about 'your' school – a photograph, regular news about activities etc. (Who knows, one day you may even visit !!)

Or, if you prefer, you can make a regular contribution which will be used in a more general way.

Please make cheques payable to Nirvanavan Foundation and send to 70 Thurleigh Road, London SW12 8UD.

NIRVANAVAN

YES I'd like to pledge my support with ____ a month.

Please complete the details on this form and return it today to:
Nirvanavan Foundation, 70 Thurleigh Road, London SW12 8UD

My Name: My telephone number is:
Address:
.....
..... My e-mail address:
..... Postcode:
.....

I want to start making a regular contribution ofa month until further notice, starting on (Please allow at least three weeks between signing the form and the date of the first payment).

Instructions to your bank or Building Society to pay Direct Debit:

Name(s) of Account Holder(s)
Bank or Building Society Account No.Sort Code:..... - -
Name and full address of Bank or Building Society:
.....
.....
.....

Instructions to your bank or building society: Please pay The Nirvanavan Foundation direct debits from the above account subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee.

Signed: date.....

Receiving bank details:

Nirvanavan Foundation, Barclays Bank, Wandsworth Branch, PO Box 3847, London SW11 1TR.

Account Number: 30709468

Sort Code: 20 – 90 – 69

“Love has no other desire than to fulfil itself.

But if you love and must needs have desires, let

these be your desires:

To melt and be like the running brook that

sings its melody to the night.

To know the pain of too much tenderness.

To be wounded by your own understanding of love;

And to bleed willingly and joyfully.

To wake at dawn and give thanks for another day of loving.

To rest at the noon hour and meditate loves’s ecstasy.

And then to sleep with a prayer for the beloved in your heart

and a song of praise upon your lips.”

From ‘The Prophet’ by Kahlil Gibrain