

Inspiration from abroad

INDIAN INSPIRATION

Will to good and the end of walls

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The rays of elaborate goodwill without bounds spread in all directions like the waves on a fish pond through *education*. The rays emanate from a woman named Cyril Mooney and are gradually hitting more and more people with their glow. The readers will read a lot about Sister Cyril in the first of the three assumed texts of Indian inspiration. I only supplement some details here.

We are in the heart of the one of the biggest cities in India, in the capital city of Western Bengal - in Calcutta, where life is pulsing through the big Sealdah Railway Station that is almost at its centre - chaotic for the European. Above the main road that is already full of rushing traffic apparently without road traffic rules, streams of cars, tuk-tuks and rickshaws, in the noise and hooting that stops at about two o'clock in the morning, is a footbridge on which multitudes of people cross the road. A small three-year-old girl is begging here, abandoned by her mother and younger brother in the wrap has been abandoned here because they moved and went to beg at another location to improve their hope for better income. We gather on the other side and move toward the railway station around the canvas huts, which are suffocated by the vapours from foods prepared in large pans on open fires in the primitive conditions and water deficiency. Body on body. We are approaching the railway station and see tens and hundreds of ragged, forlorn people. Children with empty and almost evil stares, who must learn how to beg from early age - it is the only way in which they shall probably earn their living until death. We see the grubby corners, which at night become ports for homeless people, who spread out their mats and blankets and sleep here, but are also places of horror, where the small abandoned girls who do not find protection in the midst of the desperate multitude are raped, into a site of fierce clashes between teen gangs. We see old people who are hunched over their walking sticks in a semi-conscious condition and munching bread crusts, old people brought to this location by desperate, poor families from the broader surroundings and leave them to their fate because they are no longer capable of providing for them. The staring eyes of alcoholics, the tricky eyes of the poorest prostitutes, the eyes of untreated lunatics. And when we go over the footbridge to the other side of the buzzing main road full of irritating impressions and nervousness that suffocates us, we are welcomed by the wall of a school that bears the proud name Loreto (Sealdah) School.



A completely different world is behind the wall. Girls in school uniforms are running around the courtyard and smiling happily. At noon, lunch that is prepared for them is served; they take lessons in the morning. The older help the younger ones with learning. During training for the Indian Independence Day Celebrations, they are ranked and singing the national anthem in pride of their blossoming country. This is a safe world at the core of the chaos around the railway station. It is such a matter of course to stay behind the wall. Not go out. Remain in this safe greenhouse, in comfort and peace. Protect this island against the flood of barbarity.



But with the arrival of Sister Cyril as the Principal of Loreto (Sealdah) School, the school gradually abandoned this attitude. The wall became more penetrable. In the end it stopped being a wall and became an osmotic membrane, which sucks in the desperate and street children and on the contrary releases teachers (mistresses) and female pupils in the opposite direction who within the framework of the curriculum go out to help their less fortunate brothers and sisters. This activity inspired further volunteers who have joined the ranks and are active in other subsequent programmes. These are the waves of elaborate goodwill, which are spreading from one person to another, further and further beyond the bounds of the osmotic membrane, to the railways station, to other parts of Calcutta, to its slums, beyond the bounds of the city, among the poorest villagers, among the children, who are working in the factories on the brick fields with their helpless parents. For Dr. Cyril Mooney, her colleague, the school pupils, there are no lions or bloodthirsty barbarians beyond the wall. They are people, close to them who need help. "We are the world" - this is title of the series of textbooks of Value Education - the core element of the educational system, which is currently translated to many languages world-wide.

This issue of the Social Education ('Sociální pedagogika') journal is devoted to inclusion. But what is inclusion? How does it differ from integration? While a pupil may be integrated into a normal class with the help of compensatory tools and specialists, the school cannot become really inclusive if the environment in which he grows also does not change. In an inclusive school, each of the actors is aware that "We are the world" and acts according to this. Dr. Mooney's authority in her community, in the entire city, at national level, in many corners of the world, where they are adopting her educational system, is growing from the many issues that she successfully changed with her colleagues. If we look at the pages that only briefly summarise the reach of her activities, we are categorically overwhelmed by the figures: 247 from the street in the Rainbow Home, other 40 Rainbow Homes established, 20,000 Barefoot Teachers trained, 350,000 children taught by the Barefoot Teachers, 1,400 teachers trained to work in the slums, 470 educational centres established in the slums, 26 schools opened in the factories on the brick fields, 30 trained teachers serve 3,500 children in these factories, 1,040 children

were identified as victims of hidden domestic work, 306 of them were accepted into school... and further and further figures (see [here](#)).

The success of these activities is among other things due to the austere creeds of Dr. Mooney, which are also being adopted by the rest and guide their thinking. *"I do not look at problems as problems, I see them as puzzles that must be solved."* *"Go out, look around you and ascertain what must be changed, prepared plan and go for it, and continue for as long as the change is necessary."* For work with the homeless children that the pupils do on the street, Sister Cyril has prepared several simple rules. One of them is: *"Never rid them of their ability to survive on the street!"* Light that spreads is not sentimental. It is resolute, structured, with clearly set goals. The processes to achievement of the goals are continuously reflected and the strategy is being adapted continuously on the basis of this reflection. There is no space or time for sentimentality over the despair and poverty of others, it is necessary to act *"as long as the need exists"*.

The following three texts are relatively a small part of the glow of goodwill. The first text presents the work of Sister Cyril. Her educational system is inherently inclusive and refers to one fundamental thing that we forgot about: A school cannot be changed into an inclusive environment if most of the actors do not find and do not realise the values, which help us build a common and better world. For this reason, the core of her system is Value Education. It is not by chance that Principal Melichárková, who allowed us to interview her for this issue, has mentioned it several times, without suspecting that she would talk about it in a different context in this issue. In this text, we shall also learn a lot about the activities of groups of dedicated, well-organized people - partially volunteers who anchor the rays of good sent across half of the world and spread them further in the Czech schools, while they think about how to transfer the Value Education to other environments, for instance, the medical institutions and social services.

The second text was prepared by adaptation of the longer crowd funding text of Jon Ellis. Jon, initially a teacher in Southampton in the UK, is the main organiser and coordinator of *'The brick field schools programme of Loreto'*, within which 60 open-air schools that are still in operation were established. As the readers will read in the translated text, it is school that provides education to children who migrate with their parents from many locations in the states of India in pursuit of work to Western Bengal to earn a living and thus survive for the rest of the year. Their movement from their home towns to the brick fields scattered around Calcutta and back is becoming their vicious circle, which they are incapable of breaking without help. To do so, the children mainly lack education, but they cannot get it even their home towns (they drop out of the educational system due to migration) or on the brick fields (where schools initially did not exist). If Jon's team of volunteers, teachers trained within the programme established by Sister Cyril did not decide to establish the schools for the children, they would have ended up like their less fortunate older siblings - they would not get a change to get out of the loop of the slave labour in the brick factories, regular migration to and fro and eventually criminal life, which often remains the only alternative to escape the bleak life on the road and in the dust and heat of the brick factories.

The establishment of such a school is education in patience, perseverance and strategic negotiation. Jon's team must negotiate with the owners of the factories, convince them in various ways that is also beneficial to them for the children from the brick factory circles to spend several hours per day learning, in spite of the fact this drops them out of the working process. Jon and his colleagues must function as the true followers of Dr. Mooney - non-sentimentally, elaborately and consistently. It would be easy to send the responsible civil servants to the brick factories. Education is compulsory up to the age of 14 and child labour is banned in all-India. In the factories the children do not go to school and work from an early age already. But it would also be the worst that they could do. If any of the authorities intervened, only one thing would be achieved - break-up of the family and exposure of the children to even greater danger. The parents would leave their children at home with relatives who are themselves falling into the poverty vortex, and would leave without an opportunity to take care and protect them as well strengthen mutual relationships. For this reason, Jon's team contrived a

different strategy. Besides the fact that the team operates schools in the brick fields, which do not object to this, they also promote the brick factories whose owners not only allow the establishment of the schools but also voluntarily relinquish child labour. They organise a campaign that promotes the sale of bricks just from these brick factories. But even here, Jon's team is dancing on the cutting edge of reality. The brick factories are in principle cartel networks freely linked to the state authorities, which by semi-Mafioso practices ensure that they earn the highest possible profits. Jon and his colleagues must counter this with an even more elaborate strategy. For this reason, he and his team started a crowd funding campaign with friends from the Czech Republic and Norway that should help raise funds to start the next stage of help to the brick field children.

We visited one of the educational centres run by the Kaikala Chetana Volunteer Organisation not far from one of the brick factories. The third text is just about the work of this organisation. The organisation was formed by volunteers around Somnath Chatterjee, who realised that even if the children of poor subsistence farmers are not exposed to such desperate conditions as the brick field children, these children are also doomed to eternal poverty. Although the children from the rural areas attend school regularly, however, the state schools are not emancipation institutions for them. They function on the basis of abstract, detached principles, are too theoretical and are focused on continuous examinations. Such schools systematically give a privilege to class from the middle class families while the farmers' children are even more consistently nailed down to the passivity into which the poor systematically immerse themselves. Our teachers who work in schools in excluded areas know what I am writing about very well.

Somnath in one of his letters commended Dr. Mooney. Her "model of education was and continues to be the main inspiration of our work. We received all kinds of moral, material, training and in some cases, financial support from her as long as she was active as the Principal of Loreto (Sealdah) School." First of all, Sister Cyril's model of education was and continues to be the main inspiration of our work. We received all kinds of moral, material, training and in some cases, financial support from her as long as she was active as the Principal of Loreto (Sealdah) School. As the right followers of the heritage of Sister Cyril, they approach the problem creatively and structurally. Are we incapable of adequately changing the Indian state educational system? Let us offer the poor farmers' children a parallel educational programme, which shall compensate for their handicaps. Let us build such a type of organisation, which will have the biggest potential to teach them how to think, be proud of who they are, what they are capable of solving, support them in their personal development, foster their self-confidence. Let's make the programme so interesting that they shall gladly participate in it even after they come back from school.

And we could write about more programmes here, which are floating on the rays of education and love to the neighbour. About the homes for seniors, about the schools and teachers in the slums, about the educational programmes for the Barefoot teachers, etc. If we had space to present all these activities, we could identify the same, non-sentimental creeds in their arteries. Firstly: *"Go out, look around you and ascertain what must be changed, prepared plan and go for it, and continue for as long as the change is necessary"*. The rays, which have started spreading and are changing the world around them initially came from one school, the Loreto (Sealdah) School. And this is the biggest inspiration that the story of Dr. Mooney and her colleagues has for us.

In our country, many people think that Dr. Mooney's educational system is non-transferable because it is located in India and we are in the Czech Republic. Naturally, in spite of the big differences in the degree of poverty and the big cultural differences, we all share one ideal, which comes from human dignity regardless of religion, culture or ideology. We need schools that guide the pupils through joy from learning, to independence, to activity and to responsibility for self and the world. This essence of humanity is the same in India, the Czech Republic, in Austria or in the Ukraine. In fact the sceptics are horrified by something completely different. They are horrified at the fact that the walls of the school should change into an osmotic membrane, that the school should abandon the laboratory mentality and the school itself should assume responsibility for the community, from which is emerging and for

which it exists, for the society in which further generations of pupils will live. They are horrified just at what an inclusive school really is.

An inclusive school is a place full of the values of true education, activity and responsibility for self and others, and for this reason, it is in principle a place without a wall.

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