

These Orphans with Parents

Miss Shahzadi

Going to people's houses and convincing them to send their children to school is not an easy task. It's one thing to set up a school and to provide education, but what if there are no takers? Or not as many takers as you would have liked to see? When I took up this task I found that people were very suspicious of us. 'How do I know you are giving my child the full stipend that the donor is sending for him? How do I know you are not keeping half of it yourself? Building trust was one issue. There were other parents who were reluctant to send their children because of the inconsistency they had seen in NGO projects. 'NGOs come and then they wrap up and disappear. Why should we unsettle our children from their work for a few months or years of education?'

Worse than their criticism against us was some parents' attitude towards their own children. Twelve year old Mehboob was promoted from grade one to two. . His father was blind and so he worked at a workshop to support the family. He had a slight speech impairment,, a stutter which was curable. When I suggested this to the mother she was not interested in getting any treatment for Mehboob. 'Leave it *jee*, this way people feel sorry for him and give him a generous tip.'

I try my best to be a teacher and a friend to these children. I am very particular about my clothes and appearance so that my students learn to be neat and clean too. I see how my actions and words have more of an impact on these young minds than they do on their parents' time-hardened thinking. I try to remain hopeful.

Perhaps one day...

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