

It's their world too



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Lunch time. A boy in his teens helps his friend have his tiffin. He feeds him and pours some water from a bottle for his friend to drink. Next he cleans the boy's lips with a napkin. This boy likes to help his friends have their tiffin. He is known by the name of Parag Jyoti Barman (16). He lives with Down's syndrome. However he is in a position to help his classmates some of whom show signs of autism. Principal Mr. Satyendra Thakuria let me know that he loves to feed children who cannot help themselves.

These are students of Mon Vikash Kendra, a centre for children challenged with autism and spastic symptoms. Established in 1988, Mon Vikash Kendra is an offshoot of Guwahati Mental Welfare Society which was formed in 1980 by noted psychiatrist Dr. Deepali Dutta. Located amidst serene surroundings in Dakhingaon, once a village in the outskirts of Guwahati, Mon Vikash Kendra is one of the first institutions in the city which caters to the need of children who need special care.

Among the 37 students who are presently enrolled in Mon Vikash Kendra, a few have shown remarkable talent.

Bimala Singha is a young girl who cannot memorize formal lessons in alphabets, numerals or lines of poetry. But sing them in a tune, it remains ingrained in her memory. Papumoni Bora (17) is an artist whose drawings would hold one in awe. Nizamuddin (14) suffers from lack of memory. But that doesn't hold back the remarkable striker in him. He is participating in the Special Olympics 2009 to be held in Athens. Miky Barman (17) from the same Centre is also heading for the international event.

However, anxiety writs large in the minds of the wards of children with autism. The question which pervades is, "After us, what would become of them?" Says one mother, "This question, this anxiety can be understood only by parents like us. We see them all our lives and constantly fear their survival once we are no more. With every passing day, the society is becoming insensitive to the needs of their fellowmen. Still we hope against hope."

Once I left the centre, I kept wondering of the loving hearts of the likes of Parag Jyoti who love to help their classmates. This emotional intelligence (E.Q.) is evading the children termed 'normal' in the society. Such care and concern is losing out to competition in 'normal' schools meant for 'normal' children. Maybe, it's the competition in formal education which is turning 'normal' children into sadists who derive pleasure in the failure of their classmates.

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BY PALLAVIBARUA

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