



2011: Building a solid foundation for our children

OUR CHILDREN FOUNDATION

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Meet Faridul and Arifa

Faridul and Arifa are brother and sister and attend class two at Andharmanik. Faridul's favourite subject is learning Bengali, the native language, and Arifa enjoys learning English. They have both been attending school since OCF opened in 2009.

Faridul and Arifa live in the slums behind the school and share a story that unfortunately resonates with many others in the area. Two and a half years ago, these two siblings were sold to child trafficking. (cont)



Photo: Faridul (left), Arifa (Right) with Hermat (Back)

ANDHARMANIK: TWO YEARS ON

This month, on the 2nd May, we celebrated the second anniversary of Andharmanik school with OCF. In this newsletter, we provide a proper introduction to OCF's first school, surrounding community and recent celebrations for the Chairman's birthday.

Andharmanik: History

Andharmanik is located two hours south of Kolkata in West Bengal, India. Since the school was built in 1978 it has been under a series of managements, the most recent of which was passed over in 2000. Thereafter, the school was running, but not effectively. Corruption resulted in teachers receiving little to no salary, with obvious consequences for the quality of schooling given to students. By 2006, the school had been abandoned.

Our Children Foundation Involvement

OCF decided to re-establish Andharmanik had been closed for three years. The area was abandoned and overgrown, leaving only the

shell of a once functioning education system.

For two months, OCF team worked to re-establish the school. A road was cleared to improve access into school grounds, infrastructure rebuilt, walls colour-washed, and local teachers re-hired. The once abandoned school now provides 321 local children with basic education, from kindergarten to class eight.

COMMUNITY LIVELIHOOD AND ZARI

Before joining the schools, the majority of student spent their days at home helping their families with *zari*, a tasking form of elaborate embroidery that uses fine golden tinsel thread. Andharmanik's surrounding communities were once a hub for this type of embroidery.



Photo: Golden-thread zari embroidery

On the night, before being taken away, they managed to escape from their house and sought refuge in the neighbourhood surrounding Andharmanik.

Faridul and Arifa came to Hermat's house [photo], a former student at Andharmanik whilst under former management, and current school handy-man. Although Hermat did not have the means to care for these children, a single man at the back of his house agreed to take them in, and reared them there for six months. Yet, facing a common lack of money and means to rear them, Faridul and Arifa moved to his elder sister's family nearby, whose household income rests upon the father – a rickshaw puller.

Today, the children stay there with this family, who live together in poverty. OCF is grateful for the opportunity provided by caretakers of children like Faridul and Arifa, who now have an opportunity to learn and grow in their interests and abilities during school years.

Zari is popularly displayed on Indian clothing, including *sarees* (traditional dresses) and *kurtis* (a common style of cotton shirt). Children of all ages were expected to spend hours doing *zari* in order to assist the meagre household income. Families near Andharmanik would then sell their work at one of India's largest commercial market places, the *Burrabazaar* of Kolkata. While this form of child labour assists to ease the day-to-day struggles of families, it provides little opportunity for the next generation to break this cycle of poverty.

Through education, children now have an opportunity for a brighter future than the one that their families have endured. Parents willingly bring their children to the school, recognising the benefits it provides for their future, despite the current family hardships.

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS AT ANDHARMANIK

The 1st of April marked a very special day: Our Children Foundation's Chairman decided to celebrate his birthday with over 500 children, teachers and other staff from the three schools. Celebrations were held at Andharmanik School and activities ran throughout the day into the evening.



Photo: Students well-wishing the Chairman and Chairman's birthday cake



After a bright, joyful celebration upon the arrival of the Chairman followed by welcoming speeches, Shishumala's music teacher, Malaya Sriani, led a group in a traditional vocal performance. Warm wishes were passed on to the Chairman throughout the day. Birthday cake and a hot lunch was provided for all, as well as chocolates and fruits for children in the afternoon. Schools received sports equipment, including a cricket bat and footballs, which they tested later that day. It was a special birthday for the Chairman, and will no doubt be looked back upon with fond memories for those who shared in the celebrations

Want to get involved? OCF has volunteer vacancies available in Australia and India!! To show interest in joining our team and to help make a difference please email us at info@ourchildrenschool.org

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