

Project Nanhi Kali's Boston Chapter Fall 2009 Online Newsletter

August 12th 2009



[Choices...]

Our lives can be broken down into a long succession of the choices we make. From the mundane, to the life-altering, we take for granted that these choices are ours to make - Article by Rohit Mathur



It wasn't until our recent trip to India that it struck us just how important it is to have a choice. Too many children in India do not have ANY choices. They eat what they can, when they can. They wear whatever they find, they sleep wherever they find a free space. Most importantly, they will spend their childhood working because they will never know another way.

We met some people in India that had made a choice, a choice that they were living every day, fighting against the odds for something they believed in. We met Sheetal Mehta (Trustee and Executive Director of K.C. Mahindra Education Trust), Gauri Rajadhyaksha (Manager at K.C. Mahindra Education Trust) and Pragna Khandwala (Manager of Resource Mobilization for Project Nanhi Kali), who together form the leadership team of Project Nanhi Kali, at their office in Colaba in Mumbai.

It was the first time the Boston Chapter team was meeting them, even though we had been in touch

with them for a long time over email. We brainstormed for a while, hashing out rough ideas for Project Nanhi Kali as a whole as well as for the Boston Chapter. We were able to highlight our significant progress in the past year and run through our plans looking forward towards 2009.

What we were most excited about (of course!) was visiting the Nanhi Kali's themselves. We had been wanting to meet the Nanhi Kali's, and see the school and volunteer-teachers that were making it all possible. The school trip was one of the highlights of our India trip and gave us a real sense of where all our efforts were bearing fruit. We saw first hand somethings that made us feel really good about the direction Project Nanhi Kali was heading in.

The teachers maintained a very detailed report of each of the student within the program. The report was a daily progress update for each student including details such as attendance record, reading and writing skills, language skill, analytical skills, etc. This sort of intricate detailing of records gave us the impression that the program was being taken very seriously by the teachers.

We saw first hand the relationship the teachers had with the students. It was part of their brief to provide personal attention to all the students. They reassured us that if a student did not show up to class for even one

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day, they would walk over to the student's residence and find out, first-hand, why the student was not in class. If the reason was something other than sickness, it was explained to the guardian that apart from health, education was the most important aspect in the life of a young child.

The school itself was in better condition than we could have hoped. We all have walked past state-run schools during our childhoods in Mumbai, and known how squalid they can get. This particular school was run by the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (formerly known as the Bombay Municipal Corporation or BMC) and had a concrete structure, that was clean and well maintained with adequately sized, airy classrooms. The school even had a library!

We finally got a close look at the kit that is provided to kids that are sponsored by the Nanhi Kali program. The kit includes the following items: A school bag, notebooks, shoes and socks, a water bottle, a compass box with pencils, crayons, an eraser, etc



The Nanhi Kali's themselves were happy, healthy girls; Confident enough to answer our questions, but too shy to make eye contact with us. We spent time with them, chatting and asking them general questions about their classes and families and hobbies. Soon enough it was time for them to get back to class, and we were politely but strictly shown the door by teachers that made us feel like schoolkids ourselves.



On the drive back, there was not much conversation, but we all knew what the other was thinking. Each one of us had a smile on our face, bursting with pride that we had helped make an impact as positive as we had. To see it right there in front of us made all the hard work seem worth it.

We are sure there are a lot of you doubtful and hesitant about handing your money over to a non-profit agency. I'd encourage any of you that can to go and see for yourself, the impact the Nanhi Kali Project is making in the lives of these girls. You can contact the Project Nanhi Kali Team in India, and they would be more than happy to go through the details of the program and even take you to a school, so you can have your heart won over by the Nanhi Kali's themselves. There isn't an easier choice to make.

"Every human heartbeat, he'd said many times, is a universe of possibilities. And it seemed to me that I finally understood exactly what he'd meant. He'd been trying to tell me that every human will has the power to transform its fate. I'd always thought that fate was something unchangeable: fixed for every one of us at birth, and as constant as the circuits of the stars. But I suddenly realized that life is stranger and more beautiful than that. The truth is that, no matter what kind of game you find yourself in, no matter how good or bad the luck, you can change your life completely with a single thought or a single act of love." -From the novel "Shantaram" by Gregory David Roberts

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[Announcements]

Please join the Nanhi Kali team in congratulating **Murari Gopalan!** On July 30, Murari completed the grueling RAMROD 2009 (www.redmondcyclclub.org/RAMROD) cycling event, held in Washington state, by bicycling a challenging course featuring 10,000 feet of climbing over 160 miles. As part of the challenge, Murari also raised funds and awareness for Project Nanhi Kali through www.firstgiving.com/murarigopalan

Murari's pledge brought in nearly \$2500 and all the proceeds were donated to the Mahindra Foundation in support of Project Nanhi Kali.

[News]

- ✚ Please note that there has been a **change of address** for Mahindra Foundation USA. The new address is The Mahindra Foundation USA, c/o Mr. Kulashekar Raghavan, 488 Ellis Street, Mountain View, CA 94043, USA
- ✚ The non-profit '**Executives without Borders**' has partnered with Project Nanhi Kali. For more information, please visit www.executiveswithoutborders.org
- ✚ **Carnegie Mellon University's Indian Graduate Student Association (IGSA)** is partnering with Project Nanhi Kali to raise awareness about the cause in Pittsburgh, PA. Please stay tuned for further updates on the partnership.

[Success Story]

'A ray of hope through collective community support'

Village Gondivalasa in Araku valley mandal in Visakhapatnam is located around 15 kms away from the Mandal head quarter. This village is inhabited by a primitive Tribal Group (Most Backward tribal Group) **Tangula Gurubari** -10 year old Nanhi Kali, studying in 4th class, comes from a very poor family and her parents are illiterate. The main sources of income for the family are from the forest (Non Timber Forest product) and daily labour. She has got 2 brothers and a sister. She is very active, good in studies and extra curricular activities. Tangula was selected as the leader of Library club in the school. She is interested in reading books and motivates her friends to also read books.

On completion of her studies in 4th class she had to discontinue her studies due to the sudden demise of her mother. Being the eldest in the family, she was forced to support her father. Though she was interested in continuing her studies, her father was not interested in sending her to school. Initial effort to counsel her father failed and hence, a village level meeting was organized. In the meeting as a result of the combined efforts of community leaders and Naandi personnel her father was made to understand and finally agreed to send Gurubari to school. The community has agreed to extend all possible support to family. She is back in school with her friends and in Aug. 2007 she received her 2nd year Nanhi Kali kit. She wants to study more and become a teacher.

[Upcoming Events]

- ✚ **Aug, 2009** Nanhi Kali at **India Day** presented by the Indian Association of Greater Boston (IAGB)
- ✚ **Aug, 2009** Monthly **General Meeting** for interested volunteers in the Boston area
- ✚ **Oct, 2009** Nanhi Kali at **Diwali Celebration** at Nashua High School, NH organized by the Indian Association of New Hampshire (IANH)
- ✚ **Oct, 2009** Nanhi Kali at **Poverty Action Week** presented by MIT's Global Poverty Initiative (GPI)

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