

The position of the Bhil people in society and the challenges they meet

A special challenge for the school is introducing a new pedagogy, which also involves the parents' participation in it. Nowadays, students in India's state schools are still submitted to rote learning, at times with hitting and violence. It is therefore an important task to slowly introduce parents, aspiring teachers, and the local people in general to an alternative form of education, which they can absorb and get used to, so that they in turn can pass on this knowledge within their own culture and in their own way. Thus, the understanding of a new pedagogy is required, and the parents need to be encouraged to get involved and develop an interest in pedagogy in general and their children in particular, so that they, too, can actively participate in shaping life at school.

Many children, even those who attend Darbari Waldorf School, grow up in very poor families. The majority have had to endure physical or psychological violence and have had to take on difficult responsibilities from a very early age. The children know how to take care of themselves, by cooking, making fire, and hunting. Most of the children in the Thar Desert have hardly any access to education, due to the geographical location, the bad roads and the lacking means of transportation, as well as because of cultural difficulties. Girls marry at a very young age and then, in addition to being responsible for the household chores, need to go to work in order to survive and support their family. But since they have no education, they have difficulties in finding work and thereby escaping from this vicious cycle. This leads to greater poverty and makes the situation for the entire family even more difficult.

One aim of our school is to mix the different castes, so that they can learn together and live peacefully side by side. Before we can achieve this aim, we have to overcome many obstacles. Here in the desert, getting a cabinet becomes a major task, and procuring material takes a lot of strength, patience, and energy. We have to economize with the various supplies due to their limited availability and due to the difficulties involved in obtaining them.

Many things German Waldorf schools would take for granted are the exact opposite here, mostly for financial reasons, but also because of the remote location. The school depends on educational sponsorships, which can help create a foundation, especially in the very beginning.

We use part of the money for biodynamic farming, so we can offer a meal to the children. For most of the children, it is the only meal they have during the day. In this manner, the school also helps the children lead a healthy life, which is one of the main reasons for attending school.

Respect towards the casteless Bhil people is non-existent, especially in the cities. In every aspect of their life they are mistreated and they occupy the lowest position in society. They are not allowed to touch the food and drink of members of the other castes, because they are considered filthy. There are specially built hospitals and facilities for the Bhil, but they are not up to any kind of standard and are hardly subsidized by the government. But through education, the Bhil are gaining more self-confidence and have more trust in themselves. In this manner, they can assert themselves and achieve something and will hopefully have more of a say in the future and be able to attain a better social standing.