



बाल वातावरण नेपाल
CHILD ENVIRONMENT NEPAL (CEN)

DAILY LIFE AT CEN

The orphanage of Child Environment Nepal is located in a neighborhood called Naya Bazar, not far from the touristic city centre of Kathmandu. It occupies a quite new building with separate bedrooms for boys and girls, a bedroom for the caretaker Bimala, a separate room for volunteers and CEN's office. At the end of January 2011, CEN has to leave this building, however, and the orphanage will move to a smaller place in the same neighborhood.

Bimala is the only adult who stays at the orphanage. She is a very kind woman who looks after the children and is responsible for the cooking and cleaning. Her own place, where her son and daughter live, is not far from CEN and when the children are at school she has some time to go there. The rest of the day, she is quite busy with cleaning, shopping, preparing the meals and doing the laundry.

7:00 Wake Up

An ordinary day starts at about 7 o'clock. The children wake up, wash and get dressed and after that they drink tea together at the kitchen table. Most of the children have homework each day and as they usually wait with finishing it until the last moment, the time left before school is devoted to it. For most kids, it comprises some pages of maths questions, writing exercises or drawing assignments.

9:00 Lunch

Gathered in the study room, the children write, read or -if lucky- play until about 9 o'clock, when 'lunch' is served: a huge plate of rice with potatoes and vegetables. Even though this might sound ridiculous to western people, it is quite convenient to have a big meal at this time: the food gives much appreciated warmth in the cold mornings. The 'lunch' meal is almost the same as dinner; the only variation is in the vegetables: some days it is peas, other days it is cauliflower or spinach. Only during festival days, chicken

is added. The combination of rice, watery sauce and vegetables is called 'daal bhaat tarkari' in Nepali and is eaten everyday by everyone. Hence the Nepali proverb: 'daal, bhaat, tarkari: jiu dhan sarkari': 'daal bhaat tarkari contributes to the health and wealth of the nation'!

9:30 School

The oldest boy, Nirmal, has to go to school immediately after 'lunch', except when he has morning class: in that case, he has to leave at 6:20 already! The other children wash their plates and do some other cleaning jobs and get dressed again: at school, they have to wear uniforms which they never wear at home. When everybody is ready, the line of children walks to school.

The school, like many in Nepal called 'Oxford Higher Secondary School', is close to the orphanage. Most subjects, like maths, sciences and geography, are taught in English. At an ordinary day, the children come home around 4 o'clock; at Fridays, they're back a few hours earlier. Saturday is the only holiday.

16:30 Tiffin

The first thing the children do when they get home is change again. After that, Bimala provides them with tea and a bowl of dry muesli. This little meal is called 'tiffin'; it can be considered the Nepali equivalent of the English afternoon tea! After 'tiffin', the most dutiful children do some homework, the others play. Even though there is hardly any toys at CEN, the kids are very inventive in amusing themselves. From paper sheets or tissues they make planes, and with the stones and waste found in the garden they build houses. Empty bottles are carried around and taken care of as dolls. When there is a pack of cards available, the kids play a whole range of games or construct a house of cards. And there are some carrom boards at CEN, of course: the children play this game as fervently as all Nepalese. Another favorite game is what we have called the Laughing Game: everybody has to sit in a circle and pretend to be frozen. Then one of the kids, 'the monkey', has to try to make the others move or laugh. Hilarious!

18:30 Dinner

Around 18:30, daal bhaat tarkari is served again. The activities undertaken in the evening are dependent on what is euphemistically called 'load shedding': in Nepal, the

supply of electricity is insufficient due to inaccurate policies and therefore limited to a certain amount of hours each day. The blackouts are equally distributed over the country and over the different districts of Kathmandu. For each day, there is a different schedule of power cuts. Dependent on the season, the blackouts may last for many hours and sometimes for almost the whole day. The people are used to it and daily life continues by candlelight, as it gets dark between 5 and 6 PM in winter. When power comes back, everybody cheers though! 'Light is back!' the children shout before running to the TV. As for any kids, watching TV is a favorite pastime for them. The Nepalese television, however, is not entirely comparable to western television, as it has no children's programs and an overdose of sugary, nationalistic music videos. Besides, it always snows a little on the TV at CEN. When there is no power, the kids have other pastimes after the candlelight dinner. The dark house with only a few candles lit offers a wonderful environment to play hide and seek, for example. Another option is making a fire in the garden, where the kids can amuse themselves for hours, burning wood and waste. The fire provides not only entertainment, but badly needed warmth as well: the nights in Kathmandu are very chilly and houses usually have no heating! Bed time is dependent on the load shedding as well: when there is no power, everyone goes to bed after dinner. When there is power and an interesting dance competition on TV, everybody makes it a bit later!

Even though the load shedding may sound somewhat romantic, it obviously has many disadvantages. Cooking, cleaning and reading by candlelight is not very convenient. CEN is therefore searching for money to buy a battery, which would provide some power for the lights during the blackouts.

Holidays

Saturday is the only free day during school time. It is the weekly bathing day as well. All children get scrubbed and washed by the others on the roof of the house. Water is carried up in tubs and the whole ritual takes hours. Even when the sun is shining brightly, the bathing is not the most enjoyable experience, since the water is icy cold!

During holidays, daily life is different of course. Staying at CEN as a volunteer in January, I spend the eleven-days winter holiday with the children. We woke up later than during school days and we had 'lunch' at an hour that approached lunchtime. Before lunch, I

went running with Nirmal and sometimes some of the other boys to the famous Swayambu temple, which is half an hour running from CEN. The temple is located on top of a hill, so the last part was really exhausting! During the day we played chess with a homemade set and other games on the roof of the building, which is a lovely place to hang out when the sun shines. Like previous volunteers, I organized some 'excursions' as well. One day we went to Durbar Square in Kathmandu with its famous palaces and temples, and had a nice lunch in a cafe. At the end of the holiday, we went to the zoo in Patan. Unfortunately, the weather was bad that day, so the restaurant was more enjoyable than the zoo itself.

In short, daily life at CEN is smooth and enjoyable. It is impressive to see how the kids manage to live their lives quite independently, without much supervision. Besides, it is wonderful that they are able to enjoy themselves quite well in circumstances that are not always easy!