

A Friend's Visits to The Garden of Peace January 2018

The Garden of Peace is a free school for children from kindergarten through primary created by Prof. Ramu Manivannan (Mani). As my friend, Gilberto Rabozzi was going to South India, we asked him to visit the school and see the bikes we had offered to the students who needed them to get to school. Here is his report.



Arrival



Main NEW School building — funded by friends!

January 13, 2018: Even here the season is strange; very, very wet till the sun shines properly. Tomorrow at 0700 a taxi will pick me up for the 3+ hour journey and at 11 I'll take part in Pongal (harvest festival dedicated to the Sun god). My program is fixed for the first three days only, after that it is still open. Mani was



Dining-room

precise and punctual on the phone. Now i'm going to get an Indian phone because in rural India, wifi is very difficult. For the moment a big hug Gibi

Kindergarten & Library



January 15, 2018: Here people are celebrating Pongal, the end of winter. Well, at night the air is fresh, then foggy early morning but when the sun shines the temperature soon goes up!

I'm in the Garden of Peace, the school is closed. At the moment there are two Tamil volunteers (well educated guys, one, a university professor, who goes up and down to Chennai and takes care of money and tutoring the local teachers at the school.) And a (young-looking) woman who lives here and is in-charge of a



local women's project producing yearly 400 litres of organic oil (groundnut and sesame) with a traditional mill. And of course Mani, who is also a university professor, but he is not continually here. Originally he is from the village close by. The school is situated a bit far away from the village, closer to the forest area and to other smaller villages where many of the students come from.



The accommodation is very simple: they put a bed in an empty classroom and i use the basic bathroom of the school in the courtyard. They all are very welcoming, friendly and relaxed with me. And the cook is cooking good food for us, For the students there is another kitchen.

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The bikes will arrive on 26/27 January so I will come back before leaving India in order to check the bikes and to see the school working with the students.

January 18, 2018: Am in an internet cafe so I'll be short. Instead of cooking for them I'll be giving a lecture on FOOD during the festival when also the bikes will be given away. They insisted so nicely that I speak, so that even if I'm not a public speaker, I said yes. As soon as I know more I'll inform you. At the moment I'm relaxing on the beach avoiding the BIG Cold. What a present for me!



January 20, 2018: The title of my speech is: How food could be important for the journey..inside and/or outside of you.The audience will be students and teachers from Madras University. Waiting for your feed back and for a ricksha for the train station..ciao G.

January 23, 2018: The guys are happy about my response to their request. I am preparing a 45 minute speech..... something new for me.

January 29, 2018: it was a good speech. It was about the 5 styles of kitchen in my professional life and why they change... that to say how I changed. I got good feedback. Actually, the bikes are late and I saw only few child, not the whole school in action (Republic Day Holiday).

So my last day, before the flight I'll come again for just a few hours with the school open. At the moment I am in Tiruvannamalai. This could be the last news from India, so please if you have any questions let me know. Ciao Xenia hug G.

February 27, 2018: Hurrah! The school was fully functioning and I could meet the pupils who create their own computers — out of cardboard! (There are only two computers in the school.)



In addition, the bikes were there and we were able to assemble a few. I was sad that I didn't get to see the kids ride off on them but 3 visits was all I could do.

If I have to condense the visit into a few points I would say the I was very warmly welcomed by everybody I met: professors, teachers, managers, students, local workers and, of course, the pupils. The compound of Garden of Peace is the physical center of different activities: half board school for 180 students, an organic farm, a traditional mill powered by bulls for oil extraction (women's enterprise), a seminar house for students of Chennai University and last Evening Classes Project for the nearby villagers.

All the projects are overlooked by Mani. Many highly qualified volunteers come to tutor different parts of the program and they keep all the projects very alive. Tuition is free, but the parents should work for a half day each month on the farm. The fact that people from the university go to work together with local people is a key aspect of all the projects. It mixes different experiences and makes it rich.

The compound is well kept with some Indian touches. I heard that some Australian architects are studying a new system for the toilets, bathrooms and garbage. At the moment there are plenty of very basic, clean toilets with lots of water. Ciao Gilberto!

