

HOMES OF THE HOMELESS - Striving to bring a difference in the lives of the underprivileged, here's Aseema, an NGO which aims to initiate and support these children into formal education.



"Padhne se hi bada aadmi ban sakta hai", says Babu, a student of Aseema. And lets not get into a debate as to what "bada aadmi" means. We are talking of the children from Aseema, a non-governmental organisation (NGO), established in 1995, which aims to promote and protect the human rights of underprivileged women and children.

The organisation run by three trustees, Snehal Paranjape, Neela Kapadia and Dilbur Parakh has been working constantly to initiate underprivileged into formal schools. The volunteers of the organisation went to Bandra signal and spoke to beggars asking them to send their children to school. They got a room at St. Stanislaus High School and from here begins the Aseema story.

They run their classes at St. Stanislaus High School, St. Joseph 's Convent and the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School , all located in Bandra. Children in the Montessori school are encouraged to go for formal school. It is like a play school and helps these kids to enjoy school. A support programme has been developed for children who attend formal schools to ensure that they continue to pursue education.

Aseema began with just 15 students. It was a tedious task because these children had never even held a pencil in their hands. So they started from scratch, teaching them how to hold a pencil, and making them familiar with the alphabets. Aseema has managed to inculcate in these students a hope for life which goes beyond rag-picking and begging on the streets. Most of the students were eager to reply in English even when they were questioned in Hindi, though the use of "phoren" language is restricted to the four walls of their respective schools. One of the older boys, Ramesh has completed his eighth standard and with the help of the organisation is now earning his living by making wooden frames for pictures.

Other than studies, students are also given time and space to develop their interests. They go for computer classes and take lessons in judo, painting, etc. The artwork of the students adorns the walls at Chimbai Municipal School where Aseema has rented one of the rooms. In fact the artwork of the children is being used on various products made by the organisation. They sell cloth bags, mugs, dinner and tea sets, greeting cards, envelopes and calendars. "The products are made by commercial artists, only the artwork of the children are being used," says Ms. Parakh.



The Aseema office is filled with volunteers who help in making bookmarks and cards. The organisation is excited about its plans of adopting the Chimbai municipal School. A board at the school declares that Aseema is "adopting" the school. Although discussions are going on as to how Aseema will work with the municipal school. To begin with they will provide a meal to all the students which until now was restricted to just Aseema students. Till now the organisation had rented a room at the municipal school where its students were helped with their studies but the organisation felt the need to work with the school after they noticed an alarming drop in the number of students in municipal school.

"Aseema has to grow," says Ms. Parakh and growing does not mean adding numbers but improve the quality of the education and make it available to the underprivileged. With dreams in their eyes, alphabets on their lips, pencils in their

hands and eyes twinkling with mischief these children are trying to be like any other child. Lets pray they succeed.