



SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGE

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THERE is a home for the destitute children on the outskirts of Delhi. It is called the SOS Children's Village. It was established in 1964. Mrs. Indira Gandhi was one of the founder members. It is a private organisation run by the support of SOS Children's Village well-wishers all over the world. There are 97 SOS Children's Villages in 46 countries including those under construction.

We had the privilege of visiting the village as part of an educational programme. We were delighted to see the sweet children all round who seem to have made the village their happy domain. There were many things to learn at the village.

The idea of SOS Children's village came from Dr. Hermann Gmeiner, born in 1919 in Austria. After the Second World War Gmeiner was confronted with the undescrivable misery of the Post-war children. He recognised that only a harmonious family atmosphere would guarantee the healthy development of the child. Without the family, which is the fundamental social unit, no children can develop a sound body and soul. This shows the importance of a sound family structure for the child. The mother and child are in the centre of the community life in all continents. A child will suffer gravely without the mother's presence and loving care. All human tragedies seem to have its origin in the disturbance of the mother-child relationship.

In the SOS Village the "village mother" replaces the real mother, giving them the mother's love and a feeling of security.

The children grow up with "brothers and sisters" as if in a single family. The village has 20 cottages where about nine children, both boys and girls ranging in age from infancy to sixteen years provide a normal family atmosphere. At present the village has 164 children.

The cosy "one-family" house

with a living room, a kitchen and small bed rooms gives a warm atmosphere in which the child can recover from the spiritual and physical suffering it has undergone.

The children attend Public Schools which enables them to grow under the same natural conditions as children in any ordinary family. Their contact with the outside environment is not cut off. They no longer feel different from other children.

In the cottage which I visited the mother had a sewing machine. She washes clothes, stitches, cooks meals and cleans house for the children. The children help the mother on their return from school. All the cottages have television sets. Children call their "mother" Mummy and other cottage mothers as aunt.

The aim of the village is to place the children in an atmosphere of love and kindness where they grow

up into useful men and women in the society. They develop the right social attitude towards their fellow-men—tolerance, sense of responsibility and willingness to help—besides the right attitude for work, whether manual or scientific.

Each child gets Rs. 80/- per month for maintenance and the amount is handed over to the mother who looks after them. The mother gets Rs. 75/- ration allowance and Rs. 180/- for her maintenance. Every child has a saving bank account and the mother tries to save something from their allowance.

The practical experience at the village has proved that the majority of educational problems, common among children in orphan homes, do not appear in the near natural milieu created by the SOS Children's Villages. The abandoned child is once again deeply rooted and has found a real home.



At the School the SOS Village Children are serious students