



## The place Yango never wants to leave

The water's cold on this winter day. But that doesn't worry the children much, as long as the sun is shining on bath day. The big wash is taking place in the courtyard, because there's no bathroom in the two connected buildings which accommodate the Sertshang Orphanage Home in Kathmandu. After their bath the children play in the sun until they're dry. To provide towels for fifty children would blow the Home's tight budget.

"All the children are healthy, they've enough to eat, they've warm clothes and receive regular lessons," says Tashi Sertshang proudly. "We've reached our first goal." Despite the many patients he has to attend to during his two-month stay in Nepal, he checks up on the children almost every day.

Absolute essentials also have to be fought for in Kathmandu on a daily basis. The Orphanage is a very basic set-up. In the building with three dormitories live the two housekeepers and the old Tibetan man who is grandfather to all the children. In the other house, where the kitchen, prayer room and dining hall are, the three people who manage the Orphanage live in a small room and the cook in another. The adult's rooms are as simply furnished as the children's.

In Nepal, one of the poorest countries in the world, its inhabitants are suffering from galloping inflation. The prices for staples like rice, flour and gas increase almost daily. Tenzin, the Home's young cook, could tell you all about that. He often has to go a long way to buy from a dealer with the best price and carries the 30 Kilo rice sacks himself. The Home can't afford a vehicle. That's also why the children visit a school close to the Orphanage, although the with the school fees that have to be paid there, the children could be sent to a much better institution. There is no compulsory schooling in Nepal. Even the state schools demand fees and money has to be forked out for everything from pencils to school uniforms.

The more meagre everyday living, the more imaginative the children's life together. The Home can barely afford toys either. The fifty children share two footballs, a couple of board games, three or four cheap Barbie copies to cuddle with clothes made out of rags or paper. But a piece of string, a couple of rubbers or coins are enough to concoct a whole new game.

Home leader Karma Tendar experiences few problems with discipline. In his

quiet, sensitive way, he lays the emphasis on self-responsibility and a sense of community. "If a child disturbs the lesson or doesn't hold to the agreement and plagues the others, first we'll have a chat together quietly and afterwards he'll take on extra chores for the community." How important and central learning is to the life of the children can be seen from the ninety-minute instruction in Tibetan religion and culture, which Karma Tendar gives three evenings in the week to the bigger children. When asked what is their favourite moment in the day-to-day life of the Home, not a few of these children name these evening lessons.

The children are made aware every day that their stay in the Home and the school lessons are a privilege. Should a lesson take place outdoors in fine weather, children of the district often clamber up the courtyard wall and follow the lesson with curiosity. Mothers often knock on the door too, to ask if her child could take part in the lesson. "If we had more resources, we would immediately build our own school", say Tashi and Karma. "here in Nepal there aren't many good schools, but many excellent teachers, who may have studied for example at the University of Dharamsala and are looking for a place."

Lessons are taught in the Home and in the external school in Nepalese. Not all of

the children in the Home are Tibetan orphans. "The Home is open to children of various origins", says Tashi, who last year saw to it that the Sertshang Orphanage Home was recognised by the Nepalese state. An important step in a land notorious for the arbitrariness and corruption of its officials.

The Orphanage still doesn't have enough money at its disposal to be able to send all the children to school. Only a third attend a school outside the Home at the moment. The rest are taught in-house, to prepare them for the external school. "We teach the material of the first and second grades, for example. Then if they are successful in the exam, they can go straight into the third grade", says Karma Tendar. An external teacher instructs the children, alongside the Home leader, and the older girls of the Home assist the play-like instruction of the four and five-year-olds with enthusiasm. The cohesion of the children is impressive. The 14 and 15-year-olds calmly tend to the youngest, when they are troubled with homesickness after the death of their parents.

Even the smallest are already learning English in the Home, singing out the alphabet and speaking whole sentences in chorus. "My name is Yango, I'm six years old", repeats Yango tirelessly. The six-year old girl hasn't been in the Home long - her parents





were killed in an attack by Maoist rebels. But she's already found a place in the community, thanks to the many small rituals which mark everyday life in the Home and sharpen the group sense. For example, singing and prayers last a good half-hour in the courtyard before the morning and evening meals. Each day a different child takes the lead. Today it's Yango's turn, and the other children applaud loudly as she accompanies her favourite song with a beautiful little dance.

Kathmandu, Winter 2005  
Brigitta Niederhauser





## Tashi's Plans

The annual rent for the two houses which contain the Orphanage is 5400 Swiss Francs. A mighty price for a simple building with minimal furnishing. Over the past few years rents have massively increased in Kathmandu, because more and more people have left the land to find refuge in the capital because of attacks by Maoist rebels.

But it's not only because of the high rent that Tashi Sertshang has been looking for a suitable site to build a new Orphanage. With fifty children and six adults, the two rented houses are completely full. There is no room for extension, neither for a school or for workshops, which Tashi and Home leader Karma Tendar would very much like to build. Tashi's next goal is to improve the children's educational opportunities. In Nepal, which has one of the world's highest unemployment rates, only youngsters with a solid education have a future. Tashi and Karma don't only emphasise good schooling however, the children should also have the possibility of learning a trade. As trained cook, servant, gardener or joiner, as trained seamstress, cook, or housekeeper the chances of acquiring a position in Kathmandu are significantly improved. To find suitable teaching staff is no problem for Tashi, there is a large grapevine at work in Nepal.

During his latest stay in Nepal, Tashi has been searching for a suitable building site. He has examined over a hundred parcels of land, and now he has finally found an ideal spot. The site lies in the countryside alongside a stream in the city district of Jorpati and has its own spring. The idyllic site is an important trump-card for the future of the Orphanage: Tashi wants to see that the Orphanage can look after its own future on a solid financial basis in the long-term, so that it can make it over the hill if he can no longer work and the funds flow more weakly from Switzerland. Tashi plans to build a guesthouse with restaurant on the stream alongside the Orphanage, whose income will be able to contribute to the running of the Orphanage.

Tashi has already bought half of the splendid site, while he has the option on the other half, and he hopes to be able to begin with the building of the new Home next winter.

### **Sertshang Orphanage Home**

The Association supports the Orphanage of the Tibetan doctor Tashi Sertshang in Kathmandu, Nepal. All donations to the Association account go 100 percent to the benefit of the Home. The administrative costs are carried by the Association's board.

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