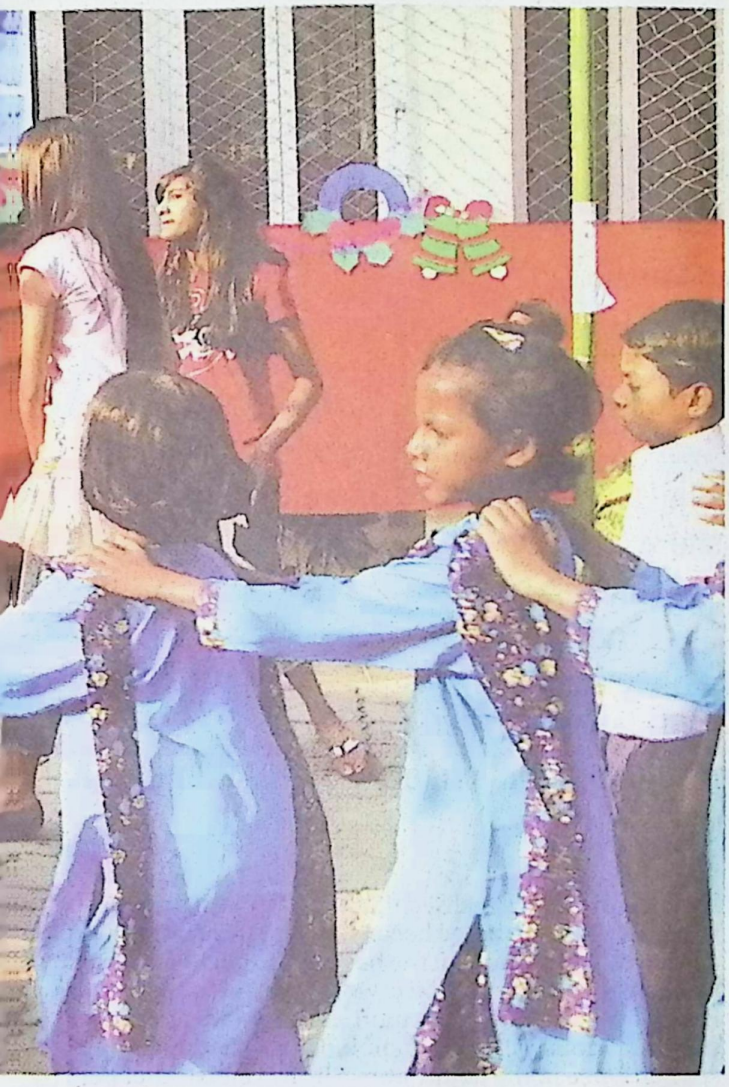


kind of bowling going on with filled plastic soda bottles and one of the teachers asked the kids to join. Two tiny girls, one of whom is named Moni, a child with a shaven head and tremendous *joi de vivre* (also a very innovative dancer, think Martha Graham or Twyla Tharp but Bangali), had waited patiently for their turn at bowling. They got to the head of the line and the father of a rather rotund young man took the ball, no, snatched it, out of Moni's hands and pushed her and her companion aside and handed his son the ball. He did it with an air of irritation and contempt. For me, it was, of course, shocking. But what was more heartbreaking was that Moni and her friend did not seem to mind at all. It was not a gentle push they were shoved, and they hopped away to the next interesting thing. Part of their reaction of course stems from the fact that they are children and don't process offensive behaviour the way grown-ups do but it occurred to me that this is their life: being shoved aside, shooed away like pests, their insignificance being emphasised again and again in million ways everyday. Their expectations of life are, and may always remain low which some Zen types would say is a good thing but not in this case. This is not about detachment, this is about their position in life which is low on the totem pole and over which they have no say. It is easy to be Zen when you know where your next meal is coming from.

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Besides all the practical results, raising their expectations, giving them the desire to want more or, more importantly, expect more out of life and know that they actually deserve more will be among the greatest things Aparna will achieve with her efforts on behalf of these children.

It is easy to vilify the well to do in any country, or at least draw attention to their dissipated corrupt ways T'olstoy did it well, Fitzgerald too but they also showed their vulnerability and perhaps their lack of instincts when it comes to dealing with the less fortunate. As soon as I got over my self righteous shock at what I perceived to be the discompassion of many of the parents and students (I shan't elaborate on a decked out woman who actually tried to haggle with one of the students who was selling greeting cards on Streetwise's behalf. I saw how hard the principal and his equally kind wife who is vice principal of the school, worked to make Aparna and the kids feel welcome, as well as some of the teachers. Also, at one point three of the mothers started dancing with them, engaging and smiling and being affectionate.

In the end the students, the parents and the efforts of the principal and his wife raised over one hundred thousand takas for Streetwise. And the only person scarred by complexity of the third world events of the afternoon was me. So, in the final analysis, no damage done.