

Claire Vellut is no more. A light went out.

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(translation)

Belgian , she had devoted her life to the fight against leprosy in India, to even adopt Indian citizenship. We met her in 1980.

Gabrielle Lefèvre

There are characters whose disappearance can only affect us as their influence was our landmark in the fight against inequality, social injustice. This is the case of Claire Vellut. We met 33 years ago in Tamil Nadu, India where she founded 25 years ago with Dr. Hemerijckx the Centre of Polambakkam, a small village in a region that had many leprosy patients. To meet a maximum number of people, she had created the system of "clinic under the trees" that is to say, mobile units for consultation in villages or on roadsides.



Claire Vellut and her "clinic under the trees" in 1980. © Photos Gabrielle Lefèvre

It was the best prevention because it enabled to inform the largest number of patients and their families about the earliest symptoms of the disease and the importance of taking medicines regularly to prevent resistance to these. The objective being to avoid mutilation that prevent patients from working and exclude them from social and family circle.

Under the trees, Claire Vellut was treating, distributing medicines and most importantly, collecting thousands of data (over 30,000 patients followed in 25 years) which served for in-depth studies by more than thirty laboratories worldwide.

She said: "We should not take leprosy regardless of the overall economic and social problems. Moreover, for the people, health is not the priority but to ensure its survival and eat every day. We must therefore cooperate to all the possibilities of development of the populations."

And about Belgium, then she said : "Belgium ? I like to come back, I know a lot of youth who really want to help developing countries. But one should not forget the minorities still suffering from inequality, even in a country as rich as Belgium. Still, I am shocked by the waste that I see here. I was walking through a department store in the section for food for dogs and cats, when so many people suffer from hunger. I saw the waste of paper, fuel, energy. In fact, there are few really essential things in all this display of wealth."

After 55 years in India, she came back to Belgium because of health problems due to her age. Monday, September 16, she was still able to attend the inaugural meeting of the International Leprosy Congress in Brussels. The following Friday, her heart - so generous - stopped beating.

<http://www.entreleslignes.be/entre-les-lignes/gabrielle-lefevre-zooms-curieux/1505-claire-vellut-nest-plus-une-lumiere-sest-eteinte.html>