

## Report of our three-month experience in the tribal village Ghosaldanga

20<sup>th</sup> of October 2012 – our first day in the village: We remember plenty of children's eyes looking at us in curiosity. Who are those strangers, who appear in our village?

We, Judith Drexler and Hannah Beckmann, appeared in Ghosaldanga, after hearing about Martin Kämpchen's work in the villages from acquaintances. We immediately liked the project, because of its private and small background and it's authentic work. Therefore we hoped we could bring in our ideas here and really achieve something.

Despite our hope it was hard to imagine the life in the village and our work there. We thought of the villagers as reserved and living in their own world. We still remember our wish to be invited for tea just once. This wish should become true...

We arrived at the villages, when Durga Puja, in West Bengal one of the biggest Hindu festivals of the year, was going on. Because of this festival, the school was closed, so we had the first two weeks to get used to our Indian life. We played with the kids in front of our door, visited a lot of villages near by and our wish to get an invitation for tea also became true immediately. Against all expectations we were busy the whole day, although work in RSV hadn't begun yet.



*While making masks with the children*

In the beginning of our time in the village we discovered, that the developing work has gotten farer than we thought. The big amount of water pumps, the relatively constant electricity supply and the fact that we sometimes were even asked for our mobile phone number for communication supported this impression.

Before the school was official opened again, we started to teach in the evening school (homework tutoring) of Ghosaldanga. Here we got all the freedom we wanted to structure our lessons. Therefore we could create an own English teaching program for the lessons. We practised with the High School students three times a week and concentrated on topics like the daily life of the pupils, the human body, presentations of self-made posters and simple grammar.

After the festival our every day life was like this: The morning we spent in the primary school RSV, which is supported by the “Freundeskreis Ghosaldanga und Bishnubati e.V.”. There we joined classes and replaced missing teachers.

But we never replaced teachers, who were present, because work in school should function and also functions without the help of volunteers.

Our afternoon was filled by our projects. Our most extensive project was the creation of a Musical Scene with those girls, who are living in the Hostel on the property of RSV School. It was a combination of singing, dancing and acting. While doing this, we took care that the girls could bring in their culture by performing a Santal dance and could also experience new forms of performing by playing a roaring lion. More and more we got to know the girls and noticed, how interested they are in German life. So we made up the plan to take them on a journey to bring them out of their known surroundings and develop their view of the world.



*Seeing the ocean for the first time*

Martin Kämpchen supported our idea and told us about the long tradition of educational trips, although nobody could realise one in the last years.

So we made a trip together with Pintu Gosh, one of the girls' teachers. We travelled to Falta and visited the "Bose" – research institute next to the Ganga, in the south of Kolkata. We went on to Sagar Dip, a small island in the muzzle delta of Ganga and finished our journey with a short trip to Kolkata. To keep our journey in mind we organized a seminar afterwards.

Despite from the girls project we also developed a program for the 9<sup>th</sup> of December (opening of the new Hostel building) with the Hostel boys together with Jakob Dörr, the other German volunteer, who lived in the neighbour village Bishnubati. Together we prepared a small intercultural program, in which we connected a German song and Santali dance and the other way round. The product included for example the German song „Die Affen rasen durch den Wald“ (The monkeys are running through the forest) or with Indian accent: „Di Afen rajen duis den Oald“).

The nutrition program in Ghosaldanga was already running very well, before we joined. We came twice a week to play with the children, to help giving the food and to improve the mothers' and children's awareness of hygiene. Parboti, leader of the program, had no computer, so we also continued Kathrin Klein's list of participating people and ingredients of the food. And of course chatting with Parboti was a nice time out for us.

Three times a week we ended our day by teaching in Evening School.

In addition to our fixed program we visited Dr. Monika Golembiewski's hospital two times, arranged a first-aid course in Evening School and after Martin requested us to visit the Tagore museum in Santiniketan, we took some students there together with Jakob.

In our time in the village we saw the product of highly effective developing work, but also noticed the daily life's problems, the organization is searching a solution for:

The little wooden sticks, instead of piercings in the infected noses, the student of primary school, who started to cry in daily morning talk, because he was so hungry or the missing ability to be punctual and keep an appointment. Because of that excursions, like visiting the Tagore museum, and seminars could never start on time.

In general unreliability is a big problem, which is also caused by the villager's inability to say "No!" to obligations, they cannot handle. That's why they cannot uphold their promises sometimes, although they always intend to help by promising.

When we asked one of the elder students about their career aspirations, they often answered with: "Teacher". "Teacher" is a job, the children are getting to know every day as a role model. They do not have any knowledge about other possibilities for their career and future. To improve the student's ability to structure their future and reach their aims the organisation arranged a workshop in December 2012, which was lead by P. David Solomon SJ (from Dumka in Jharkhand).

But when it comes to reaching their aims English is still a big problem for some of the High School students. In Evening school and in the lessons with the Hostel students we practiced a lot of dialogues. We noticed, that a lot of the students had big problems, understanding the

connection between the sentences. For example one student wished “Have fever!” instead of “Have fun!” while she was selling imaginary tickets for cinema and the stress of the presentations made another student answer with “Bishnubati!”, when she was asked: “What is your name?”.

Such situations made us all laugh many times. Right from the beginning the students as well as the adults showed us how openhearted they are. We have never experienced such hospitality in our lives before. They invited us for tea and little snacks and with their open ears they guaranteed that we could always come to their house for help. We had to remind ourselves to not tell them about every little problem we had, because they always try to manage everything.

Furthermore every student, we had, was eager to learn and diligent. They definitely were the most thankful students we ever had. Because of these character traits the students of the Evening School improved their English faster than we had ever imagined. They absorb everything you give to them. So we discovered perfect English sentences on our “Fare Well” presents, which we have only taught them once.

Ghosaldanga became home to us in this short time.

What touched us the most, were the people, who let us be a part of their culture without any reservations and gave us the feeling, that we could really achieve something here.

We are thankful for this time that we will never forget!

Yours

Judith and Hannah

PS.: If you want to know more about our time in Ghosaldanga, you can click on our Blog. Unfortunately it is in German, but maybe you want to train your German a little bit? Then it could help: [judithhannahinindien.wordpress.com](http://judithhannahinindien.wordpress.com)



*Foto: Jakob Dörr*