

Six months in Bishnubati

My name is Jakob Dörr. After passing my A-Levels in 2012 I decided to do volunteer work in the villages of Bishnubati and Ghosaldanga as well as in the Primary School RSV. During the 6 months I spent there I lived in and was taken care of by the family of Sanyasi Lohar, the artist from Bishnubati. I therefore lived directly in the village, together with the people I was working with.

During the preparation for my stay I was very cautious not to make too many plans on what to do with the children and adults because neither did I know the exact situation in the villages nor the needs and abilities of the children I was about to teach. During the first week in the villages I was observing the projects and the children, after that time I thought about how and where my help was wished and needed. After that I started my work. I took Spoken English Classes in the Coaching Centers of RSV (in the morning) and Bishnubati (in the evening) and I started a Computer Class for younger and older students in Bishnubati. Additionally I helped with classes and class preparation in the primary section of RSV and I helped taking care of a Nutrition Program (initiated by Sanyasi) in a nearby, much poorer Santhal village.

On top of that there were often little things or problems where I could provide technical or mental assistance. Two other volunteers, Judith and Hannah stayed in Ghosaldanga at the same time and we became friends very quickly as we did many things together. I did most of my activities in RSV with them, for example teaching the hostel boys a multicultural dance and present it with them at the inauguration of the new hostel building.

The teachers and workers in the villages were always supportive of us. I have formed deep friendships with them.

The initial restraint of the villagers in Bishnubati soon disappeared more and more and I formed relationships with many of them. This is mainly because I discovered that most of the life is happening on the streets. So I tried to spend much of my free time there. That way I played with the big and small children many unknown games and taught them new games. I played football and volleyball with the teenagers of the village, and I even came into contact with the completely uneducated old generation. My self-taught Bengali was very helpful in order to be able to communicate with everybody. Over the time I got more and more invitations for tea or rice beer. In the many conversations I have learned much not only about Santhal culture and life, but also about the characters, views and the sense of self-esteem of the villagers, especially of the young generation.

The simple life in the villages has given me a whole new perspective on our western lifestyle and has shown me new sides to my own personality. I believe that I could give the villagers, especially the children and teenagers, much of myself (new games, new views, new self-esteem), but at the same time they have given me so much in return and I am very thankful for this wonderful experience. After a very emotional and tearful farewell program that made me speechless, it was very for me to let go of the village, my many friends and the life. But I will return as soon as possible, this is what I have promised so many people.

Greetings from Frankfurt am Main, Germany
Jakob Dörr