

Betreff: 9. Newsletter September 2011 - English version**9. Newsletter September 2011 - English version****August- month of festivals in India**

Those who travel to India will more than likely experience a puja or another religious festivity. During festival times, public life is reduced to a minimum; shops and offices remain closed. August is the month of festivals. In India, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Christians and other religious communities coexist mostly peacefully. Every religious community has its own festivities and holydays that are not rarely celebrated by everyone. Eighty percent of all Indians are Hindus. Celebrating has got a vital meaning in India since it is for many Indians the only possibility to create some variation in their normally somewhat repetitive everyday life. This applies especially to the rural population. Besides the countless Hindu Gods, there are often local or village Gods that are worshipped by the respective communities during special pujas (religious celebrations). We as a school often have to bargain with our pupils' parents about free days. It happens that children stay away from school for several day since they have to participate in celebrations or do pilgrimages with their families. Tolerance for every religion and deity is indispensable and we have to find our own ways to deal with it. Our annual schedule takes into account the main festivities. Furthermore, we attempt to integrate them in project works and the organization of daily life in the school. For example, we celebrated Rakshya Bandhan, the famous Raki celebration, Nuakhai (which resembles somewhat Thanksgiving) and the Ganesh Puja honouring the elephant God in August and September with the children. Today's newsletter tells you more about it.

The month of august was month of festival in India and our school cannot stay away for the festival. We planned our learning activities and projects according the festival. The festival projects are good for the new children to get familiar with new environment and feel comfortable in school.



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News about our school

Projects and pujas in the Gaiatreeschool



Rakshya Bandhan

Rakshya bandhan symbolizes sisters love and prayers for her brothers well-being, and the brothers lifelong vow to protect her. This festival is celebrated on the full moon day (Shravan Poornima) of the Shravan month of the Hindu lunar and solar calendar (Most of the time it falls in the end of July or beginning of August). We celebrate Rakshya Bandhan by tying of a rakhi (holy thread), by the sister on the wrist of her brother. The unique thing about this festival is that even unrelated boys and men are also adopted as brothers and can be tied Raskhi and they too commit to a lifelong obligation to protect and look after.

We celebrated this festival in our school by working on the theme of Rakshya Bandhan. All girls tied Rakhi on the wrist of all the boys. The children learnt the significance of the festival. They were very happy to celebrate it.

Ganesh Puja (Worship) 1 september 2011

Lord Ganesh is the son of Siva and Parvathi. It is the day Lord Siva declared that Lord Ganesh is superior to all the gods. Ganesh is worshipped as the god of wisdom, prosperity and good fortune and traditionally invoked at the beginning of any new venture or at the start of travel. As Lord Ganesh is the god of wisdom, we celebrate in school especially in Orissa with enthusiasm and devotion. This is also a very auspicious day for the pupils to begin the education and go to school.

We too celebrated this festival in the school. It was a very big event for children and parents, especially for the parents. All the parents came to the school and they themselves organized the special lunch for children. They sponsored the lunch and they cooked also. It was the most delicious food we had in our school ever since the beginning of the school as it was prepared by the parents. Their active participation in this special occasion made the event special and it gives us lot of courage and optimism. Their participation signifies that they are really an integral part of our education system.

Nuakhai 2 September 2011

Nuakhai is a harvesting festival and it is mainly celebrated in Western Orissa. The word nua means new and khai means food, i.e. the farmers' cook newly harvested rice in this occasion. It's a very big festival for western Orissa people. Significance of this festival is to welcome the new rice of the season which brings happiness and prosperity to family. According to the Hindu calendar it is observed on the fifth day of the lunar fortnight of the August–September and the day before Lord Ganesh Birthday. On this day the whole family comes together and worships and eats delicious food on this day. This is the only one occasion where people forget their bitterness among themselves and come together and celebrate.

We do also have a project in our school. We tried to replicate the same activities in the school as in the family. All the children were very happy and did their assigned work perfectly. They learned new vocabulary related to the festival and cook Khir (Sweet Rice with milk and sugar) and ate together, too. It was a nice feeling for the children.



Sri Aurobindo's Birthday and Independence day of India – 15th August 2011

Since our Gaiatreeschool is a Sri Aurobindo School, we enthusiastically celebrated Sri Aurobindo's (1872 – 1950) Birthday and 64th India's Independence Day. Aurobindo, a widely recognized scholar, spent his entire life in the struggle for independence of his country. Born in Calcutta, he lived in Pondy in South India later on where he founded an Ashram and the teachings of Integral Yoga. His fellow, Mira Alfassa, also known as "The Mother", joined him and initiated the foundation of the universal city Auroville in 1956 which is situated some 10 km south of Pondy. There, Aurobindo's ideas are lived, schools were founded, communities created, research was conducted and a new way of communal living was attempted. Aurobindo wrote numerous books and hundreds of poems; moreover, he was an inspiring teacher. The fact that his birthday and Independence Day coincide seems too meaningful to be accidental. As a matter of fact, he contributed considerably to this great step in his country's history. At Gaiatreeschool, we all worked hard, a day before to decorate the school along with children. Sadanada and Bablu spent the whole day on 13th August to make the Mandap for hoisting our national flag. In the morning of August 15th, all the children with their parents came to school for flag hoisting. After the ceremony sweets were distributed to the children.

Despite this joyful occasion, we have to admit to ourselves that India may have attained independence 64 years ago but she has not yet got freedom from corruption. Many ministers and bureaucrats are in jail due to corruption. So Anna Hazare, the eminent social activist, was in hunger strike in order to have a strong Jan Lokpal Bill to check the high level corruption and bring back enormous amounts of black money kept in Swiss banks. His determined action may bring India one step closer to true freedom.



Sponsorships – social commitment with affection and passion



...from an email by Agnieszka Pagels from Poland, 18th August 2011

"Dear Anke, dear Mike,

Thank you so much for your interesting message! We are simply amazed by your activities in India. It's an absolutely genius plan! Our sponsorship is very important to us and we hope that our children Helena (11) and Dawid (6, and a fresher at Schkola school, by the way!) will learn from it. We wish that our children experience social commitment with affection and passion.

We hope to get the opportunity to get to know little Krishna a bit better. This would be very nice. We would like to prepare a welcome-package for him at the next occasion but we are not sure what could be



*useful as a gift. Do you maybe have hints for us (about the content, the right time and the logistics)? Thank you in advance!
We have been living in Jasna Gora for four years now and enjoy the beautiful nature and the many children that live here. As soon as you are back around, we would like to invite you to our home.
We are enthusiastic about the commitment, courage and passion that you invest in the project!*

Say hello to the Himalayas and to little Krishna and his family as soon as this is possible ?

Yours,

Agnieszka Pagels"

For Krishna we have a sponsor

Obviously, we were able to find a committed and loving sponsor family for little Krishna. Altogether, we have sponsorships for 14 out of the 19 children to the present date. So we are still looking for sponsors for 5 children – these could be individuals, families or learning groups and school classes. Of course, assuming a sponsorship means the obligation to contribute 120 Euros of school money for the child's education and to establish a closer relationship to the sponsored child. Our school children are still young and often, even their parents do not understand the point in these relationships. For them, the "West" seems far away and is simply out of their imagination. Many of them do neither know how to write nor to read. It is not a rare occurrence that we have to convince them to send their children to school at all since they do not grasp the significance of education. In our Gaiatreeschool, we struggle to add some spirit to sponsorships, to make it a real experience for the children. Sponsor letters to the children are read out, the children handcraft small gifts, in the morning and final circles we tell them stories about this far world of ours. In October, even a project work about "Germany" will take place. Sometimes, packages are sent from one continent to another. Much later, when our children grow up, they will be able to read and write English themselves. Then, they will understand much better who their sponsors are and that they were the ones making it possible for them to attend the Gaiatreeschool. Until then, we would like to ask you for understanding and patience. What we can see already is the happiness and the smiles in the little faces. We can also see the love with which our employees treat them. This is not for granted in Indian schools and it would not be possible without the help of our friends and, as we could read above, neighbours from bordering countries such as Poland. In the following newsletters, we will introduce two of the new pupils each. More information about the children and the sponsorships can also be found here.



Foto right: Krishna and his parents

Mukesh and Amir still waiting for a sponsor ...



Mukesh Meher

Mukesh is a rather quiet and calm boy. He was born in Dhumdhara on 3rd June 2005. His older brother attends the government school in Turla. Mukesh learns quickly and loves listening to the teachers and the other children. He does not seem to enjoy being in the centre of attention. He likes drawing and pointing and shows a lot of creativity. His family seems to be happy with what they have. The parents regularly attend the school meetings and contribute wherever they can.



Amir Sabar

Amir was born in the village of Bramani on July 15th 2007. He has a six-year old sister. His mother is expecting another baby in the beginning of the new year. His father is a worker and does not have a permanent job. His family are tribals, that is, native inhabitants of Orissa. In the first days already it became clear that Amir enjoys drawing and painting. With his shining bright eyes, he radiates friendliness and happiness. He is popular among the other children and likes talking. He loves

school a lot.

Short News! Sonstiges!

Birthday of Ramprasad



14th August is birthday of Ramprasad, the orphan who lost his parents and siblings due to starvation in 2009. His Birthday was celebrated for the first time. He cut his birthday cake in the evening. Twinkle cooked all his favorite food on his special day. He enjoyed his day, seeing his new clothes and making a wish.

Construction of water tank is ready

Finally the construction of water tank is complete. The order has been placed for 300 liter of water tank and within a week time it will delivered. In this part of Orissa, it takes unreasonably too long to complete any construction work due to unprofessionalism of workers and not adhering to the contract. In the last week of September, solar water pump will be installed.



Internship Report deals with German-Indian cooperation

Our former intern Sabine has submitted her internship report for grading. Under the title "Intercultural Cooperation in Non Profit-Organizations in India exemplified by the Gaiatree Foundation", she has elaborated the specifics of intercultural cooperation based on the people involved and the frame conditions. First of all, she used dimensional models to describe the cultural backgrounds of the involved people. On this basis, she identified problems that have their roots in cultural differences and presented their consequences with the help of real Gaiatree sample cases. Besides, the solutions that have been developed so far were introduced. The report pursues the aim to find and explain new possible solutions that might be implemented in the future to further facilitate the intercultural cooperation at Gaiatree Foundation.

Sabine's observations reveal some partly significant cultural differences. These were grouped in the categories communication, organization, gender roles, hierarchies and bureaucracy, prejudices and expectations, dealing with conflicts, independence and proactivity, and self evaluation.

A major problem is the lack of a common language. English may be spoken by most involved people but is nobody's mother tongue. This results in frequent misunderstandings. Consequently, further language education for all members of the organization is absolutely recommended.

When it comes to organization and hierarchies, Indian and German approaches differ considerably. The Indian society shows strong hierarchies and authorities. Consequently, it is sometimes difficult for Anke and Mike to confine their activities to the desired consulting roles because they appear too controlling, which creates tensions in the private relationships with the organization's members and employees.

In her report, Sabine gives many concrete examples that will now be discussed with the local partners. This is a promising basis for the further organizational development, especially for honest and transparent relationships among members. Considering the different approaches to conflicts – research has identified a tendency to avoid them with Indians while Germans tend to be assertive and even provoke conflicts at times – this appears somewhat challenging. The reason for this could be the so-called relationship orientation, which international research has repeatedly identified to be very strong in the Indian society and significantly weaker in Germany. In India, problems are kept for oneself and discussions are avoided so as to prevent unnecessary tensions in one's personal relations. For us Germany, there is much to learn, especially tolerance and empathy. The process of mutual approaching is still in the beginning phase.

The comprehensive report provides all externals with profound insight in the way of working, project work and the interpersonal relationships, the daily problems and challenges on the spot in India. In her report, Sabine does not only focus on the bright sides of our cooperation and its successes. She also reveals the challenges that are part of such a vision and highlights the good will and determination with which all Gaiatree Foundation members struggle to find and implement solutions in practice. For those who plan on coming to India or even supporting the Gaiatree Foundation, this basic work constitutes a recommendable document for preparation and insight. For us, the people working on the spot, it functions as a mirror and provides some valuable solutions for our future work.

Thank you, Sabine, for your interesting views and insights in our work.

PS: The complete work will be accessible on our website soon (only in German, though). It's a valuable resource for all India travelers, volunteers, and people that are involved in similar projects.

interessante Beiträge

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