

## **Balamitra Model School Report 2006/07**

Balamitra is a Tribal Education Program run by the Visakhapatnam based NGO Samata. For 20 years Samata has been working in the tribal areas of the Eastern Ghats in Andhra Pradesh, South India. The organization provides legal support for the Tribals and demands for sustainable development from the government.

One of the important activities of Samata is the Education Program. Samata runs schools in 30 villages in the hills of Visakhapatnam district and a model school in Sagar Nagar at the outskirts of Vizag.

The Balamitra Education Program was created to enable tribal children in remote villages to have access to primary education, which is not provided by the government. At the village schools the students have opportunity to strengthen their cultural identity and traditional knowledge as part of their education. To accomplish this Balamitra has adopted some ideas of the Waldorf Education.

Tribal youths are trained as community teachers and are introduced to the art of creative and joyful teaching. An important approach to this is to take in the anthroposophical teaching methods.

For the Model School the School year 2006/07 brought a lot of changes. In July the school shifted to a new building, which provides more space for the classes and as it is located in a quieter and greener area, a huge playground for the children. Due to the increased capacity of the new school building we could welcome some new children, so that now a total number of 34 students studied at the model school.

In autumn six volunteers from Germany came to live and work with Samata for 10 to 11 months. This was possible because Samata has been taken up in the list of organizations where German volunteers can serve their social year from the "Friends of the education art of Rudolf Steiner e.V."

Teaching at our school was a fruitful experience especially for three of the volunteers as they have studied at a Waldorf school for 13 years themselves. Meanwhile it is inspiring to have volunteers with anthroposophical background with us. It was the first time for Samata to have volunteers staying almost a whole year and it was an interesting and enriching experience for both sides.

What is more, an experienced Waldorf Teacher, Kristina was a real boon for our project. In the 5 months she stayed at the Model School she held regular training sessions in which she introduced how to teach in the Waldorf way.

Not only Balamitra staff benefited from the training, even teachers from Jasver School, Vishakhapatnam, took part in the meetings as their school is adopting some Waldorf ideas to give their students a more creative education.

Due to the input of the volunteers a lot of new projects have been done, like building a clay oven and some new tables for class V, painting a wall of the school and tinkering papier-mâché masks involving both the children and the teachers. New epochs were held, including a research on the plant life at the surroundings of the school and the geographical exploration of the local and the national landscape patterns.

A solar oven has been built in weeks of hard work, so that it is possible now to cook rice and other meals just by using the energy of the sun.

Some of the lessons could be held at "the Farm", a 9,5 acres piece of land, in the untouched forest area near Visakhapatnam. There the children could study the plant life in a beautiful, natural surrounding.

The vision of Samata is to centralize all sections of the organisation in one place, the offices, the accommodation for members, their families, friends and volunteers and the Balamitra Model School on this property. If the dream can become true essentially depends on the generosity of our supporters.

As the Balamitra Model School is also a training and resource centre for the 40 Balamitra Schools in the remote villages, two major trainings were held here as well as some other visits by smaller groups of village teachers.

During the trainings, in which teachers, Model school students and volunteers as well as Samata staff participated, many new insights mainly based on Waldorf education, like rhythmic activities, black board art, mental maths, sports, speech, drumming, carpentry and pottery were introduced to the participants. Primary level history, geography, plant and animal life lessons through working with nature around them and tapping the experiential knowledge of tribal people, was an important focus of the trainings, but also guidance on hygiene and Hoemeo medicine was provided.

Other events, which will stay in the mind of the whole Balamitra-family, include our festivals and the School Bazaar.

On Holi-Festival, the Indian celebration of colours, for example, the children had heaps of fun throwing coloured powders and water at each other. As the sun is setting the children love to do their traditional dance, Dhimsa, on these occasions, accompanied by some of them playing the drums.

Other festivals we had together were Christmas and New Years as well as other traditional Indian festivals like the snake festival.

One of the busiest times of the year all of us had in preparation of the Annual School Day.

For the School Bazaar the students had tinkered little handicrafts such as bookmarks, various percussion instruments, self stitched bags and colorful lamps. The children of class II also sold soaps in four different aromas, which they made in a project with two of our volunteers.

In each of our three classrooms the children exhibited their workbooks and pictures from their lessons.

In the later afternoon the students presented some of their recent classroom activities and songs in English and Telugu.

The highlight of the performances was the play Eklavya, adapted from tribal mythology, which class V rehearsed with Kristina.

Another highlight for the children in this year was the recording of their traditional songs. All India Radio staff visited Balamitra Model School twice to tape their performance. The children were very proud and astonished as they could listen to their own voices on the radio.

As the hot summer sun intensified and even the first signs of the upcoming monsoon season were visible, it was time for our school to wind up their doors and give the children well-deserved summer holidays, which they could spend with their families in their remote home-villages. Before that each of the children received a personal report looking back on their efforts in the past year. A very special moment especially for the class 5 students, as they got admission to government run tribal schools passing a test in May.

This leaves the Balamitra Model School with only class 2 and 3 and a total of 27 students for the next school year, as more effort is laid on the work in the village schools with our teachers visiting the schools regularly for supervision and trainings.