



Newsletter 01 - November 2006

Content:

- Introducing Samata
- Village schools
- Teachers Training
- Volunteering with Samata
- Projects
- Contact

Introducing Samata

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 40 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.



Balamitra Students praying at Dipavali

Village Schools

This April Samata and the communities decided to provide a roof over the children's heads and to construct new tribal schools, which was possible due to the help of Action for India's Development (AID), USA. The community worked hard to collect the wood and build mud walls. However, as rains set in early this year, the walls in some schools collapsed before the tiles reached the villages and we had to wait till September to put up the structures again. In one village the school completely collapsed after construction due to landslides and the village itself is being relocated to a safer place.



Village school in Odiyavalasa, Sovva Panchayat

Some medical kits could be given to schools and have been of great use during this monsoon period of illnesses, not only to the children, but to the community as a whole. However, the structures are only a bare minimum and cannot be considered an adequate structure to address primary education and health issues yet. Proper floors, toilets, drinking water and space for kitchen gardens need to be provided to build community schools, but it is hard work to provide even bare minimum requirements for children.

Teachers training

In the morning of October 14th we inaugurated the teachers' training program at Balamitra model school in Sagar Nagar. Students, 41 teachers from the village schools, volunteers from Germany and Samata staff participated.

The teachers' training is held regularly every three months and is a good possibility for every teacher of the 40 tribal schools to share their experiences and get new inspiration for their lessons.



Teachers meeting in the morning

During the 5 days 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, is an important focus of the training.

The training program was conducted with live exercises by the children of the model school, who gave glimpses of their activities in each subject through these practical exercises. They did exercises in village mapping and collection of information on village census, seasonal calendar of agriculture and forestry in the geography session.

On the third day an experienced doctor gave guidance on Homeo medicine and first aid. The teachers were given orientation on body immunity system and performed a role-play on vaccination with students.

The next training will be held in January.



A young teacher is participating in the carpentry workshop

Volunteering with Samata

This autumn six volunteers from Germany came to live and work with Samata for 10 to 11 months. This is possible because Samata has been taken up in the list of organizations



Volunteers Mira and Ria teaching class I outdoors

where German volunteers can serve their social year from the “Friends of the education art of Rudolf Steiner e.V.”.

For the three boys the 11 months they are staying with Samata are an alternative to the German military service and for the three girls, who will only stay for 10 months, it’s a possibility to discover another culture after finishing school in Germany.

The working fields of the volunteers are various. Mainly they work as teachers at Balamitra School in the classes 1, 2 and 5, teaching English, Mathematics,

Geography, Sports, music, art, etc. Teaching at our school is 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. Another working field is in the Samata office, where they can help with the documentation work of several campaigns and write articles.

It’s the first time for Samata to have volunteers staying almost a whole year and it will be an interesting and enriching experience for both sides.



Volunteers Desiree and Robin at Balamitra school

Projects

This term started with a lot of new projects at the model school involving both the children and the volunteers. First two of the volunteers built a clay oven using just clay from the school sports ground and stones so that now it is possible to do bakeries like bread and cakes at Balamitra.

At the same time class V did a research on the plant life at the surroundings of the school and collected some useful information about the structure and qualities of the leaves.

After finishing the science and herbology project class V focused on Geography and explored the local and the national landscape patterns. What is more the children traveled to a local Buddhist monastery's ruins and got to know the story of King Ashoka.

Meanwhile the school was experiencing some difficulties with the gas supply so Flo, a volunteer from Germany, spent most of his time planning and building a solar oven.

This was quite a hard task as it was difficult to purchase the right materials in Visakhapatnam and the oven was once destroyed almost completely by heavy rain.

With the solar oven it is possible to cook rice and other meals just by using the energy of the sun.

While we are having some new subjects due to the input of the volunteers such as Drumming, Flute and Eurhythmy, our main focus is still on teaching English, Telugu and Mathematics.



Children help to build the clay oven

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Appeal:

You can contribute to our efforts by way of donations in materials or money. Financial contributions to Samata are exempt from Income Tax under Section 80G and has a contribution regulation act (FCRA) number from the Central Government which allows it to receive foreign funds. Please make Cheques payable to 'Samata'. Legal Status:

Registered under Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860 (No.554/90)
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