

Development assistance in South-India

“India – the heaven of millions of gods and the hell of millions of poor, holy cows and hungry people, astrology and nuclear weapons, transmigration of souls and software production.” Quotation from a guide book about India. In reality the subcontinent is an area of extreme. But if you think about the expanse from the cold Himalaja over the deserts to the tropical south so this condition of this country will be clearer. Nevertheless you can see and feel the extreme everywhere: the food is spicy or very sweet, the people work very hard or not at all, ...

The state Tamil Nadu in the southeast has about 60 Mio. inhabitants in an area about 136.400 km².



Even the East Coast is deprived by the Monsoon the country has a wonderful landscape. In the opposite the western part of the south gets a lot of water during the Monsoon season. That is, because there is the mountain range of the West- and the East Ghats in between. The Monsoon season in the east starts in October and is normally not so heavy than in the west and sometimes it will completely miss. Modern techniques of dam building saves the water during the rainy season and so the fields can also be irrigated during try periods, and also it prevents the fields and areas below the mountains against flood. The farmers

are planting rice, coconuts, peanuts, sugar cane, olive plants and pulse, bananas, rubber, coffee and tea. The mother tongue of this state is Tamil, which is the foundation of the Dravidien languages and the Tamil people are very proud of this. In the south the Indian have a very dark color of skin, that is because the original inhabitants have not been mixed with the Aryans they have conquered the country via today's Pakistan from the north.

1989 Friedl visited the south of India for his first time. He joined a group, who where helping to start a development project organized by the church in Austria. The group started with the foundation work for a community house. Friedl was so impressed by the poverty of the people living in this area, that he takes the decision to support this people also in the future. So he and the local priest Don Bosco started the project “Godchild”. Education is the best way to help this people, so Austrian families take care about a godchild and spend a certain amount of money per year, so that this child is able to get a proper education. There are at least two arguments for this project. First the growth of the population will be slowed down, because educated people in India have only one to two children. Second you are not able to change the corrupt government, but educated Indian will change this situation. In India it is obligation to attend school until the 5. degree this is comparable with primary school, but nobody checks if the children are really going to school and the education in the government school is inadequate. The Indian government is not interested to educate its population, because uneducated people are easier to control and in this country still the cast



system is up and for people in lower casts the life is much more difficult. For only 70 cents per day a child is able to visit a private school, the school fees, schoolbooks, clothing, food and the boarding will be paid with this amount of money. Even sometimes not all of the money is used and the rest will be used for medical help if it is necessary in the family of this child. Social insurance is not available.



1992 the last group from Austria had visit the project in India and has started with the foundation work for a big boarding school for about 160 pupils. So Friedl thought in 1998 a group should again check the project onsite and help a little bit with the ongoing work at the boarding school. And so 6 people where found to go to India. Maria S. from Styria a social worker, Maria H. and Romana H. form Upper Austria two ICU nurses, Paulo a 87 years old priest and Indian expert, Christine and Alex S. from Lower Austria. During two meetings up front the group was prepared for the journey and had got his tasks. Monday the 21st of Sept. the adventure started. At

07:55 am the plain took of with the 6 people and more than 300 kg of luggage. With an intermediate stop in London they group traveled on to Chennai (Madras) the capital of Tamil Nadu.

06:00 am we traveled per a rented bus to Pagandai Kootu Road for 5:30 hours. The streets are not very well and so the luggage and we got shook very well. The village is about 200 km in the south of Chennai. Our accommodation was very luxurious for this area. We lived at the house of Don Bosco, who is leading the project onsite, and we had 3 rooms with kinds of beds, wood frame with stretched ropes, a shower and a water toilet, maybe the only one in a surrounding of many kilometers. This sanitation was very primitive, but useful and even better than expected. For the ordinary people the nature is used for toilet and for a shower the people take a pot with water and a beaker and go with this behind a shed made



of palm leaves to spread the water over their

body. The climate was very kind to us, because the temperature was between 25° and 30° C, but the humidity was high. Fans at the ceiling helped to cool the body down and a second advantage was, that the fan blew the mosquito's away. Sometimes the mosquito's made it difficult to find some sleep during the night. We were surprised about the quality of the food. The Indian women produce real work of art on the hearth out of mud. Lots of vegetables, rice, bananas and sometimes chicken and fish filled our stomach. Even we get more to eat then we are able to, I saw, that the food had only less nutrition, because even to the lot



of food and little workout I lost 6 kg of weight during this 4 weeks. The Indian hospitality is for us European unbelievable and sometimes embarrassing. They tried to read every wish in your eyes even the whole family had to suffer to get the wish true. An Indian will spend his last Rupee to entertain his guest well. In Pagandai rich and poor live next to each other. Big brick houses in the neighborhood of small mud huts, but still the community works perfect. Most of the village people are farmers, the start early in the morning when the sun rises and they finish work long time after sunset. Here are no machines available, here





each helping hand and the own bull is essential. Only few families are able to rent in a community some machines like tractor or threshing machines. Because of this the grain is threshed on the street by the passing cars. The shell of the boarding school is finished. Now the last phase of the construction has started. Some windows are already put in their place and soon they will start with the plaster. This building is constructed for this area and not everything corresponds to our experience. Here everything is carried on the head, but we found out, that this method saves a lot of energy and is positive for your posture. The Indian looked at us European with our white skin like if we were E.T.. The

people here now with people maybe only from TV, that is why we 6 always attracted attention when we



appeared somewhere and caused a crowd. The children were the first who tried to get in contact with us, like everywhere over the world the children are very nosy. So the children liked it when we waved to them. Every day 10

minutes past 4 p.m., after the school has finished, a lot of children were waiting in front of our house until we started playing with them.

The European way of thinking is useless in this country, the mentality is different and sometimes the people only do things, which are essential. Why not? An Indian will not have every time an advantage, if he is working very hard. That is why we got often told to wait concerning the work at the boarding school. But this had also two other reasons. First was, that now in the last phase of the work at the school, we were not able to help much because there were a lot of special works and the rain during some nights avoided to bring material respectively. The most



interesting task was to interview the godchildren. At this time about 200 children are supported and we wanted to meet and to take photos of many as possible. About 100 we met and we discovered that the donations are really used well. Someone would ask, why we did not see all of the children? But the distances are not easy to manage. We did not have any vehicle to visit some children and so most of the children came per bus, but you need more than 1 hour to drive 20 km and the children are living in more than 100 km surrounding. That is because father Don Bosco was working for the department, which was responsible for all new buildings in Tamil Nadu in the church. In the future the project godchild will concentrate on the area around Pagandai. This area was declared to a mission area by the bishop, and father Don Bosco will build a new parish in the next 2 to 3 years. Today this is not an easy task in India, because minorities have a difficult life. In the north the bible was burned officially and at this time it is not allowed to change from Hindu to



Christian faith. In the south the proportion of Christian is high. In the state Kerala the proportion is about 20%, but all over India it is only 2%. This causes that father Don Bosco will support 80% Christians and only 20% Hindu people in his projects. All children are very ravishing. Christine S., my mother, had the chance to see her godchild.

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Esther Rani is 17 years old and lives about 20 km away from Pagandai in a little hut where her family runs a small farm. At this time sugar cane and rice is planted. Some days later we were invited for lunch at her house and also this meal was excellent.



To the existing godchildren we also registered some new children, who will be taken in this project. I also decided to start a sponsorship for a child and so J. Rama will be supported by me beginning next year. J. Rama is a jolly about 10 years old girl who belongs to the Hindu faith. Her father deals with coconuts, which he buys in a big amount and sells it piece by piece on the street. He earns about 50 Rupee per day, which is 1.30 US\$. From this money the whole family, 5 persons, have to live. The basic live, food and the rent for the house, is

no problem with this amount, but there is no money for education. J. Rama visits the 5th degree in a government school, but the knowledge in writing and arithmetic leaves much



to be desired. When I visited her school she went back home with me, because the teacher did not come, that happens very often in government



houses were swept out perfectly also the forecourts and streets were very clean. In the opposite the big towns are not like this. There you get the feeling to suffocate in the crowd of humans and the dirt, all the happier we were to stay in the country. In the nearby perishes are very often big churches from the colonial time when the English and the French have been here. Connected to these churches are often first aid stations, big private schools with up to 3000 pupils and boarding schools and also convents. On Sundays the churches are full to bursting and sometimes loudspeaker transfer the mess to the people outside the church, who did not find a place inside. As usual in India you will not find any bench all the people are sitting on the floor. But we not only saw the near surrounding on some excursion we also could see some other places. We have been for two days in Pondyerry at the brother's house of Don Bosco. This area next to the coast is reserved for rich people and so some of the best colleges and schools are here. Some of the godchildren are going to school here. We were more impressed by the excursion in the south. The first stopover was Trichi, where in the center of the town is a mountain with a temple on its top. The Hinduism is a very complicated doctrine. Innumerable gods and much more names are existing in this faith, so for example Shiva one of the main gods is worshiped with 1008 different names, that is because in the Hinduism they believe on the reincarnation and so their gods are born again and

schools. Starting with June 1999, start of the next year for school, J. Rama will join a private school with a boarding school in Viriyur, which is about 20 km away from Pagandai. The most job the children want to become are teacher, doctor, computer science, but also priest and nun.

In addition to the work with the two projects we had the chance to get around and see a small part of India. We visited some villages around and have been invited to some families. On one day we were traveling by tractor with a trailer and already short time after lunch our stomachs were full nevertheless we still had some visits in front of us. Everywhere a lot of food had been served up. We were most impressed by the cleanness. Not only the floors in these



again. Around the temple the fairs flourish. Hundreds of small shops and handcarts are offering their goods. As an foreigner you have to take care not to pay exorbitant prices, because if they see a foreigner appearing the prices increases suddenly to the double or triple of the original. On the same day we staid in Madurai over night in a convent. Next day we drove to the mountains to Kodaikanal. We felt like home as the bus climbed the small mountain road. In Kodaikanal it was very foggy and we could not see the wonderful view and landscape. It looked like the mountains in Austria, but the plants were different, here you could find

coffee, rubber, On the third day we visited the temple town of Madurai, the biggest and most famous in the south. The buildings were very impressing and in a perfect condition. This big temple in the center has two shrines, where one is consecrated to a reincarnation of Shiva and the other to a reincarnation of



his wife. Only Hindus are allowed to enter these shrines. The big towers in the temple area have been used to store rice for bad times to overcome periods of hunger. After some shopping we drove back home – 8 hours driving for 250 km. Before we flew home, we had the chance to see Chennai (Madras), the capital of Tamil Nadu. In comparison to the other towns we saw was Chennai very clean and seemed to be already a western oriented town. But we had also big luck, because this Monday the 19th Oct. was Diwali (celebration of the light) and on this day most of the Indian stay at home. During the night and on this day more rockets and crackers were fired than during ten times New Year all over Europe. Sometimes in the



villages it seemed to be foggy from all the smoke.

At the time of leave there had been a lot of tears. One thing is certain for me even I had sometimes problems to change to the different culture, I'll be back and I will support the running projects. The future plan is, to come back in June, when the boarding school will be opened.

Some additional information: The expenses for this journey were paid by the group itself and no donations have been used for it.

- 675,- US\$ flight per person
- 250.- US\$ expenses for food, sleeping place, excursions and shopping per person
- ?? immunization, that could get expensive up to 300,- US\$
- 1.670,- US\$ photo and video material

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