

## **Muskaan Site Visit Report**

Visited by Wolfgang Schramm and the theater group creating.net from Germany  
Translated and compiled by Sandeep Morthala, Asha Frankfurt  
Visit dates: 15.03.2020 – 19.03.2020

### **Background:**

Asha Frankfurt received a grant from GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), a government organisation that supports developmental projects. The grant is to establish a theater group with qualified trainers at Muskaan, Bhopal for children and youth from DNT (denotified tribes) and other tribes. The theater training will be done by Wolfgang Schramm and his theater group Creating.net from Germany and Creacting India based in Bodh Gaya. As part of the preparations, they have visited Muskaan from 15.03.2020 to 19.03.2020 of March. During the visit, they interacted with the communities, especially children and youth from Bastis, where Muskaan is working. They have also organized short theater workshops and a theater show with the children and youth from Bastis. This report is their impressions from their visit, focusing on the work of Muskaan.

### **Report:**

After several weeks of staying in Bodh Gaya, we reached Delhi on the way to Bhopal. We stayed in Delhi one night and took the flight the next day. For most of our Creacting team members from Bodh Gaya, it was their first time flying and all were very excited.

In Bhopal, we stayed in Muskaan's mud house ("Mitti ka ghar). Muskaan was started by Shivani, who at the age of 24, decided to dedicate her life to improve the lives of children from slums. The mud house is a hostel cum school. Most of the children who are part of Muskaan are from denotified tribes (DNT). These tribes were categorized as habitual criminals during British colonization times. Even though the official category of "habitual criminals" has been abolished by the Indian government, there is a social stigma against the people from the communities. They also face discrimination from authorities, especially the police force by taking them as suspects for any thefts or other cases. It was very impressive how Shivani and her team from Muskaan have been working with those communities for over two decades. At Muskaan, the children have a place to learn and live in harmony with other children. The "mud house" is very beautifully made of Bamboo and Mud. It has a very nice peaceful garden.

During our visit, we planned to organise theater workshops in various slums, followed by a theater show together with the children. After the first day workshop, when we went in the evening to organise a theater show, a big crowd gathered to welcome us. It was good to see that several children came to say hello to us. The show went very well. The children laughed a lot and had lots of fun. It was wonderful to share the theater experience with them.

The next day workshop was canceled because of corona related flight cancellations. Some of the team members had to fly back to Germany. It was sad to say goodbye to them. We still managed to organise the theater show as planned. Today there were more children and women, who were very friendly. Even though most of the people did not understand the theater piece's content and meaning, did not have any understanding of the art of theater, they all were very involved in the show with laughing and crying as the show progressed. Our bodha gaya team gave their best without any expectations. If, in the end, only a brief escape from everyday life occurs and a smile remains on these people's lips, the entire project has been worthwhile.

During the following days, the corona crisis became worse. We got the news that the flights to Germany will be stopped at any time, so we had to cancel the works and go back to Delhi. It was sad to leave the group so suddenly, but we hope to start the project soon once the corona crisis is over. Even though we could not do as much as we planned, we were happy that we could get to know the people at Muskaan and laid a foundation for the theater project.

### **Conclusion:**

Children and youth who are associated with Muskaan have a very close bond with the Muskaan team. They all feel they belong to one family. Shivani and Muskaan team are very dedicated to helping those communities. Even though the focus of Muskaan is to provide education for the children and youth, for the people in the community, Muskaan is everything and their interface to the mainstream society. It is wonderful that Asha for Education has been supporting Muskaan with various programs. We highly recommend continuing this support.



Creating and Muskaan Team in front of Muskaan's „mitti ka ghar” (The mud house)



Theater workshop in a Basti



Theater show at the “mud house”