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Newsletter 08 – May 2008

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**Konda Basha**

Every Saturday our teachers Vara and Rhada offer language classes. Not foreign languages but their own native languages, including "Konda Basha". Why do we feel it is necessary to teach them tribal languages,

which are only spoken by a minority of villagers? Why do we teach them their mother tongue?

Since generations Konda speaking tribes, East- and Westgodavari, lived unaffectedly in the forests of Visakhapatnam district. Hunting and porduculture sufficed to provide essential nutrition. With

dramas, songs and Dhimsa dancing as daily entertainment, strong interest in modern Indian culture did not arise.

However our students may be from the last generation to gain a glimpse of this original tribal life. In the past years there has been a gradual development towards assimilation. Roads were built which create a connection to the cities. Forests have been chopped off, farming succeeded porduculture.

Television programs have



partly overtaken the original evening entertainment. Villagers who spent time in urban areas frequently feel attracted to western culture. Hence they deny their own heritage, *inter alia* by replacing their mother tongue with Telugu. Therefore tribal languages such as Konda basha are starkly threatened with extinction.

This is why we teach our students songs and basic vocabularies, not only of Konda Basha but also of Kui Basha and Adivasi Oriya. Also other efforts may result in some new scripts in these traditional languages.

### **Seed festival**

Short and yet intense rainfalls have already heralded this year's rain season. Consequently harvest season has slowly come to an end. Traditionally at this time of the year a seed festival is celebrated in Sova area, an area in which twelve of our Balamitra schools are located. On April 23rd a large number of villagers from various tribes, including over a hundred Balamitra students, gathered in Karakavalsa. The local inhabitants had joyfully decorated their place. Every house in Karakavalsa was painted in specific tribal style. For this kind of art only natural colors are used, which are obtained of differently colored mud. Flowers, Rangolis or other patterns were painted on a plain colored background. Some tribes typically also add drawings of animals or daily life scenes such as hunting, market or festival scenes. Seeing a whole village painted in this unique, coltish style is absolutely magnificent.

Important element of the seed festival was the presentation of our Balamitra schools. Each school performed some songs and classroom activities thereby cheerfulness was



passed on to the audience. Subsequently a contest between the attending villages took place, whoever harvested the largest variety of crops this year... and the winner was Malivalsa, whose villagers produced over a hundred different kinds of crops. The program came to an end with a dance drama, written and performed by three of our field school teachers. Central topics were local issues such as health, education, literacy and

harvest season.

Around midnight another dance drama was performed, this time by actors from Dumbriguda area. However at sunrise the performance had to be interrupted. This happens frequently in classical Indian dramas. If they deal with great stories such as the Mahabharatam or the Ramajanam - both are Sanscript epics - it is essentially impossible to present them in one night. Therefore either only an extract can be shown or the performance has to be continued in the following days. At the crack of dawn, the truly successful seed festival came to an end.

### Model School

In the past two months, pupils, teachers and volunteers mainly focused on the preparation of our third Annual Day. However there were a number of events, which should not take a back seat:

- On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March all our students went to an **eye check**. This had been forgotten throughout the past regular medical checks. And in fact there are students who now need to receive medical treatment for their eye problems.
- We recorded **all the tribal songs**, which we sing every morning in school to begin the day.
- Two days before our annual day the Indian festival **Holi** was celebrated. Holi is also known as the festival of colors. Throughout the whole day people throw color powders and water at each other. Joyful laughter filled our school due to this colorful chaos.
- On March 23<sup>rd</sup> our **Annual Day** took place. A detailed report can be found on the Balamitra website.
- At the beginning of April **Ugadi**, the south Indian New Year was celebrated everywhere in Andrah Pradesh. After ritual bath, pooja and traditional singing we had so called Ugadu Panchadi. This juice contains a mixture if different plants and spices and combines sweet, spicy, salty, sour and bitter tastes - just as the new year is assumed to be.
- Since two weeks now all our children are back in their villages, the school year is over. Class IV students however came back after just a few days with their families to practice for governmental examinations for admission to class V.



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**Appeal:**

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