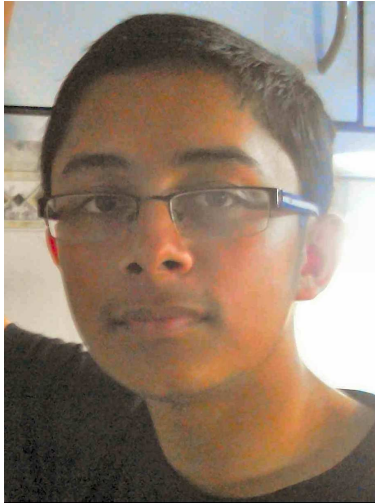


A Bond beyond Borders - Abhishek Ghosh



Willkommen In Indien!

“India has got a very different culture. One can’t expect it to be a ‘home away from home’. The sooner we tourists understand this fact and accept India as she is, the more we will enjoy!” said Vanessa Berndt, the exchange student from Heidenheim, Germany who was staying with us for two weeks. She woke up after arriving from the airport at 4:00 AM. Her first view of India-green marshland and the open road was not what a traveller would usually expect. She exclaimed, after visiting our local mall, Inorbit, that she felt she was in the U.S.A., the only difference being the large crowd aimlessly roaming about.

Our school arranged for a tour of the city for all German exchange students including Vanessa. She had taken a lot of photographs, and I had a chance to look at them. On one hand, Marine Drive, the Mumbai skyline-signs of a bustling metropolis, and on the other, a darker side. They saw and photographed beggars with amputated limbs, unending rows of slums, and poor mothers letting their children into the traffic to persuade the foreigners to offer money. “We have a moral responsibility to help humanity,” she says “considering our grim Holocaust past...”

But not once did she complain. Her usual observation was “Yeah, it’s different here. But, that’s okay!” Their usual food, too, cannot afford even a dash of spice. After savouring our food, she turned red and emptied bottles of Cola! But, she was determined to try the wildly famous Indian cuisine. The next day, we banished the chili from our kitchen temporarily. She found our Bengali delicacies finger-lickin’ good!

They visited the Haji Ali Mosque, Chowpatti Beach, Nehru Science Centre, Jehangir Art Gallery and many more attractions. She was quick to notice Krishna – as she was fond of playing the flute. Also, she proudly showed off her knowledge on caste inequalities, and religious flare-ups, the image most foreigners have of India, apart from the Taj Mahal. She soon started to love all things ‘Indian’. The names of common Indian food and rap music of the ‘Outlandish’ band soon became her ‘pet’ favourites.

The Germans became the most hotly discussed topic in school. Everywhere we went, there were a thousand eyes adoring the foreign ‘deities’. Some got scared, some embarrassed, some felt awkward, while some became arrogant. The Exchange Programme is not only a change from our mundane lives and the chance to learn about a new culture, it also made us realize that all of us have a deeper bond that helps us connect with friends beyond national borders.

I discovered that our own country was like a collection of small European states. We have got a larger population too. So no wonder we have bigger problems. However, idolising western solutions is not the answer. There is a certain charm about our chaos, our diversity and our uniqueness that attracts foreign tourists year after year!



The group of exchange students in our school