

## Internship, Manipal University

### My experiences in India

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**Content: Electricity in India, Campus Life, Food, Society**

I have always taken electricity for granted; turning the room light on or off whenever needed, using the lift for transport and laziness, not to speak of typing reports or any other document conveniently into a PC. What seems almost trivial for the majority of inhabitants of Germany, is still largely unknown to approximately 300 Million people living in India's rural areas without electricity. Working only by the light of a kerosene lamp or suffering daily power outages lasting up to several hours are a normality in these regions and the result of a grid-infrastructure that is either nonexistent or unreliable. Electricity theft, lack of resources or poor planning for construction within widespread jungle areas are the major reasons why 40% of villages in India are left without power. To overcome the enormous scarcity of electricity, the Indian government is highly promoting renewable energies, especially solar power.

### **Research**

The Institute for Print and Media at TU Chemnitz conducts research on printed solar cells under South Indian climate conditions in Manipal, for this undertaking they also involve non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in rural electrification and rural development. Throughout my research I had the opportunity to visit villages, NGOs and research institutes, which provide aid for rural people in installing solar panels and maintaining the equipment in the houses. This was important for my study as it gave me first hand experiences of how the NGOs in rural development are structured and conduct their work- in contrast to European NGOs for example.

### **Manipal**

Manipal is a small university town located 20 to 30 minutes away from the Arabian Sea; therefore, one can find many beaches in close proximity. Compared to other cities in India, Manipal is a paradise of peace due to relatively clean roads, less traffic and fairly liberal

attitudes. The latter can be observed in the dress code of the students (girls wear more western style clothes), the amusement facilities (bars, clubs, discos) and openly displayed love relationships. On the other hand, a strict gender division is visible in the hostels as well as in some busses and train wagons. Girls are not allowed to invite boys into their rooms and vice versa. If the students are not inside their rooms at a certain time during the night then they have to pay a fee (students from abroad are excluded from this rule, of course ;-)). These are just some of the phenomenons which can be experienced in India.

## Nature& Food

Driving through Karnataka reveals the abundance of nature of the country. As a result, the economy of the state is characterized by agriculture. Palm trees bearing thick, green fruits (coconuts) are lining the roads. Rice fields can be spotted here and there and are a common source of income for farmers. Female workers from lower castes can be seen transplanting the rice seedlings in straight rows into the wet soil. Skinny, sun-withered men in short skirts (the so called *Veshti* or *Dhoti*) work on countless banana or cashew plantations that exist in Karnataka as well. India is overall a heaven for food and spice lovers and one can get the impression that, no matter how unreliable or unpunctual certain “things” can get, a sizzling *kadai* (pan) or homely masala chai is just a foot step away at the next street corner.

***Here is a selection of dishes that are worth a try:***



Festive dish served on a banana leaf during a Hindu ceremony



*Masala Dosa* – a kind of crispy Crepe filled with potato curry and several chutneys on the side



*Dal Tadka*– yellow lentil soup garnished with coriander leaves

## People

Indians, most of the time, have a very curious, warm nature towards foreign guests which can turn into outright enthusiasm. Towards their fellow countrymen, they are usually less open-minded: The caste system is still evident and for me painful to see; lower castes basically have no opportunity for social mobility and are stuck in low-income jobs and poverty throughout their whole life. However, the younger generation promotes equality and anti-discrimination, also with regards to gender equality. Young educated Indian women with liberal families become more and more able to dress and live relationships the way they want. However, the freedom of decision making that young women as well as men in Europe or other Western countries enjoy, has not yet been achieved in the life of Indian teenagers or students and will be a topic of ongoing public discussion for years to come. Especially discrimination of women in all fields of professions and in many circumstances is very much common. Sexual harassments and crimes against women belong to the most aggressive forms of suppression and are spread throughout all layers of society and regions. Due to that issue, it is mainly recommended for women to travel in groups. Nevertheless, I did travel alone as it was also necessary for the research and most of the time I found it quite safe and comfortable. The few sexual assaults that I have experienced usually came in a very quick and almost routine way by pedestrians or men sitting next to me in busses. It can be a “coincidental” touch against the legs or other body parts in places where you have no chance to quickly move away as in a crowd or vehicles. It might sound harmless but the psychological effect of such encounters can be quite intense. The best is to speak up against these particular men in order to signal how wrong their behavior is and also to raise the attention of surrounding people that might support you. Female single travelers can furthermore help themselves by staying close to other women or families in trains and busses and by being aware of what is going on around them and whom they feel safe to trust and follow. Being cautious is as essential as being unbiased and friendly still, since the majority of Indian men seem to be really decent and polite. Wearing typical Indian clothes like *Kurtas* or *Dupattas* (long scarves for females) is not necessarily a must but Indians really appreciate it when foreigners do wear the traditional clothing style. Throughout travelling one comes across countless Indians from all kinds of backgrounds with whom it is worth to have a conversation. It is not unusual to get invited into homes, for meals or offered a lift. I am looking forward for my next trip to India soon!



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