



Zanskar Connection 2017

Visiting our Hostel in Jammu by Bernd Balaschus

We are approaching Jammu airport: Fields, villages and roads with heavy traffic are now clearly visible. Through window, on the righthand side of the plane, we can see the morning sun illuminating the majestic chain of the Himalayas with its white giants.

A few minutes later, I am amazed to see that the airport buildings look so different than two years ago. Proudly, the Indian gentleman sitting next to me explains that the brand new buildings have been built within just one and a half years, and are functioning really well - now offering considerable relief and comfort to travellers.

As the plane slowly makes its way to the new terminal. I notice, like on previous visits, the numerous military facilities: Soldiers standing in position, many bunker buildings and army vehicles: Jammu is a city dominated by Hindus and situated

within the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which for decades has been the problem child of Indian politics due to the separatist movement. There are repeatedly unrests and uprisings in the region around Srinagar.

The reason that our hostel has been erected here, as an additional facility for schooling of students in grades 9 to 12, is due to the fact that applications for positions with the government require that a school qualification has to be gained within the state of Jammu and

Kashmir. Government jobs are of course very popular with all young people! We wanted to enable this by choosing this location.

Rinchen, the „good soul“ of our hostel, some younger and older students are waiting outside the terminal entrance. They hand over Katas; it's a happy reunion. I am almost being crushed with hugs, and lots of "Julays" are to be heard. It has been almost two years since the last time I visited our hostel in Jammu, I am therefore curious and very keen to see all the familiar faces again, as

well as new ones, from Reru and our Jamyang Ling school in Zanskar; to see how they have developed within the past two years and, of course, to hear how they were coping with our partner-college KNIT, headed by Professor Kotwal.



We take a taxi directly to the hostel - here a lot of new changes. To begin with, the old front entrance is no longer in use. On the one hand, the new assembly hall was built directly behind the entrance, and on the other hand, a new tarred road was built at the rear side of the property, where the construction of a nice new entrance gate has been planned.

As the taxi stops and we get out, I totally lose my breath: the sound of a drum, accompanied by Zanskari mu-



Cutting the ribbons

sisic from a stereo system, a group of students in traditional dress dancing along a marked "welcome" path, young and former students standing left and right, partly with bouquets of flower or Katakas in their hands. It is a touching moment to see all these faces: Now young adolescents and only a few years ago in Zanskar they were still small children.

After many handshakes and even more warm greetings, I wanted to have a look at the new assembly and dining hall. Just a few years ago, we had extended the existing hostel building and added a very nice, large hall there. But now the last groups of students coming from Reru were so large that single beds had to be shared by two girls in many cases. It is hardly possible to stay concentrated whilst studying within such a confined space. When the following classes were increasing in size to 16, 17 or even 18 students, we reluctantly divided the hall into 2 more rooms for girls and one for warden Rinchen.

We start moving as a large group towards the new hall, the entrance of which is decorated with garlands of flowers. All are very proud that they no longer have to go outside on the lawn during the rainy monsoon, or at mealtimes eat in their rooms. A colorful ribbon blocks the main entrance and everyone wants to take part symbolically, when the ribbon is cut, there are loud cries of "Julay, Julay" and lots of applause. Everything is still a bit provisional; the painting, flooring and interior equipment are not yet finished, but colorful covers, blankets and large Dalai Lama fotos provide for a beau-

tiful atmosphere. As usual upon such occasions, many speeches are given, there are dance performances, and tea and pastries are served: A dignified setting, mixed with a lot of warmth and cheerfulness.

Of course as „chief guest“, I am also expected to give a speech. It is easy for me, because I had already received a message whilst in Germany that older students had taken the construction management into their own hands. Due to their negotiating skills, they had seduced the total costs of the new hall significantly . So there was a lot of praise from me for the four members of the "managing committee"; just as much recogni-

tion for Rinchen too, our friend from Spiti, who has been running the hostel excellently here in the "Diaspora" for many years. Praise also for our cook from Manali with his family.

Taking into account the high rate of inflation in India, all in all, the new building has put a great strain on the finances of our association. If we hadn't had the generous support from long-time friends and sponsors, this new building would hardly have been possible. We hope that with your support, we can continue to run the school in Reru and maintain the hostel in Jammu in the coming years. As already mentioned above, a further reliable partner is Professor Kotwal, the founder and head of the KNIT Institute in Jammu. He once told me



The new assembly hall

that when our students come to Jammu, after the 8th grade, they are on average almost 40 percent behind their classmates from Jammu in terms of their learning standards.

This is partly due to the fact that children in a big city like Jammu naturally have other possibilities from a young age on-

wards, and are used to computers and cell phones, unlike children raised in Zanskar. Normally, after finishing the 8th grade, students leave during january to walk across the Chaddar, the frozen river, to Leh, where they wait to take a flight to Jammu. Once they arrive in Jammu, they have to digest the many impressions of a completely new world, enviroment and way of life. The older students are very helpful and assist the newcomers wherever they can. Upon Professor Kotwal's advice, we've been using the rest of the 5 months before school starts for intensive tutoring to help our students

Jammu/ Kashmir and village Raru



reach the level of Jammu. Since a year ago, former and current students decided to save the expensive private lessons and to take the tutoring into their own hands. They know best from their own experience, which gaps the newcomers have in their knowledge and how they need to be closed. It is touching to see how they care for each other and learn how to take on their own responsibility.

Finally, I want to make a few comments about the constructional situation in the Jammu Hostel. Some years ago, heavy rains hit the region in this part of Kashmir. Our hostel had also suffered much damage. Water had repeatedly penetrated the ceilings and walls. A considerable amount of furnishings and furniture was destroyed or rendered useless. We still remember the situation when, years ago, we had bought the deteriorating ruins. There was nothing in the derelict rooms but bare, naked walls and a



Inauguration of the new hall

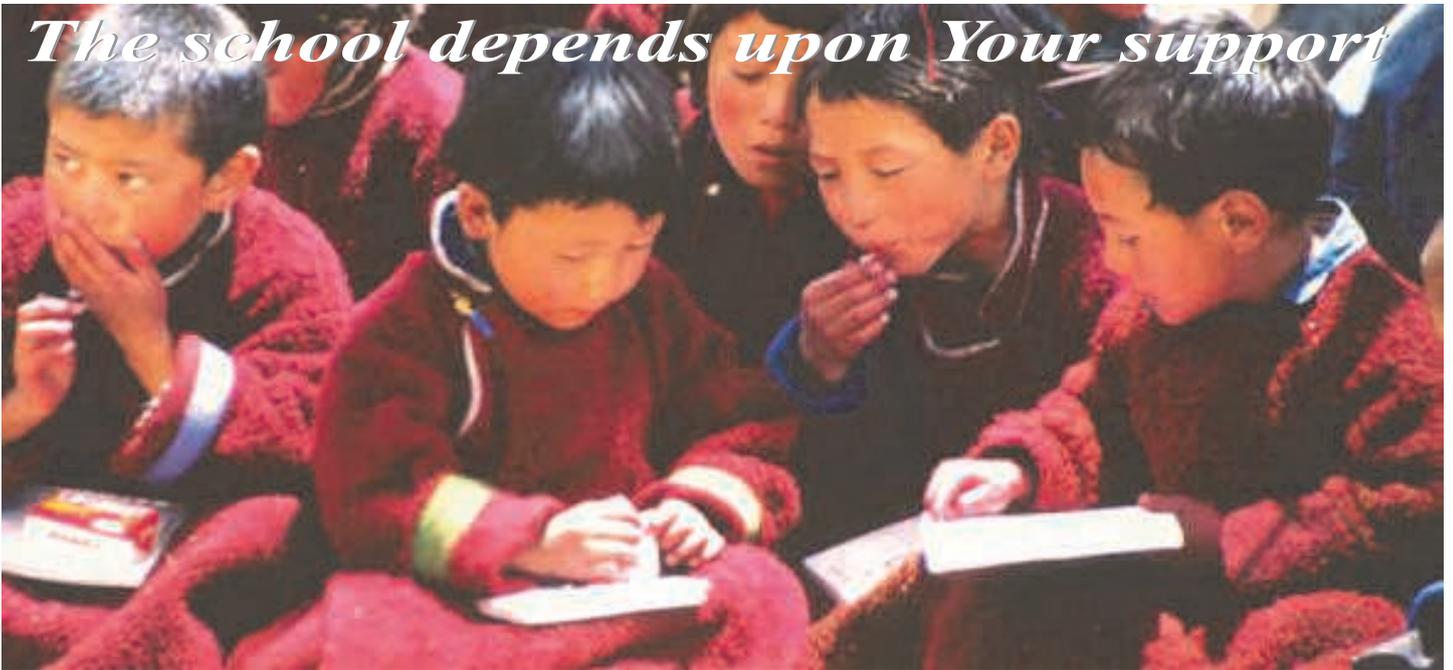
pipe protruding from the floor, at least with running water. In 2012 we were able to inaugurate the newly renovated building with its two floors. The then existing assembly hall has since been divided into two rooms for the girls. Also Rinchen Bodh, who has been in charge of the hostel for many years, was thus able to receive an appropriate room.

Upon this occasion, I wish to express my sincerest thanks to all those who helped us. Without their committed enthusiasm, all this could not have happened. However, all these expansions and renovations have brought our organisation to the the limits of what is financially feasible.

Therefore, I sincerely ask you to continue to generously support the Jamyang Ling school project!

Bernd Balaschus, Chairman of Shambhala e.V.

The school depends upon Your support



Ways You can support the schoolproject

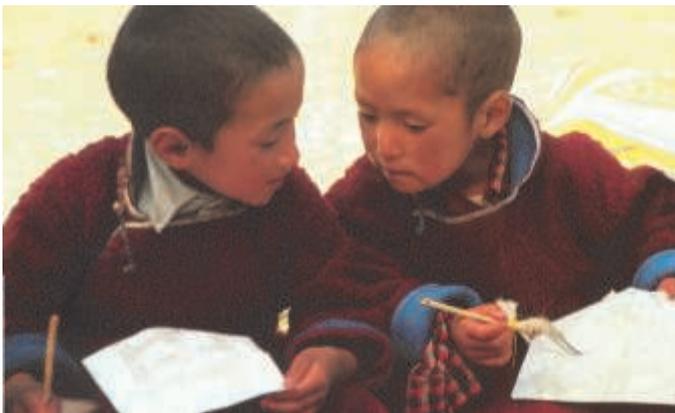
- As a member of Shambhala e.V. (annual subscription € 60,-)
- As sponsor for a Zanskar child, monthly € 20,-
- A contribution in the form of a single donation
- By ordering our set of postcards with 12 motives of the school and Zanskar

As an association, on a non-profit basis, Shambhala e.V. can issue a receipt for your donation, which is tax-deductible.

Bank account for your contribution :

Kreissparkasse Reutlingen

IBAN: DE79 6405 0000 0000 0195 34, SWIFT: SOLADES1REU



„The course of time “ - by Evelyn Stierle

For Bernd's birthday this year, students from Jammu sent him this picture. It came by WhatsApp at exactly the right time and touched us both and made us very happy. Not until some time later did I realize just how sheer unbelievable this incident, for all intents and purposes, actually is.

According to my experience, it was not even so long ago that we passed through Zanskar trekking, and immersed in a time that had as little to do

with modernity as moonlight has to do with a watermelon. Nothing at all. The first contacts we had with the Zanskari children at that time (I am speaking of about 1992) were initially cautious and also a little timid.

The children were not used to the sight of such funny and strange-looking people with weird skin and hair coloring, trekking outfits and the corresponding equipment (backpacks, sleeping bags, tents, watches, altimeters, trekking poles and shoes - and the Lord knows what other equipment which seemed necessary in order to set off into the Himalayan mountains!) Even I was not used to it at all.

They themselves went around in their traditional and mostly somewhat shabby clothing: The fabrics were often worn out and ragged. They were wearing shoes with holes or even going completely barefoot. As shy the children were to begin with, they were at the same very curious. As soon as our tent

was pitched, a whole flock of children gathered around it. They did not identify a closed zipper as a limit to some kind of privacy. In the whole of India it's a foreign word anyway, so also here in the mountains. They live together with their family and clan and are always in a group and together when trailing around.

After the initial fears of contact had vanished, they were sitting more or less on our laps and on the sleeping bags



and inspecting everything new. Of course, this naturally aroused desires and many children began to wish things for themselves and later on to express this very loudly. Why were they always begging for „candy,candy, pen,

pen!!! In the case of the candy, it was clear. All children (and adults as well) enjoy candy!!! But what was this thing with the „pens“? There wasn't a sheet of paper to be seen far and wide, all children and adults were illiterate, and there was not a school in Zanskar. This was even unthinkable. Something as far fetched as the previously mentioned comparison between the melon and the moon. The fact remained the same: We were continually and consistently being begged for pens or pencils, even if the

children already had managed to obtain one or two of them.

Today I see it as a kind of metaphor. As if the 'pen' symbolized something the children weren't really aware of,



could not know what it really was, or what they would ever use them for. Maybe just the desire to have something in their world which had previously not been available: material goods and wealth. And beyond that, maybe something they had never

known, education, the chance of a school education and thus the possibility of working in a profession, which would allow them to participate in a rapidly changing and developing world. Until then, something unthinkable in

this impoverished and deserted area between the many fivethousand metre peaks and deep valleys hidden between mountains. All right - the rest is history and the school in Reru is celebrating almost a quarter of a century of success.

The begged 'pen' became supplemented by a pen case full of pens, by books and paper, on top of it all, were the committed teachers and the presence of the monks, who breathed caring and benevolent life into the

whole project. In addition, there was a wide support of many people here in the West, who have seen the project in Zanskar and met the people overthere.

Read more on last page!

Reunion with Jamyang Ling - by Karin Klinger

It is as though I haven't been away at all. As always, everything is familiar, a little exciting, joyful, and this time too, the reception for this year's „Zanskar Special Shambhala Group“ is simply overwhelming. As always, there's a line-up of children, we look into wide-open eyes, radiant faces, are showered with white scarves (a symbol for happiness), flowers and welcoming greetings. My sense of time is totally distorted... was our last visit really three years ago?! It seems to me like an everlasting „here and now“. In the midst of a fast-paced life and its impermanence, the situation reflects something sturdy, stable. After a refreshing rest in the guestroom, we are invited to participate in their morning ritual on the following day, and afterwards to visit the individual classes.

After a restful night's sleep, the second tent night on this journey, now in the idyllic

camp at the small lake above the village and the school grounds, we walk down to the school to participate in the festive morning prayers and singing. We then share the apples that we had bought in Kargil, some children carefully pack theirs away for later on.

It is always impressive to see the intensity, joy and motivation with which the students learn, and the natural and creative way they manage with basic conditions. For example, in the classroom there are no mats for sitting (should be obtained!), schoolbags serve as a kind of desk for exercise books and folders. It is easy to get immediate contact to the students, especially to the little ones, who are readily enthused with balloon games and painting actions. At meetings held by the teaching staff, it is emphasized how important it is to work "hand in hand" for a common goal, for the benefit of the children and people living in the Lungnak Valley. Mr. Rajendra, long-time headmaster, should particularly be mentioned for his valuable presence. With both his heart and prudence he holds everything together, with foresight and careful "hands on", he organizes the teachers, and at the same time is a loving daddy for the students in hostel.

Right in front of the bedrooms, in the middle of the willow trees, which incidentally grow remarkably well here, we will be visiting the new and almost completed washhouse, one room each for boys and girls. A comfortable building has been built, compared to the previous water pipe which was the only washing place. It offers vital protection against the icy weather in spring and autumn.

The students' evening prayers end the day. We are particularly touched by the extreme simplicity and limitations of material means in comparison to our abundance, e.g. the dormitories (although very simple are clean and tidy). Again and again, the students' enthusiasm is so impressive, the long school day starting approx. at 6 a.m. until 9 p.m., and they are always ready to help each other. An atmospheric night walk to the camp, under a clear starry sky, ends one of these impressive days in this special place.

After a few days, some of the children come up to our camp, they have lost their initial shyness. They soon start to play and sing together. We notice that despite their highly disciplined behavior, which we are not accustomed to, they express a lot of enthusiasm, openness and creativity during the games. It is also notable that in spite of self-forgotten, wild playing, they never lose respect, or lose touch with themselves and others. The days in Reru are as always very rich and filled with festivals (monastery festival in Bardan, village festivals) and invitations

to families to enjoy the best Zanskari food and drink, to sing and dance. Hospitality is everywhere, all doors are open. A particular highlight is the village festival organized by Reru Women's Association in honour of the Shambhala group. Impressive this time encounters with young women, also with Jammu students on vacation. They are self-confident and open-minded. They dance and sing stories of the mountains and rivers, from the Dokshas, the mountain pastures high up, of Shingo-La pass. They are dressed in classic Zanskar costumes and dancing in classical circle formation. Later in the evening the scenery changes, they appear in different clothes, e.g. jeans; CD's are inserted, and they start to dance in "Jammu style" to Indian „Bollywood music“: A surprising combination of tradition and modernity. Everybody is dancing.

The next day they come up to the camp carrying baskets filled with yakdung on their back. And everything is wonderfully natural, tradition and modernity are not a contradiction, both are present.

This year's school festival forms the final highlight of our eight-day stay in Reru. Again, there is a wide range of presentations from all the classes. It is a big reunion for all the parents and friends of the children as well.

Our departure is approaching. I just need to assure everyone that we will keep in touch and that we will continue to support the Jamyang Ling School project. Finally a line-up to say goodbye, this time more relaxed, more familiar: a wonderful farewell!

Karin Klinger



Karin Klinger

Jamyang Ling summer 2017



In August 2017, Karin Klinger visited the school, as a longtime Shambhala member and group leader.

Follow-up "The course of time" by Evelyn Stierle

And of course progress continues. And it doesn't stop in the Himalayan mountains either. It took some time, but at some point the first computer found its place in school. And with the construction of our hostel in Jammu, every student has his or her own mobile phone.

Emailing, googling, sharing and liking on facebook and Whatsapp, all belong to their repertoire. And they just sent a touching birthday picture for Mr. "Bernd" by email.

The clusters of children in front of the tent and the begging for a ballpoint pen seem ages ago. Of course, as with all new achievements, questions are legitimate concerning the pros and cons, the curse and the blessing, of this development. And how we can deal with it while we here in the West are now talking about slowing down again; seminars are being offered discussing if we can even survive offline, and how we can deal with the computer addiction of our children or partners - the time for discussing these matters does not yet seem to have reached India.



The children and young people in Reru and Jammu still have some time to make their own experiences, to explore their personal interaction with all this and find their own position. And maybe one day they'll be sitting off-line in the monastery and meditate. Just like we did

when we set out decades ago to immerse ourselves in the silence of the Himalayas. Circles always tend to close. Which brings us back to the moon and the melon. Who knows, maybe they have more in common than we can grasp at first glance.

Last but not least, as always at this point:

Please help us to continue supporting the school, so that we can keep what we have achieved and build new improvements as necessary! The consistency that has been maintained for over two decades must be sustained. We still need your support for this and thank you from the depth of our heart for all the help you have so far given to Jamyang Ling - the School in the Himalayas!

Yours most Sincerely, Evelyn Stierle

Final Information: email from Jammu



From: Tenzin Tonyot

Sent: Wednesday, October 18, 2017 8:42 PM

To: info@shambhala.de

Subject: Enrollment Medical College

Hello Mr. Bernd How are you? Hope everything is fine! I am Tenzin Tonyot and I would like to give a good news that I got selected for MBBS course in a Medical College in month of august.... I am these days going to College. I am feeling very happy to share this news with you....I would like to thank all the members of SHAMBHALA Association on behalf of whole Lungnag Youth Association and student union. It's all due to the whole hearted support of the whole Shambhala Association. We are very fortunate to get the support right from childhood which leads to our bright future.

Thanks a lot from my heart,

TENZIN TONYOT

Annual General Meeting 2018
11. November 2018
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