

After one month – “everything in India attracts me”

I really feel that I am starting to get to know everyone in the local communities of both Thelpara and TK Colony, of which we are situated between. It helps that most children go to the Assumption Public School where we are teaching, so they of course know who we are. I only have to go on a walk up or down the road and there will be children come running, appearing out of nowhere, to say hello and wanting to introduce us to their parents and grandparents and whoever else they may live with. We will always end up sat inside someone’s house with a cup of chai (tea, which I am growing to love) and some sort of food snack which will quickly be prepared for us (saying no is not an option). One woman named Sidji, who we know from school, saw us and took us into her house behind a shop and from there we were suddenly exposed to a warren of homes and a hive of activity we would otherwise have completely missed from the roadside! If I am out on a walk, everyone will stop in their cars to offer me a lift despite usually already having at least 5 people sat in the backseat, making it physically impossible...however they would definitely find a way of getting me in if I accepted! People could not be more friendly or welcoming.



One example of this kindness was the invite we received for a local girl’s engagement ceremony. She is our direct neighbour but I barely knew her when she came to give us the beautifully handcrafted invitation. I spent the few weeks leading up to it in such excitement. This was a perfect opportunity to wear my sari I had brought with me, which I was given last time I was in India by a good friend I made. The other women teachers in the school wear saris every day and I am always admiring how beautiful they all are! Ignacia helped to dress me, which took some attempts due to our height difference and who knew that so many hidden pins are needed to keep the sari in place!?

Next there was the issue of learning to walk, especially up and down stairs, and how 5 of us were going to fit into the back of a tuk tuk (3 is a squeeze)...but it was all worth it in the end. I loved wearing it and it was actually a lot cooler than I imagined so I will definitely be buying another one and hoping for another event I can wear one too.



The night before the engagement we were invited to Shiya (the bride to be)’s family home. Here they had a pre engagement party with lots of food, music and good atmosphere. The tradition here, which I have also witnessed on birthdays, is that the person at the centre of the celebration is fed cake by everyone else. Obviously a tradition I can’t wait to be a part of on my birthday! The engagement itself was a short blessing in the local church followed by more incredible food and merriment in the parish hall. We all sat down to every type of curry imaginable served on a banana leaf, followed by ice-cream such a treat!

Teaching in the school is going well; I am really enjoying teaching Geography to Class 6, I am teaching about the countries of the world as well as learning from them everything about India. There is a badminton court in the school yard, so I am enjoying playing with a few of the children during games lessons and hope to make more use of this before and after school in the coming weeks. Sports Day is also coming up which will be fun. There is a lot of excitement in the school at the moment as we have started practising for the school’s Annual Day which is held every January. Each class is getting involved with a dance, song, or drama performance. I have somehow



been roped into teaching the Class 6 boys a dance (anyone who has witnessed my dancing will find this hilarious) but with the help of YouTube it seems to be going well!

I have also become in charge of the school library. There are many English books but it is still quite limited so hoping to get some more books. It is proving popular with the children, and the more they take out the more we need. I am also taking full advantage of some of the books myself. I'm currently reading '*India of my Dreams*' by Mahatma Gandhi, a very interesting book. I was hooked by the first page which began: *Everything in India attracts me. It has everything that a human being with the highest possible aspirations can want.* I find this statement so true and definitely something that I agree with!

I am still enjoying getting up early; I don't think I have stayed in bed past 7am since being here... certainly not something I was used to back home! I twisted my ankle running last week, so no running for a while, however I am either going for a walk (mainly to look for peacock feathers!) or I will be found watching the sunrise over the mountains and basking in the morning sun on the roof terrace topping up my tan! (Sorry had to boast about that somehow...).

