Photography workshop Pragpur

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Centre for Sustainable Development and CLIC Abroad organized their second photography workshop in Himachal Pradesh at Pragpur, Kangra Valley, India, from March 9-18, 2013. Pragpur, established in 17th century, is India’s first heritage village and is located in the foothills of Dhauladhar Mountain’s about 60 kms away from the Dharamshala. The workshop was jointly sponsored by Nikon India, X–Com Global, and Goal – Zero. These workshops educate and empower children in America and India by sharing their cultures and daily lives through photography. The workshops are inspired by Bhaskar Krishnamurthy, world renowned photographer. Bhaskar is passionate about documenting and sharing old world Indian culture before modernization transforms the many faces of India. After extensive research and travel throughout India, Bhaskar identifies remote regions where many aspects of daily life exist in the same fashion they have for centuries. In addition, the CLIC Abroad workshops have been organized in various remote locations such as Orissa and Karnataka. Not surprising Bhaskar’s teaching methods and new world ways are also discovered by these regions. Often the workshops’ goal to document old world culture is best achieved by local children. And this is to have the very people that actually live in these cultures document their own lives. And who might be the most interested, energetic, and enthusiastic people in the community of Pragpur? Children. Cameras are substituted for writing instruments and photographs serve as their voice in this incredible experience.

Forty local school children from various backgrounds were selected in the heritage village Pragpur and they were given a Nikon digital camera each. The students were divided into groups based on various themes: Environment; Religion and Culture; Women and Children; Family and Home; School and Education and Livelihood. Devin Gibbs and Marcus Grant volunteered to help teach children from Pragpur basic camera skills while immersing themselves in their Indian cultures and lifestyles. Fourteen students of University Lake School in Hartland, Wisconsin, led by Lori Sra and two of their teachers joined in on March 14 to discover the beauty of Indian life and culture. Local children took ULS students to their homes and communities, their workplaces, and showed them every sphere of their life. Children documented the ancient arts and precious customs that still exist in their lives through photographs. ULS students helped to preserve the rich history of India while, at the same time, gaining the respect of lives, and knowledge and understanding of primitive cultures. Tom Grant, Assistant Professor of Journalism at Abraham Baldwin Agriculture College, Georgia shot a video documentary of the workshop.

During the workshop local students also interacted through video conferencing with Margaret D. Lowman, Director of North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. Popularly known as “Canopy Meg”, Lowman is an American biologist, educator, ecologist, writer, explorer, and science communicator. Her expertise involves canopy ecology, canopy plant-insect relationships, and constructing canopy walkways. ULS students also celebrated an early Holi with local children and community. The celebration of Holi in Pragpur not only worked as an interaction but the students from University Lake School learned about the culture and love the people share through these festivals. So this was a perfect interaction between different culture and people of different countries. ULS students gifted 125 pairs of shoes and socks to host students. Outcomes Of the Workshop. The workshop at Pragpur was coordinated and organized with active support of Jitender Verma, Praveen Sharma, and Asha Thakur from Centre for Sustainable Development.

The workshop proved to be an important tool in documenting local art and culture through the eyes of local children. The local students who were shy in beginning developed confidence during the workshop and started reaching out and asking people for poses on their themes. The students also showed that they would like to know more about their peers from US, learn about them and show them their world. The local students started noticing and appreciating things in their world that they hadn’t done before. Devin Gibbs said, "I took everything for granted..."
back in US and when I saw some of the students walk 4-5 miles to reach school and their eagerness to come to school and study despite scarce resources, I started to appreciate that many things which we take for granted in US are a luxury in many parts of the world.” Similarly when the visiting students saw the rich culture heritage of the local communities, the local children started to be more appreciative of what they had. When the students took photographs on various themes assigned to them, they started to notice things about their culture and life which they had never noticed before. Anchal Goswami, one of the participants working on her theme ‘Women and Children,’ realized how much hard work her mother puts day in and day out to keep the family running and she resolved to help her mother in household chores. These workshops are not just about children clicking pictures but also about developing leadership, a sense of enquiry, confidence, curiosity, creativity and appreciation for things around them.

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