Americans to milk buffaloes in Warangal!

A Unique Programme Envisages American Students Teaching English To Villagers In Exchange For A Taste Of Rural Indian Life

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Come Sunday, a backward village in Warangal district will witness the arrival of unusual visitors in what can be described as a unique exchange programme. In return for teaching English at the local educational institutions, these students from Washington University in St Louis, Missouri, USA, will get a taste of rural India which includes milking buffaloes and working in rice nurseries.

For the next 30 days, 11 undergraduate students from the university including eight girls and three boys will live in Kalleda village in Warangal as part of the Village India Programme (VIP). During their stay, they will teach English and aspects of modern US education to the locals, join the 3,000-odd villagers in their daily activity and attempt to pick up the local lingo. The students in turn will earn up to five academic credits for taking part in the VIP.

It all began when academician Glenn Davis Stone came to Kalleda village for the first time in 2005. Stone is professor at the department of anthropology and ecological studies in Washington University in St. Louis. While doing his research, Stone found out that communicating in English was a problem for the local people and soon realised that the schools and colleges in and around the village too did not have teachers proficient in teaching English language.

Stone then came up with the Village India Programme (VIP) for Washington University students. The first batch arrived in 2007 under his guidance and in 2008, a second batch of six students made this programme a huge success for both the villagers and the students. Prof Stone found the village interesting when he was studying the controversy surrounding Bt cotton and farmers’ suicides in Warangal district in the early 2000s.

“I also came here because of the presence of good scholars to collaborate with in Warangal, and partly because of the relationship I developed with the Rural Development Foundation (RDF). They have been wonderful people to work with and have helped enormously with the logistics of my anthropological fieldwork,” Stone told TOI via email.

Stone discovered that a field study by WU students in an Indian village would be mutually beneficial. “The VIP was designed to benefit the American and Indian students equally. The Americans would get to experience life in an Indian village, have an opportunity to design and teach courses, and get to know Indian students; the Indian students would get to know the Americans and would learn things that are not in their regular curriculum, and, most importantly, would get intensive English training.”
This year, the Village India Programme will be directed by Prof Ken Botnick of the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts, WU. According to Professor Botnick, the students will be arriving in Hyderabad on June 28, and leave for the Kalleda on July 1 and stay in the village till August 2, 2009. Before reaching the village, the students will participate in a two-day orientation program in the Osmania University Centre for International program (OUCIP).

According to C Vijayasree director of OUICP, the students would be given lessons in the cultural, social and political aspects of the rural life in Andhra Pradesh, with special reference to Telangana region. “The programme is greatly benefiting the local students also. Last year, American students taught skills such as photography, drama, starting small businesses, spreadsheet and wordprocessing skills, web page design, and more,” said Vijayasree.