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Exploring Cultures of Learning in India and Germany (2019-2023)

DAAD

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1. Cultures of Learning

Focussing on the historically and culturally vastly diverse "Cultures of Learning" in India and Germany, the project looked into how different modes of learning about South Asia in both countries can complement each other, but also how these ways of learning might pose obstacles to a mutual understanding. In settings of common learning the project looked into how to overcome such obstacles.

Banaras Hindu University (BHU)
Indian Institute of Technology, BHU (IIT-BHU)
University of Heidelberg
University of Würzburg

2. Lived Sanskrit Cultures in Varanasi

We conducted four intensive courses designed to impart a practice oriented training in methods of cultural and religious studies focussing on how Sanskrit texts are taught, applied, enacted, inscribed in spaces and lived by practitioners, women and men, in Varanasi. Over 50 students and 30 scholars and traditional experts from 11 countries participated in these courses. The topics included Teaching Sanskrit and the Veda, Performing Rituals, Processions and *Rāmlīlā* in Varanasi etc.

3. Building academic networks

We developed association with centers of learning in Varanasi, including Sampūrṇānanda Sanskrit University, Pāṇini Kanyā Vidyālaya and Brahmā Veda Vidyālaya. Several short term workshops, including crash courses on Spoken Sanskrit were organized together with the students and scholars of these institutions.

References:
https://www.sai.uni-heidelberg.de/krs/studium/npi.html

4. Exchange Programme

Thirteen post-graduate and doctoral students from Heidelberg and Varanasi availed scholarships aimed towards facilitating immediate, enriching personal experience of the respective cultures of learning, especially to comprehend their complementary nature.

5. *Variegated Experiences*

The DAAD exchange programme was truly an „exchange" in every sense. I was enriched by the variegated experiences through exposure to diverse cultural practices, creative approaches to academic pursuits and research, new friendships and different work cultures. This profoundly broadened my perspective on life and learning, creating indelible cherished moments.
— Shruti Bhat (BHU, Varanasi)

6. Covid-19 and the *Virtual-Reality*

The unanticipated challenges posed by the pandemic were successfully met by online activities: we organized an online workshop on „Female Religious Leaders and Dynamics of Female Agency in Religious Settings in South Asia" and several students from Varanasi received online stipends.