

Educational Tour to Jhargram

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The Third Year Geography Honours students went for an educational tour as a part of their curricular activity (Paper XVI) from 28th November 2015 to 6th December 2015. The group consisted of 9 students and 2 faculty members (Dr. Punam Tripathi and Ms. Monisha Hembram). The students went to *Jhargram*, which is a town in Paschim Medinipore district of West Bengal. The journey began on the 28th of November 2015, when the students and the teachers (henceforth referred to as 'the group') boarded the Kanchankanya Express and reached Sealdah (in Kolkata) on the morning of 29th November. After a brief halt at the Young Women's Christian Association's (YWCA) Guest House, the group moved to Howrah for their onward journey to *Jhargram*. Taking the Steel Express from Howrah, the group reached *Jhargram* at 8 pm on the 29th November. From the 30th November to 4th December the students were engaged in intensive fieldwork.

Dubrajpur Village, which is around 10 km from *Jhargram* was selected as representative village in which the household survey was conducted. It was a learning experience as the students came in contact with the agriculturalists as well as the blacksmiths. They saw the working of both the groups. As it was the harvesting season for the paddy, the students had firsthand experience of the threshing process, both by traditional method and by the use of the electric threshers. They also witnessed the work process of the blacksmiths and saw them moulding the iron implements.

Students Mapping the Village



Students getting a firsthand experience of the threshing process.



Witnessing the work process of the blacksmiths.



The next day the students visited the local market to see where these implements were being sold. The market was at a place called *Fanko Haat* which is the largest weekly market of the area. This market draws its clientele from three states, namely, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Odisha as it is located at the junction of these three states. In the market one can find variety of items that are required for a rural living. The group then visited the river bed of the *Subarnarekha River* which was a unique experience. This being the post-monsoon season, the water level in the river was low, yet the beauty of the river was mesmerizing. From there the group proceeded to visit the Sal forest, the dominant vegetation of the region. The purpose of this visit was to understand the role of the Sal trees in the ecology and the

economy of the region. The Sal trees are hardwood species and its wood is utilized in the construction process. Moreover the trees also help in checking soil erosion and recharging the ground water. The non-timber forest produce (NTFP) from the forest supports the economy of the region.

Near *Jhargram* is situated the Uniglobal Papers (Pvt.) Ltd., a paper mill that uses waste paper as raw material to produce packaging cardboards. The group visited the paper mill and saw the process of paper manufacturing. It was a great learning experience for the students. Post lunch, the students tabulated the information from the questionnaire schedule and classified it according to the sub-headings under which they would write the final report.

On the 3rd of December, the group went to explore the tourism potential of the region. The students thus visited the *Ghagra Falls* on the *Tarafeni River* at *Belpahari*, which also helped them in understanding the process of river erosion. On the way was a Krishna Temple which was a small trek away. Though the climb was exhaustive, yet the ultimate view from the hill top was captivating with flat plateau top visible at a distance. The next stop was at the *Kanak Durga Temple*, which had engrossing legend associated with it. The place was filled with *langurs*. Close to it was the *Dulung River*, on the banks of which the evening was spent before returning to the Guest House. The following day the group visited the *Jhargram* Raj Palace after which it proceeded to the mini zoo. The experience was enthralling as rare animals and birds were seen. After lunch the group moved to *Jhargram* railway station and boarded the Ispat Express to Howrah. The stay at Kolkata was arranged at the Hotel Heera International at Rippon Street.

The next day the group visited the Indian Museum. Though it was enriching experience, but most part of the Museum was closed as the renovation was going on. Therefore the students then went to New Market and did shopping till their heart's content. By evening they moved to the Sealdah Station. After having dinner at the *Jan Ahar* of the Indian Railways, they boarded the Padatik Express at 11 pm which reached New Jalpaiguri the following day at 9:15 am.

The Fieldtrip and the journey to *Jhargram* was enriching as the students understood the difficulties of rural life in India. The area has tremendous water shortage and people spend hours in collecting water. The students have come to value the resources such as food and water even more. They have also started to appreciate their comfort zone living after witnessing the tribulations of the people in remote part of the country. The mud houses of the villagers were a centre of attraction for the students. Thus this trip has provided a learning experience for the students.