

EMBRACE CULTURE!



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◉ **When it comes to contrast, India represents so much of it! Not without a reason it is the country of colours. Besides business visits the Focus India Delegation of 2017 was able to experience a full range of Indian culture.**

The Indian cities are loud and sticky, which is also the case in Mumbai, one of the most eclectic cities of India. In Bombay, the old name of Mumbai, there are over 2000 slums. Areas, where the ground is owned by the government but the infrastructure by private individuals. The **Dharavi Slum** known as the biggest within Asia, is home to 1 million people living on only two and a half square kilometres. But Dharavi is not only a slum located in the heart of Mumbai. It is the centre of everything: geographically, psychologically and spiritually. By visiting the most variegated district with its labyrinth of small alleys, Focus India could experience how over 20'000 small businesses, like potteries, tanneries and markets, are operating perfectly within this unique ecosystem. The government convoked a rehabilitation program, where the slum should be replaced with a sustainable system in housing, civic infrastructure and amenities. Around 57'000 households are meant to be relocated in residential skyscrapers. Where every apartment would have its own bathroom. Imagine, they share only 700 toilets all over Dharavi!

It is not only the cities that are diverse. It is also the religions. The main religion in India is Hinduism, which is the third largest religion behind Christianity and Islam. In India around 80,5% of the population are Hindi. The caste system, generally accepted to be more than 3,000 years old, is a part of it and traditionally divided Hindus into rigid hierarchical groups. Many believe that the groups originated from Brahma, the Hindu God of creation. The system divides Hindus into four main categories - Brahmins,

Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras as well as Dalits, which are also known as the "outcasted" or "untouchable". Around 25% of the population belong to them. Even though, the caste system has been illegal since 1950 according to the Indian constitution, the lower castes are still struggling to find their place within the Indian society.

In Bangalore, Focus India had the opportunity to visit the "**Dalit Freedom Network**". The NGO's mission is to end atrocities and help the Dalit people achieve fundamental rights through a foundation of education, healthcare, and economic empowerment (<http://dalitnetwork.org/>) . The Dalit people of India have been considered to be "untouchable." Less than human. Worthy only to be slaves, to be broken and crushed. Today, a new generation of Dalits is standing up for the rights of their people to go to school, to be healthy, to be free. To never be called an untouchable again and to finally gain a voice within the society. The **Dalit Freedom Network** is running women trainings centres and around 100 schools all over India. Focus India went to visit one of the schools. "We try to give children a chance in life. Education really makes a difference.", stated the leader of the school. "The knowledge of English is crucial as you can progress in life much faster. Our goal is to give them skills and a voice."

There are more organisations that are pushing the education of the Indians forward. The NGO **Magic Bus** is one of them. They are steering children towards a better life with greater awareness, improved life skills, and more opportunities, during their journey from childhood to livelihood. To enable this journey, they use different dimensions: First of all, they apply Activity Based Curriculum (ABC). This is a learning model that uses activities and games to change attitudes and behaviours. Each