



The reason behind the superstar Norwegian writer titling his six-part autobiographical sensation *My Struggle* finally becomes clear in the final work in the series... A review P2

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# When Santals go abroad

**Reflections on an intercultural experiment where representatives from the tribe travelled to Germany**



Interacting with the audience



I love your turban! Copyright Udo Keller Foundation



Santal dance in Hamburg (Courtesy Udo Keller Foundation)



Performing for a primary school in Tübingen



We stayed mostly with German families



Tell me how you drum (Courtesy Udo Keller Foundation)



The final dance together (Courtesy Udo Keller Foundation)

ago, Professor Ronald Kurt from Bochum had made a half-hour film on Boro Baski, one of our seniors. For several weeks, he visited Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati and shot scenes with Boro. He could personally show the film in Frankfurt on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of our registered society *Freundeskreis Ghosaldanga und Bishnubati*.

Kurt explained, how he got the idea for this documentary and what he wanted to attain with it. He portrays Boro's life story through interviews. While shooting, Boro himself could decide together with the filmmaker which questions would be posed and which places of his personal environment should be shown. The result, "Roots and Branches: The Lifeworld of an Enlightened Villager in West Bengal" can be viewed on the website [ronald-kurt.jimdo.com](http://ronald-kurt.jimdo.com).

After completing his studies in the arts, Sanyasi Lohar settled down in his village Bishnubati as an artist and craftsman. For this he even built himself a studio. More than once he travelled in Europe as a member of our group. Since Sanyasi is especially interested in working with local village artisans, he was predestined to collect the handicrafts, which had been made in the Santal villages, and show and explain their intricacies to European audiences.

Among them was jewellery from the villages made of natural fibre. He also offered his own batiks, decorated with Santal motifs. We exhibited and sold these products as part of our programmes in many towns. It gave people the opportunity to touch Santal culture with their own hands. In 2015 and 2018, we offered T-Shirts with motifs that Sanyasi Lohar had designed. Tim Weiner organised this year's production and printing in Germany.

**Interactive programme**

We always made sure that our audiences — the young ones especially, but also the adults — were not silent spectators. Instead of using a stage our group gathered the people in a semicircle. The tribal dances and songs in Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati are never just to look at. Everybody is either joining the dances or is at least emotionally involved due to the rhythmic movements and the cheerful chaos of the festivals. To create an interactive, participatory atmosphere on our journeys, the group members demonstrated how to play on the instruments used in Santal music (two different drums, a flute made of bamboo and others) and then let our listeners try them out.

Our audiences were surprised to find out, how difficult it is to replicate the rhythms of the drums, even though they were produced with such natural ease by the Santals. The secret lies in the Santals' unique feeling for rhythm. Not all audiences were willing to participate in the interactive sessions. Teenagers in the difficult age from 14 to 16 years and adults often fought shy. Children, on the other hand, were eager to try their hand. They were not afraid of missing the rhythm and participated for the fun of it. When it came to dancing together, the children became so excited that I was worried the whole event would end in chaos with the children screaming and jumping around. Teachers and parents assured us that the memories of these events would continue to linger on. Adults would, however, willingly be part of our playful interactions, provided the audience was small and all people knew each other. One example was the group at Sonnenhaus Beuron — everyone happily joined in the simple steps of the Dong-dance, which the Santal group often presented at the end of our programme.

Every performance had to make room for questions and answers. This kind of conventional interaction made it possible for every audience — whether young or grown-up — to contribute. Many of the questions I answered myself, if I thought that its complexity needed a well-considered answer from my insider-outsider-perspective. Other questions, which were easy in content, I translated into English or Bengali, so that the group could answer. This year, we had Boro Baski with us, who could address the audience and connect with them in English without me as the moderator. But also Anil Hemram gave authentic and touching answers, which provided an insight into his mind and emotions. I tried to act simply as an enabler, as someone who opened up the channels of communication from both sides. This was an essential part of my experiment in intercultural communication.

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**MARTIN KÄMPCHEN**

on the indigenous tribes.

Since the beginning of my work with people of the Santal villages, Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati, close to Santiniketan, it has been important to me that it is not a one-way street. Giving and receiving should be equally important. This means that I, an outsider, was willing to share my experiences and my knowledge while remaining curious to learn from the people in the villages, value their way of life and cultivate their friendship.

This reciprocity unfolded on different levels. Since the early days, friends from Europe have come to live in our villages. For our students, these foreign guests became a "window" to the world outside their village. As I had always experienced sincere hospitality without any suspicion and disguised intentions by the village people, I could expect other friends from outside to be welcomed in the same way. And since the Santals traditionally cook their meals with great care, I could also be sure that the food they provided was substantial and well prepared.

Soon the educated seniors of the villages did not only welcome friends from other places but they themselves started travelling within India. Those who had begun the development work in the villages now attended conferences, got to know development projects elsewhere and joined festivals, where they would join the dances and play music. Coming into contact with this larger world strengthened their cultural self-awareness as well as their personal confidence. They developed leadership qualities, which are desperately needed for village work.

Since 1998, we have organised a number of journeys with our seniors in Germany, Austria and England. We arranged events in schools or elsewhere to "introduce Indian village life". We wanted to show that villages do not only consist of poor and ill-clad people. Joy, conviviality and the celebration of festivals are also very much a part of their lives.

In our presentations we always pointed out the importance of education. Those young men and women who came with me were meant to demonstrate that school education is the key to a balanced development. Not less important is the showcasing of Santal culture. We wanted to draw attention to Adivasis in general because so far they are absent in the minds of most Germans. When the media is reporting on India, they rarely elaborate

**Dances and songs**

Our performances have always shown a variety of Santal dances and songs mixed with visual presentations, theatre, information, discussions and interactive elements. Since the dances require at least three persons, three men were chosen to travel in 2015. I was aware that a group of only men could neither represent Santal society and culture nor our efforts in education in its entirety. Hence, two men and two women travelled to Germany this year. Finding good singers and dancers among the Santals is easy; choosing the ones who are also able to communicate with the people they meet in Germany is, however, a challenge. To fully communicate you should not only know English but you need the ability to reflect on your own role and articulate your impressions. You have to be aware of who you are and the ability to adjust to other people. No easy task!

It was important to me to assemble a programme, which was not merely delightfully folkloristic. I wanted to demonstrate that music, rhythm and dance are part of the Santals' innermost purpose of life. In Santal tradition, the different dances go along with the yearly agricultural cycle from sowing till harvesting and light up all life events from weddings to bereavements.

Also the songs that every group presented on our tours are directly related to the Santals' daily life. They express their *joie de vivre* through the evocations of erotic love, their community feeling in the family, the village and the whole tribe, but also their sorrow over lost innocence and the modern problems that come along with the deep rift between village and city life. First, I recited each song in translation and explained its context, and then the group presented it.

**Visual presentations**

The visual presentations consisted of short slide shows that should give the audience a vivid impression of the rural scenery and daily duties, regarding farming or other work in the villages. To learn how the people that are standing in front of them live, was important for the grown-ups as well as the students. Nevertheless, these parts should not take up too much time so that the main focus stayed on the group itself. Pictures and videos about Indian villages can easily be watched on TV or the Internet, but our group wouldn't always be available. We had a premiere this year. Five years

