

Some dreams become true

About the "Friends of Ghosaldanga" in Germany

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Since my school days I tried to understand the socio-economic problems of the villagers of Birbhum. During my stay at Aachen in Germany I could not forget the socio-economic problems of the villagers and tried to support them also from abroad. Along with my wife Roswitha and friends, we started in 1975 initiatives in Aachen to help few needy schoolboys in my home town Suri and also supported some Santals and non-Santals ("Help for Selfhelp"- project) in one village near my home town. Since the start of our private initiatives at Aachen we were also interested and wished to work long term together with some group or person who were sincerely understanding the needs of the villagers and working hand in hand ("Help for Selfhelp") with them in Birbhum.

In 1991, one of my Indian friends (who sadly died in 2002), who was connected with the activities of the Indo-German Association in Aachen (Deutsch-Indische Gesellschaft), told me that Dr. Martin Kämpchen has got the "Rabindranath Tagore-Preis" of "Deutsch-Indische-Gesellschaft", and that he was staying at Santiniketan and helping the poor villagers of Birbhum.

I felt some inner urge to write to Dr. Kämpchen (Martin) and felt he might be the person for whom we waited so long. In March 1991 I wrote to Martin without knowing his full address in Santiniketan. Martin answered me and informed me that he will be visiting Germany and will be happy to meet us at Aachen sometime after Easter 1991. During his visit to us in Aachen we discussed in detail the various aspects about our ideas and cooperation possibilities. On that day we decided to go together to help the people of Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati. So to say on that day the idea of "Friends of Ghosaldanga" was born at Aachen.

In 1994, I visited for the first time Ghosaldanga with Roswitha and Sumit (our son, at that time only 9 years old). Our experiences and stay at Ghosaldanga were overwhelming. Sona, Gopal (Sona's nine-year-old blind brother), Boro, Snehadri, Gokul, Sanyasi, Probhat, Monotosh, Kamal and other young Santal boys and girls and Martin accepted us as their family members. Gopal and Sumit immediately became friends and brothers though they couldn't speak a single word with one another because of their language barrier. According to Bengali customs, our friends started calling Roswitha as Kakima (aunty) or Boudi (sister-in-law), Sumit as Bhai (younger brother) and me as Kaku (uncle) or Dada (elder brother). We all felt: We have come home, though we have never met each other before.

Martin's regular visits to Germany, his publications and lectures on his idea about "alternative development" and his method of work at Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati as well as his talks on German television and radio, the moral and financial support of a well known Christian organisation "The Pontifical Mission of Holy Childhood" in Aachen ("Kindermissionswerk / Sternsinger" in Aachen) along with the active support of our other friends in Germany ("Friends of Ghosaldanga in Germany") helped us enormously to begin and to strengthen our efforts to support the activities of Martin and our friends in Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati.

In 1994, Dr. med. Monika Golembiewski visited Ghosaldanga for the first time. During her stay at Ghosaldanga she treated the needy villagers medically, worked out a plan for the future concerning the nutrition and health problems of the villagers, especially about the problems of the children. Back to Germany, she wrote a very lively and detailed medical report. Her talks and meetings with school classes and several organisations in Germany also support us to promote the activities of "Friends of Ghosaldanga" in and outside Germany. Until 2003, she has visited Ghosaldanga 10 times and has written several medical reports about the outstanding medical problems in Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati.

The basic idea of our activities is to promote the intercultural and interreligious understanding between the people of different nations and communities, mainly between Santals and non-Santals and to inform the people about the problems of Santals and of Indian villagers. We believe this can be better done through friendship, brotherhood and through personal contact. This idea is compatible to Martin's basic idea of "alternative development", viz. to work hand in hand with the villagers of Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati as sisters, brothers and friends. Inspired by this idea, we named our group "Friends of Ghosaldanga". Under the motto of brotherhood and interreligious understanding our activities in Germany and in Ghosaldanga-Bishnubati are also strongly supported by "The Pontifical Mission of Holy Childhood", Aachen.

From the very beginning Martin, Roswitha and myself wanted to minimise so far as possible the bureaucracy and to concentrate our energies, resources and activities from Aachen directly for the needs of the villagers in Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati. Until today "Friends of Ghosaldanga" is a non-formal and non-government organisation (NGO) without any official character, without any managing committee or office, any membership application forms or fees or any compulsion of donation. All works are done by many of our friends and individuals voluntarily from their homes, without any salaries, side by side with their daily private and professional duties.

Our activities are as follows:

a) Maintaining personal contacts : With people, especially donors, inside and outside Germany through telephone calls, letters and emails, answering their queries; keeping contact and exchanging ideas with other religious and social service organisations like "Kindermissionswerk /Sternsinger", Aachen, "Missio", Aachen, "Agape e.V.", Heidelberg, "Indienhilfe e. V.", Herrsching.

b) Distribution of information: Annual Reports, Medical Reports, publications of Martin and of our friends from Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati; promoting an exchange of thoughts and ideas with Martin and also with our friends. Collection of Funds: Funds are collected by selling cards and calendars drawn and made by the children of our schools at Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati, by selling of hand woven bags or books to our friends and wellwishers on Christmas Bazars. Many items we also give away as presents. Some funds are also come from people who, instead of accepting presents on their birthdays or during their marriage ceremony or any other family festivities, collect funds for us.

c) Donations: Donations are collected purely on voluntary basis. We never ask for donation. In this connection we would like to emphasize that the funds and the donations do not come from Europeans or from non-Europeans who just want to give away some money for our purpose. They are mainly the manifestation of love and understanding of European and non-European children, schoolboys and -girls, students, housewives, retired persons, academicians and businessmen. Our donation funds are also actively supported through the same motivation by our

partner organisation "Kindermissionswerk Aachen". Martin's and Monika's active personal support and the several individual initiatives of our friends are the main factors which enable us yearly to collect some considerable amount of funds and donation for our purpose. We are conscious about the moral significance of these collected donations and funds and cautiously control their management and implementation in India and in Germany. We do not want to waste one rupee even.

d) Medical support and nutrition: In order to cover a major part of the cost for medicine, medical treatments, stay at the hospitals, distribution of nutritious food, especially to the children of our kindergartens, to the schoolboys and -girls a Medical Fund has been started. It is planned, that within the coming two years - under the initiative of Monika and her personal guidance - our first aid and medical center will be built and start working. In order to solve the nutrition and job problems, Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati have started a "Bio-Orchard"-project with our financial help and the help of the "Kindermissionswerk", Aachen under the guidance of Srikanta Mandal of "Manab-Jamin", Bolpur and "Indienhilfe", Herrsching, Germany (More details in our Annual Reports and Medical Reports).

e) Hospitality, educational visit and cultural tours to Europe : With active moral and financial support of the "Kindermissionswerk", Aachen and many of our friends, we organised in 1998 a five-week cultural tour of a group of our friends from Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati. The cultural programme was worked out and headed by Martin. During their visit to Europe they visited 20 different cities in Germany including Aachen, Bonn, Berlin, Dresden, Munich, Flein, Salzburg and London. They stayed as our guests with the families of our friends (Friends of Ghosaldanga). In 1999, this tour was repeated on a smaller scale. These cultural tours through Europe have been able to promote the basic idea of our activities very strongly. Further, Boro Baski stayed at Woodbrooke College, England for several months and Sanyasi Lohar's first educational stay at Ecole d'Humanite in Hasliberg Goldern, Switzerland, were also supported by us.

More than 12 years have passed since Roswitha and I met Martin for the first time in 1991 at Aachen. We, the Friends of Ghosaldanga, are feeling proud to see the all-round developments, which have been achieved and feeling happy to be with Martin and with our friends in Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati and being able to share their sorrows and joy together during these past 12 years. We are looking forward hopefully to the future.

Here I would like to conclude with one beautiful poem by Rabindranath Tagore (Gitanjali 3) translated by Martin from Bengali to German :

**Das Unbekannte hast du mir vertraut gemacht
Heimat gabst du mir an vielen Orten,
das Ferne Freund, hast du mir nahebracht,
den Fremden Bruder werden lassen.**