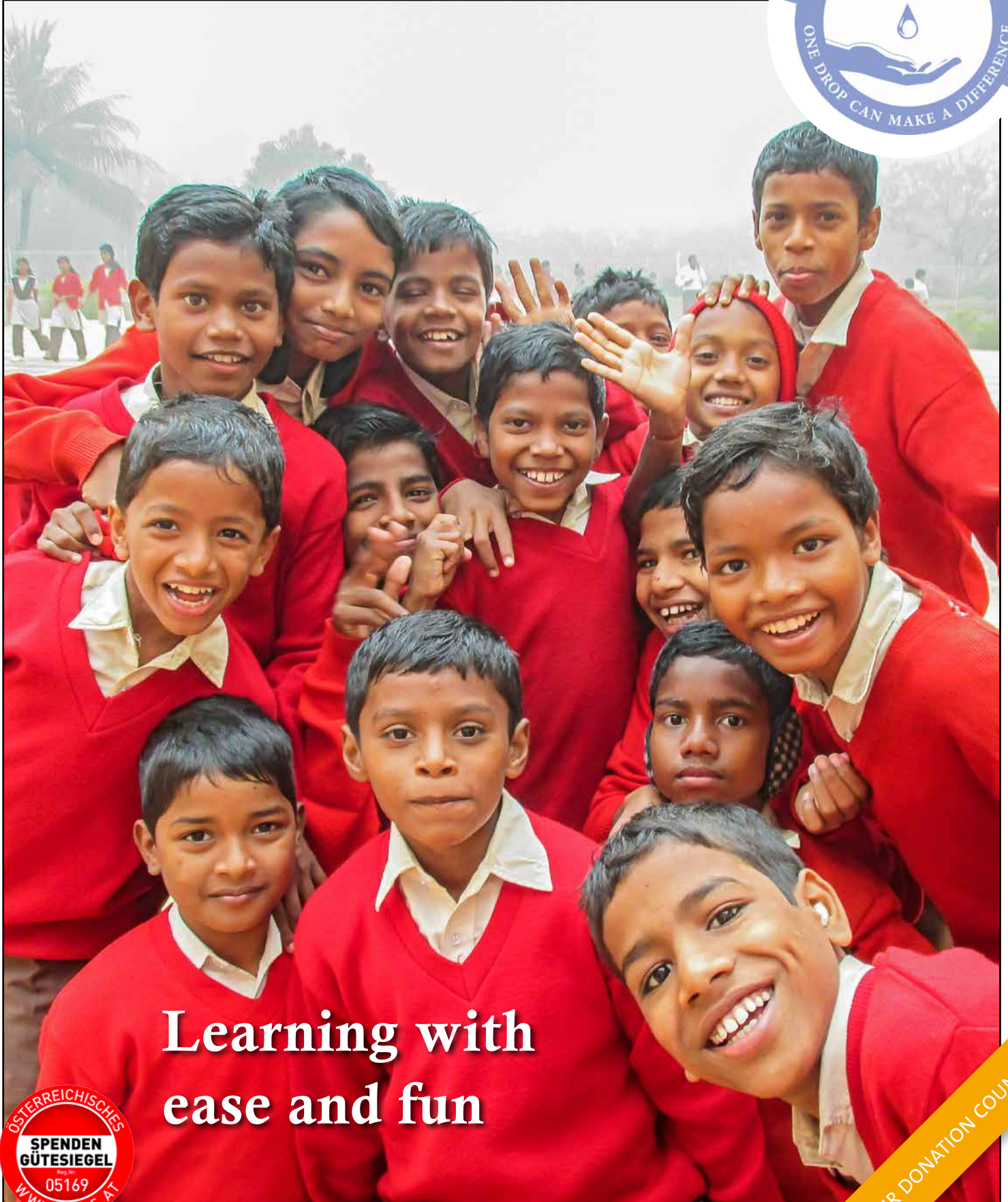


SPOTLIGHT

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Learning with
ease and fun



YOUR DONATION COUNTS!

Bhajans for Balashram

Music, a way to share joy



Members and friends of the Yoga-center in Tattendorf organise charity concerts under the title “Bhajans for Balashram”, in favour of the Balashram Residential School for underprivileged children in Odisha.

The Bhajan group called “Jyotijalakash” consists of three members, namely Dayamayee (harmonium), Julia (guitar), Christian (tabla) and was founded in September 2014.

Since then, they have given successful concerts enjoyed by many during large

Yoga Seminars, and at Yoga studios in the city of Vienna and its surrounding area.

Dayamayee, Julia und Christian play and sing Bhajans and Mantras from India, as well as spiritual songs from all over the world. The trio always touches the heart of the public who is inspired to sing along when the group repeats song lines the Kirtan way.

“To rejoice” is the motto of the group whose aim is to bring some joy to the children in India. Maybe it is only a small

contribution towards offering the children at Balashram a safe home, good education and more chances of a happy future. However, it demonstrates how one can share talents or skills with others. The generous donations collected during the concerts, up to May 2015, amounted to 3.600 EUR - all of which (100%) will be devolved to the Balashram Residential School.

A big Thank You, to all who have contributed!

Convert “miles” into “smiles” 😊

A marathon in favour of the Balashram children

The desire to support the Hariharananda Residential School prompted Joanna and Nadia from Poland, to participate at a half marathon in Warsaw. On top of this, they took advantage of the presence of their families, friends and colleagues to involve them in fundraising for Balashram.

Joanna and Nadia had already started training for the half marathon during the summer in 2014 and have been supporting each other ever since. Running, which initially was intended as a relaxation exercise, quickly became a passion for the two.

In 2015, the young women decided to run “the extra mile” and fundraise for Balashram. The action was a success and they raised 2,200 EUR for the Balashram children.

The aim of the event was not only to collect funds in a relatively short time but also to spread, in Poland and Great Bri-



tain, the message of HAND IN HAND’s generosity and charity. Their aim was to influence more people to regularly help and support the less advantaged.

“Our hearts have always warmed up to the Balashram projects and we are proud to have been able to contribute in the realization of these objectives. We hope that this will allow more underprivileged children to experience the childhood they deserve“, say Joanna and Nadia, who have already started organising their next activity in favour of the Balashram children.

Dear Friends,

Our organization HAND IN HAND works closely with Prajnana Mission in successfully realizing numerous and diverse humanitarian projects in India. In this edition, Swami Achalananda who has been the Secretary of Prajnana Mission since 2011, is going to tell us more about it. We are also sharing with you some lively impressions gained by friends of HAND IN HAND during their visits at the Balashram Residential School and at the Hospital in Cuttack.



f.l.t.r. Sw. Achalananda, Peter van Breukelen, Chandrakanta Mishra

In his article Shri P. P. Singh, the Director of Balashram, portrays two pupils: a boy who has just entered the Residential School, and one schoolgirl who is already in the last grade. We are also reporting on the many creative fundraising activities like "Bhajans for Balashram", "A marathon for the Balashram children" and "Pupils help pupils" – all means and ways of collecting donations to be used for the assistance of people in need.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all from my heart, for your donations which are not only allowing many children to have a new and better future but are also giving sick people and victims of natural catastrophes the chance of a better life. We would like to kindly ask you for more donations as we want to be able to continue supporting these projects also in the future.

In the name of HAND IN HAND

Peter van Breukelen (President)

Pupils are helping pupils

The AGEF, a German action group for development and peace, was founded in 2004 by the Konrad-Adenauer secondary school in Westerburg. Socially-engaged pupils have since been meeting regularly to organise charity runs, fundraising during school concerts, and other activities.

The proceeds go to several charitable organizations. During the past few years, the AGEF has been fundraising also for HAND IN HAND, whose aid projects they approve of quite strongly. For instance, the youngsters had organised, in 2014, a stand during the annual Gingerbread-Christmas market and had devolved all the money from sales to the children of the Balashram School. The sales of the self-baked German Lebkuchen/biscuits and of the drinks amounted to an extraordinary sum of 2,300 EUR. This amount is sufficient to pay for six children - their school teaching, healthy food and medical care - for an entire year.

HAND IN HAND would like to thank the pupils for their social engagement and their extraordinary fundraising action, and also the teacher Astrid Zahn who has been actively supporting them.



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Organization for Humanitarian Aid
Austria, A-1120 Vienna, Pohlgasse 10/4/7
A-2523 Tattendorf, Pottendorfer Str. 69
Phone: +43 650 7026050
E-Mail: info@handinhand.at
Website: www.handinhand.at
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Editorial and Responsibility:
Uschi Schmidtke and Nada Steinmann
Editorship: Nada Steinmann
Editorial staff: Annemarie Ackerl,
Peter van Breukelen, Irma Botero,
Patrizia Brunelli, Carola Dörnfeld,
Linda Hawkins, Dr. Ingrid Kohlmann,
Kristin Mosch, Nadia Pawelczyk, Shri P.P.
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Balashram children

Jagannath Chandil and Kausalya Pal

Twelve years has gone by since Balashram opened its doors to many children, and many more have joined since. In this report, school director Shri P. P. Singh portrays a pupil who has just been accepted at the school, and one schoolgirl who is already in the last grade



Kausalya Pal, a 15 year old girl, came to Hariharananda Balashram from a remote and obscure village

near the sea coast in Rajnagar block. She was staying with her small family consisting of her father, stepmother and her two younger step-sisters. When she was 2 years old her mother died. Her father was initially reluctant to marry for the second time but to care of his 2 year old daughter was very difficult for him. Encouraged by the advice and insistence of his neighbour he married for the second time hoping that his new wife would take good care of his daughter. This turned out to be a big mistake. Instead of caring for the small baby, the step mother meted out harsh treatment to the baby.

The father had no way to save his baby from the cruel treatment of his second wife. With his meagre income he just about managed to feed the family. The father loved the baby with all his heart. Many a time, he left his little baby in his in-laws house on his way to work and

brought her back home when he returned from work. Such was the situation in which she was raised before she came to Balashram.

Now her life in the Balashram has changed. In her words – “After coming to Balashram, I feel that I have a future. Now I am free from the fear of my step mother. I am studying hard in order to reach my desired goal. I want to be a pilot”.

Her performance in studies at school is satisfactory and she has been trying her level best to achieve her target.



Jagannath Chandil is a child from MaLJrbhanj District of Odisha whose father is a blind and lame person and mother is a house wife with a young baby of

11 months. Father was blind from birth and one day while walking along the road had an accident and became lame, permanently, as the accident was severe.

His income is almost nil, getting only Rs.300/- and 25 kg of rice per month from the government, which cannot even meet the food expenses of the family. The mother cannot go to work because she is feeding the baby, and also there is a scarcity of working opportunities in the area, so the financial situation was really bad.

Meanwhile the Balashram Students' Survey Team came and investigated their miserable condition and finally the selection committee approved Jagannath Chandil – or his admission to the school. In the month of June 2015, the child was admitted in nursery class in Balashram and is now doing well.

Balashram School

Hariharananda Balashram is a free residential English Medium School affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education, New Delhi.

The school started in 2004 with forty children, three teachers, few caretakers, and supported by three Brahmacharinis and a Brahmachari.

Every year the school admits 40 students from destitute families, most of whom are orphans or semi-orphans.

Besides 471 students studying in Nursery and Standards I to X, the school has 24 teachers and a few office staff.

These students live in three, well-furnished hostels and are looked after by 40 caretakers and 2 superintendents, one for girls and another for boys.





Learning with ease and fun

The open, clear and goal-oriented attitude of the children at the Balashram Residential School, has deeply impressed the teacher Astrid Zahn. She tells us more about it in her report ■

“Sit down ma’am. Where do you come from?” While I was answering their questions, I joined a group of about eight girls. They were curious and wanted to know about Germany, about my work as a teacher, and more. Some of them were very self-confident and loud while others were giggling cheerfully while looking shyly away. Just like normal teenagers.

In December 2014, my sister, her family and I visited the Balashram School, during a hot 30c day which there, is considered winter. It was a holiday period and we were surprised to find one afternoon, some 13/14- year-old girls in the shady garden. They were sitting on their mats with books and notebooks open and were studying Oriya, their national language.

They waved to us when they saw us. Although they were not at home with their families – I secretly pitied them - they see-

med happy and content to be at the residential school. When I asked them what they liked most at the school, they answered spontaneously: “Studying books!” and looked at me, a bit surprised that I had asked such a question!



It made me think about the pupils and teachers back home in the schools who aren't always completely satisfied. Therefore I decided to ask them what they disliked. They only looked at me, dumbfounded and unable to reply to my question. Apparently there isn't anything they are displeased with.

I realised that Balashram represents for these young people an enormous opportunity they want to grab, in order to receive an education and develop social skills and competence. Something they wouldn't be able to achieve while staying with their families. I came to know that some children prefer not to go back to their original homes because of the difficult and poor conditions there.

Here at Balashram, the children feel at ease in the community, and they enjoy each day from anew, the many and varied opportunities that the school offers them.



Travel report

While on a trip to India, the couple, Carola and Andreas Dörnfeld, visited, together with their son Elias and Carola's sister Astrid Zahn, the hospital in Cuttack and the Balashram Residential School

Here Carola Dörnfeld describes what has impressed and moved her most and deeply

“My husband and I both work in medical and health care in Germany and were, therefore, very interested to see the Cuttack hospital. We were impressed by how well-organised it was, thus providing and ensuring comprehensive, medical diagnostics and care. This newly established hospital can be compared to our polyclinics back home with an integrated choice of all relevant medical specialisations, including dentistry and ophthalmology. The staff working there was very kind and answered all our

questions while patiently showing and explaining everything. We were also allowed to take pictures. We appreciated the fact that, for the Balashram children, a dedicated room had been equipped with several beds, should they ever need to stay overnight for treatment. That way, they wouldn't need to travel back and forth between the school and the hospital and, they wouldn't have to go to another hospital as in-patients.

“On the same day, we continued to Balashram where we were greeted by Swami Gurusharananda Giri, who made good friend with our son Elias.

“We first went to see the youngest children and it was heart-warming to listen to the songs they performed for us (in pairs or in a choir) with their strong and joyful voices. We then joined Elias in singing German Christmas songs and other songs from his school, for the children. We all enjoyed it very much. It was Christmas time and a Christmas tree had been decorated in the school. A teacher told us that on Christmas day, they had performed a nativity play, which had been thoroughly enjoyed by all.

“We were quite surprised to find out that the children did not know what an aeroplane was. They asked themselves how we had travelled to India. Many of the children didn't even know what toilets or running water was, before coming to Balashram. They usually arrive undernourished, and do not know what fruit, vegetables or milk are, and some of them, cannot even chew properly.

“After the communal lunch we went to the cow shed with the docile cows who like to be stroked. These allow the school to produce their own milk and derived products, so important for the protein balance of the newly arrived, undernourished children.





“We then went to see the older boys and girls who are accommodated in separate quarters. The boys were enjoying their TV-hour and were very excited about it because they do not have many chances to watch TV.

The girls were sitting in the garden with their books and chatted with us openly and with curiosity. We would have liked to have stayed longer however, after this eventful day which filled our hearts with happiness and contentment, we had to make our way back to Balighai.

“At the end of this report I would like, as a mother and nurse, emphasize the following:

“It needs to be noted that Balashram utilizes, fully, every available means, thus enabling the school to sustain itself. Best results are obtained by the simplest means.”

”I was also impressed by the effective and loving care given in dressing, nourishing and educating these children.”

“Besides the major principal subjects, the children also learn dance, music, sewing, martial arts and many more subjects which will be useful in their future lives. All children, whether young or older, are in excellent physical, mental, emotional and spiritual condition. They are as animated, happy, open and inquisitive as the children in the West - however, with a small difference: Pupils at Balashram do know what privilege it is, to have the “opportunity to learn”.

Olivia Walker interviewed Elias Dörnfeld



Olivia is 21 years old and studies pedagogy. Elias is 8 years old and is in the 3rd grade; he has only an elementary knowledge of English.

Olivia: What did you like most at Balashram?

Elias: I liked very much the nursery children and their songs. It was nice that they allowed me to sing something for them as well. It was stunning to see the puppy dogs and the monkeys running around and climbing freely all over the premises. I liked very much the breakfast with yogurt and I was really happy when Swamiji gave us yummy cookies.

Olivia: What did you not like so much?

Elias: Unfortunately, I couldn't understand everything because I don't know much English yet. I didn't like the dazzling of the sun on the roof.

Olivia: What surprised you most?

Elias: I was surprised to see so many children sleeping in one dormitory and the fact that they were all wearing a uniform. They all looked so different from us with their dark skin, dark hair and eyes. Even the cows and bulls look different. They are almost white, are very friendly and they are all free to roam anywhere.

Till we meet again

The East and the West need each other

Swami Achalananda has been Secretary of Prajnana Mission, the partner organization of the non-profit organization HAND IN HAND, since 2011 but has been active within the organization since 2004. He emphasizes that he will support the projects until his last breath. The tasks have been continuously increasing over the years and now, he has a team of young people working with him who bring new ideas and visions. "It is important to give young plants the chance to grow," he said in an Interview with Nada Steinmann, citing his teacher Paramahansa Prajnanananda

SPOTLIGHT: Prajnana Mission has its base in Odisha where it handles and implements urgent humanitarian projects. When was the organization founded and what type of tasks is it carrying out?

Swami Achalananda: On the suggestion of the visionary and philosopher Paramahansa Hariharananda, who spend all his life helping poor children, Paramahansa Prajnanananda founded the organization and became its first president. It was his heartfelt desire to help people in need and to continue the tradition of his Yoga Masters in promoting spiritual, physical and mental development. The major charitable activities of the organization are to give the poor and underprivileged children an education and also to offer free medical care to people who otherwise couldn't afford seeing a doctor.

The Balashram Residential School in Arua was founded in 2004, five years after the devastation caused by the 1999 super cyclone in Odisha. The catastrophe claimed many lives, leaving many children without parents. The aim was to offer these children a home and an education. The school is unique in India with its philosophy that an academic curriculum alone is not necessarily suitable for each and every child and, therefore, each child needs to be encouraged and supported according to its own individual skills and abilities.

Even more so because many of the children are the first ones in their families to be able to attend school. Illiteracy is widely spread in India and most parents or grandparents of these children never had the opportunity to attend

school. Seen in this light, these children are realizing their dream.

In order to administer medical care we have created three Health Centres in Balighai, Jagatpur, and Bishindpur, as



well as regular Village Health Projects in Athagarh and Arua. Mobile Health Camps are also held both in remote villages of Puri and also in very poor urban quarters of Cuttack. We are planning new projects, for example treatment of geriatric patients who are normally a little neglected in today's society. We are already gaining some experience in that sector in the Cuttack Hospital, where a geriatric physician is looking after elderly, sick people.

Another task of Prajnana Mission is to provide quick help and assistance in cases of natural catastrophes like cyclones, floods and fires. Volunteers of the Mission try to reach the site quickly to help. The older students of Balashram also volunteer their services during natural catastrophes.

SPOTLIGHT: What type of cooperation is there between Prajnana Mission and HAND IN HAND?

Swami Achalananda: Prajnana Mission is like the, so called, executing agency of the relief organization HAND IN

HAND. The two organizations work closely together to provide humanitarian aid in India.

SPOTLIGHT: Given the present economic boom in India, many people are wondering why they still need to provide financial aid for projects in India. How do you secure the funding of the projects?

Swami Achalananda: The financial support comes partly from India but mostly from the West. Lately, we have increased our efforts in establishing some sort of cooperation with regional companies who are prepared to provide financial support.

SPOTLIGHT: In the past, many volunteers have been interested in supporting the HAND IN HAND projects locally in India. However, they were faced with many difficulties. Has anything changed in that respect?

Swami Achalananda: At the beginning there have been difficulties. Firstly because of the Indian legislation which does not allow foreign medical doctors to practice without a permit. Secondly, often the help offered was in areas where it wasn't really needed. By now the projects have expanded and so the tasks. We are about to finish a website with all the necessary information. Anyone interested to help can then easily check which areas need assistance. Therefore the whole procedure should be much easier in the future.

SPOTLIGHT: People in the West are rich in material goods while the East is rich in spiritual values. You travel quite a lot



and you get into contact with people of both cultures. How do you believe the world is going to evolve in the future?

Swami Achalananda: There are needs on both sides. The East has more spirituality and the West has more material prosperity. However, the West needs more spirituality and the East needs economic growth. If you look at it this way, it is like two semi-circles which need to be closed. Nowadays there isn't much material wealth in India but a thousand years ago the East was a material paradise.

With time a lot has changed. We know that in this world everything comes and goes. While India is considered the cradle of spirituality, the West is advanced in technology and science. If we look at today's world, we realize that a certain balance is missing. A good combination of both should bring the world forward. I think that the East and the West can learn from each other.

SPOTLIGHT: Are you optimistic in that respect?

Swami Achalananda: Yes, by all means.

SPOTLIGHT: What is the reason behind your optimism? If one looks at the present situation in the world, it doesn't look very promising.

Swami Achalananda: Man has become more conscious. Nowadays people know more about themselves, about others and about the world. For this reason they cannot be manipulated as easily by political and religious conflicts. If you observe history, you can see that changes have always been happening and right now we are facing a new one.



The Health Centre in Cuttack enjoys a good reputation

Text by Peter van Breukelen, President of HAND IN HAND

One year after our previous trip to India, my wife Silvia and I re-visited the Health Centre in Cuttack, in February 2015. A lot had changed since its foundation in 2014. While, initially, 1,200 patients were visiting the facilities every month, now there are three times as many.

When we arrived early in the morning at the Centre, we found already 30 people waiting on a bench in the shade. The waiting time is not too long because the number of available doctors has increased: ten specialists (among which are cardiologists, surgeons, dentists, and psychiatrists) offer their services on a daily basis, for free.

Doctors who are still working elsewhere full-time, come usually one day per week, while those who have already retired, spend

every day at the Centre. One of the doctors was

telling me that for acute cases or when the patient is too weak to travel to the hospital, he visits them at home - also during the night.

The Health Centre has different departments, one of which is a surgical unit where small operations are carried out. One of the biggest problems in India is diabetes. Many patients present themselves with open and inflamed wounds which need immediate attention.



For the population in the surrounding villages, the dental unit is very important. Without this specialised assistance, all teeth causing pain to the patient would just be pulled out.

Patients with psychological problems, work in the garden of the Centre as part of an occupational therapy. They are also given medication- though for a few days only in order to avoid drug dependence.

Many diseases are caused by a wrong lifestyle: insufficient nutrition and deficient or total lack of hygiene. People in the villages are not aware of the importance of these factors and need advice

and guidelines in order to be able to conduct a healthy lifestyle. They are given small brochures which explain how disease can be avoided. Often it is about small things, like washing their hands or cleaning their teeth.

People cover long distances to reach the Health Centre and arrive by bus from villages as far as 60 km away. For patients who do not have the money, all treatments are free of charge. Those who can afford to pay are asked for a contribution of three Rupees (70 Rupees are the equivalent of approximately 1 Euro). The reputation of good health care at the Centre has spread and now also attracts patients with more money. Instead of going to a hospital they prefer to come for treatment to the Centre.



Sw. Gurukrupananda, Irma Botero



Images of the Balashram

Irma Botero has been one of the most committed and dedicated board members of the HAND IN HAND organization since its foundation in 2000. In December 2014 Irma spent ten days with the children at Balashram and in this report, she is going to share with us the many lively impressions she has been carrying within her heart since then.



A few months after returning from India, I still see pictures in my head of the Balashram, and I find myself smiling at the memory of the little ones washing their teeth without water, or showing me their tiny beds where they curled up to sleep. I loved to help the caretakers put them to bed.

How cute and tidy they were as they folded their uniforms for the next school day and put away the toothbrushes in a little cupboard above their bed. Some actually had to jump and climb to reach them!

How simple and uncomplicated is their upbringing...a little like their diet... healthy, balanced and fresh from the adjoining fields. Their milk comes from well-groomed cows in a stable bathed in golden light.

I see the kind faces that inhabit their world: The patience of their teachers and caregivers.

The tranquil gaze of the Principal as he surveys every aspect of the school, day after day. The sweetness of the Vice Principal, as she gives her input.

The diligence of the monks, brahmacharis and brahmacharinis. The people who prepare their food, who clean and cook and clean again.

India with its red sun has always held a timeless essence for me

How lucky they are to grow up in this safe environment, among such well-meaning and earnest teachers, who patiently strive, through science and music, sport and dance, language, art and maths to awaken the spark that will help the children make their own way, later on in life.

In my mind's eye, I see flashes of lovely, long haired girls dancing, and the serious concentration and discipline of a taekwondo display.

I hear the interest of the older students in world affairs, and I remember being moved as the students folded their hands and closed their eyes with complete sincerity during morning prayer.

I felt it again at the Balashram. Here time lies still...waiting for every little, grinning child to mature into a well-rounded young adult.

Every one of us wants these boys and girls to succeed but none more than Paramahansa Prajnananda, whose dream imbues all who live here. Every child and every stone of every building is in place because of him and I felt his smile mirrored in every face.



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