



Goetheanum · Freie Hochschule für Geisteswissenschaft

Sektion für Landwirtschaft

Section for Agriculture

Section d'Agriculture

Seccion de Agricultura

Listen to the farmer

Report about the journey to India by the
biodynamic movement in November 2017

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Cover image: Bernard Schmitt

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From Iguazu to Delhi: the journey to India

Dear Readers,

This special issue of the Circular letter is dedicated to the biodynamic movement's India trip in November 2017. By way of introduction I would like to relate briefly how it came about ... In 2013 the Section for Agriculture worked on the theme of building alliances at its February conference. At this we found out how necessary it is in the present day to form alliances with other movements in order to be able to make a contribution towards the gigantic challenges of our time. The first step on the way is to "open yourself up", without preconceived ideas. What counts is to be completely a listening ear, completely open, for the questions that come towards us. Thus, when I brought this theme of alliance building two years ago at the south American biodynamic conference in Iguazu, the co-ordinator of IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) in south America came to me and said, "you, biodynamic farmers, are not at all so dogmatic after all; it would be important for you to bring your contributions more strongly into the great organic movement; the next opportunity for doing so is the next Organic World Congress (OWC) in Delhi in November 2017". This question led to a whole process coming about. When we met Sundeep Kamath from the Indian biodynamic association some time later, he said that the organisers of the OWC in Delhi, the Indian organic association (OFAI), wanted to give farmers (especially the smallholders from the countries of the South) much more space and that we should use this opportunity to portray the world-wide practice of biodynamic agriculture. To this end "farmers' track" was arranged for the first time, in which more than 200 presentations were given, of which more than 30 came from the biodynamic movement. Then came the idea to organise the November meeting of the Circle of Representatives of the Section to be in India before the OWC. And Demeter International got particularly involved with financing the travel ... Thus the process

was built up step by step: the preparations swung to and fro between the outer (question, impulse) and the inner (reflection: what are we doing here? How can we take part?). Out of one question a fortnight's trip with 4 to 5 stages for 80 people came about; something that nearly turned the Section into a travel agent's. I would like to take the opportunity to warmly thank all those who made it possible on behalf of the Section. "It was a dream and it became reality".

Now all the participants of this unique trip are back again with new perspectives, ideas, impulses and friends. Hopefully, all these new impulses will go on ripening and will make our whole movement fertile ...

We hope that this bouquet of texts can take you along to this "incredible India" and that you can have some sense of what moved us.

We wish you stimulating reading.



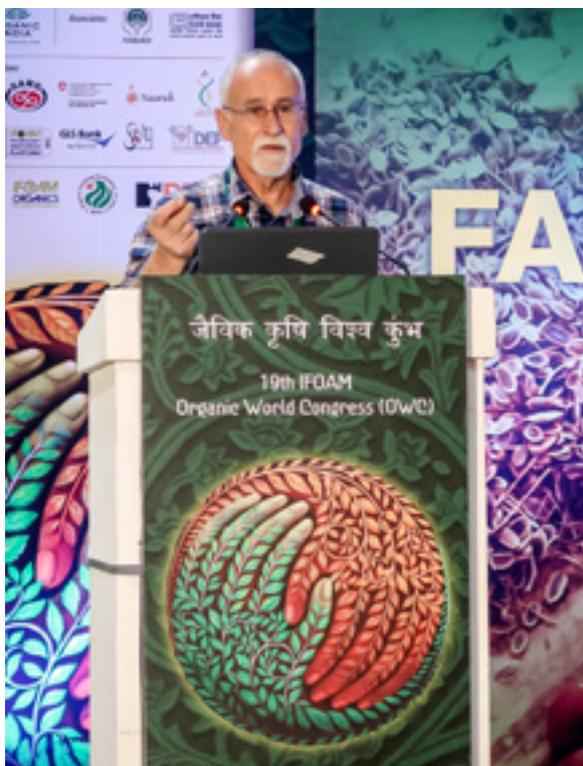
Jean-Michel Florin, for the Section for Agriculture

Translated by John Weedon

Journey to India of the Section for Agriculture

In our meeting space, out in the open on a biodynamic farm in India it is never silent, even when everyone is quiet. The sounds of birds, monkeys, dogs and the rustling of the bamboos of tree height form an unaccustomed tapestry of sound for the meeting of the Circle of Representatives of the Section for Agriculture in November 2017. It is the first time ever that we have met outside Europe. Our host is Sarvdaman Patel, the president of the Biodynamic Association of India. We are meeting on his farm. And that is no coincidence ...

In recent years within the biodynamic movement the outlook has changed. Instead of a centre, nowadays the central point of the movement is located wherever active people work in their own situations. At the same time, we learnt to connect up with other movements and to engage more strongly in civil society in order to tackle the great question about the future of the earth and of humankind. In tune with these changes a request came from Patricia Flores, the IFOAM-co-ordinator for South America: biody-



The french goat breeder Patrick Lespagnol presents his farm during the OWC / BS

amic agriculture, as an integral part of and source of inspiration for the organic movement, should have a strong presence at the 2017 Organic World Congress (OWC) in India. So from 3rd to 16th November, after more than two years of preparation, about 70 representatives of the world-wide biodynamic movement from 20 countries and 6 continents met in India.

The places where we stopped on our travels were:

Gujarat for the Circle of Representatives' Meeting

A 4-day meeting of the Circle of Representatives of the Section for Agriculture with invited guests on the farm of Sarvdaman Patel in Gujarat. We had a guided tour around the diverse, innovatively run farm, met with the Council of the Biodynamic Association of India and listened to interesting reports of outstanding biodynamic initiatives. Some examples were:

- Coffee-growing in Adivasi villages (indigenous population of India) in Araku Valley (Andhra Pradesh). Naandi Foundation: www.naandi.org
- Production of healing plants and of essential oils in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, in order to support social initiatives. Muhil Health Center & Karmuhil Organic Farms: www.muhil.org
- Agricultural and socio-economic projects for sustainable development with marginalised groups in Andhra Pradesh. Timbaktu Collective: www.timbaktu.org
- Production of biodynamic preparations as well as the training in and spreading of biodynamic agriculture through the SARG Organisation at the foot of the Himalayas (Uttarakhand). www.sargindia.org

Organic World Congress 2017 (OWC) and international biodynamic meeting

On 8th November, approx. 80 farmers and representatives of the world-wide biodynamic movement met at the invitation of the Section for Agriculture and participated in World Cafés on current topics, tasting of Indian coffee and a meeting between the members of the Circle of Representatives and the biodynamic speakers at the OWC.

There were over 30 contributions of biodynamic farmers and researchers at the OWC. We made lots

of contact with the world-wide organic movement and especially with Indian farmers, who were represented in large numbers at the IFOAM Congress for the first time.

Field Trip to the Preparation Producer in Uttarakhand

The last stage of our journey was Nainital in Uttarakhand. There Binita Shah had organised the event "listen to the farmers"; through which the international group of biodynamic farmers came into direct conversation with Indian farmers. Besides this we also visited Binita Shah's initiative and her biodynamic training centre high up in the mountains. There biodynamic preparations are produced for several tens of thousands of farmers and training courses are carried out with farmers.

We are taking lots of impressions and impulses home with us. Wonderful landscapes and a most diverse plant and animal world have left lingering impressions in us. However, we were deeply impressed especially with the people, with their energy, their dignity, their courage and their strong commitment. All of which is required, especially in a country, in which the negative effects of our lifestyle are so starkly evident: the most

bitter poverty, poisonous smog, polluted waters and degraded soil. The tasks are enormous. We had the privilege to get to know some remarkable personalities from the organic and biodynamic movements, who have undertaken impressive initiatives, working with lots of small farmers; great hope for India and the world!

The trip has brought the world-wide biodynamic movement together in a completely different way than would have been possible in Europe and has brought it into closer contact with the large organic movement. The participants at the Organic World Congress noticed the strong presence of the biodynamic farmers and researchers. This will enable the biodynamic movement to better position its significant contribution towards the organic movement in future. Being together with them led to a strengthening of our own impulse and a greater opening out to those beyond our movement. The trip helped us to inwardly and outwardly take the step from being a relatively Eurocentric movement to being a world-wide one. It will go down as a milestone in the history of world-wide biodynamic agriculture. Now we are on the way to becoming a truly world-wide movement.

Jean-Michel Florin and Verena Wahl

Incredible India

General Impressions

REGINA HALLER

India, a huge subcontinent with about 1.3 billion people, where 122 different languages, very different climatic zones and 7 main religions co-exist. Alongside China India is the most densely populated country in the world, with 0.12 hectares of cultivatable land per inhabitant, which, despite an average rainfall of roughly 1 000 mm per year has to be irrigated up to 40%; over 90% of the fresh water goes into agriculture. The consumption of pesticides and chemical fertilisers is enormous (the 2014 average: 165 kg/hectare), in the course of our stay the smog rose to 30 times the official health limit, to say nothing of the ever-present mountains of refuse, above all, in the cities ...

So, what in such a context does the world-wide biodynamic movement have to bring here, that is to say, the Section for Agriculture, many members of the Circle of Representatives, Demeter International as well as 25 other farmers from many different countries?

The invitation by the Indian biodynamic association and the IFOAM organisers to our world-wide movement to attend the Organic World Congress, organised by IFOAM in Delhi, was definitely the starting-point. However, there was far more to it: we all wanted to be able to see the Indian initiatives in biodynamic agriculture with our own eyes and acknowledge them and to get to know the hugely exemplary work in this such difficult and, often enough, depressing environment.

We were able to do so in our roughly 15-day stay. Many of us met before the congress at the meeting

of the Circle of Representatives at the biodynamic farm of Sarvdaman Patel and his wife, in the West of the country, where we immersed ourselves in the world of India, worked on the conference to come in the shadow of the 'Bamboo Cathedral', relished the Indian dishes and, above all, got to know the biodynamic dairy farming and vegetable production of the farm; a farm, where screeching swarms of parrots and hordes of monkeys threaten the crops, where a lot of women, enveloped in saris and crouching down, work with their hands and where ox-carts and equipment pulled by human hand are common, instead of by machines as is the rule in Europe.

The congress itself in the capital, Delhi, was exciting. Not only did about 3000 farmers, heads of agricultural organisations, researchers, politicians and exhibitors from all over the world, who have devoted themselves to organic farming, meet, but also this year's slogan "Farmers first" was actually realised. The amazing initiatives of so many small farmers from across the world gave us courage, and the mood in the three parallel halls of the "farmers' Track" was carried by a lot of warm-hearted mutual support.

On the journey to the Taj Mahal, the emblematic cultural memorial in Agra, the incredible tragedy of many Indian farmers was visible from the fields on the roadside in the form of kiln chimneys; everywhere on the vast plane, farming land for as long as anyone can remember, wherever the earth has been removed to a depth of two to three metres and is used in a final act of exploitation for brick production, a farmer has had to sell his now completely barren land out of despair. This move is frequently followed by suicide by drinking the same chemical poisons that have destroyed the soil, the family livelihood and their human dignity.

After a long bus journey on what to our minds are the chaotic roads of India, where, at speed and only a few centimetres apart, tuk-tuks, cars, minibuses and lorries, piled high with their loads, or tractors with trailers squeeze past pedestrians, cyclists, rickshaws and cows and one another in total confusion, we arrived late at night in the mountainous North. Here we were relieved to breathe pure air once more; the next day we found out from the Indian biodynamic farmers at first hand about their work and their emergence from the trap of



agrarian poisons and we could sense the extent of the fantastic work of our Indian friends. Here in Bhimtal Binita Sha's own farm and initiatives are rooted, and the visit there was a highlight of the whole journey.

What impressed us most of all on the whole journey was the tremendous energy and the will, combined with a wealth of ideas, political nous and determination, with which our Indian friends have achieved such a huge amount already, and are striving to achieve much more; all of this in a context that makes our problems seem banal. And what is still most interesting of all is how biodynamics and its anthroposophical background can be stimulated and inspired by Indian culture and how this can be enriching for us all.

Translated by John Weedon

A very inspiring Journey

ULF-DIETER VOIGTS

What an experience to be permitted to get to know Indian organic and biodynamic farming from 3rd to 16th November 2017! Yes, there is biodynamic agriculture not only mainly in Europe and other parts of the world, it is there being practised on a large scale and by lots of small farmers in India as well. Here composts are set up fairly basically and simply with preparations, cow pat preparations are produced and horn manure and horn silica preparations are made and spread on the land. There is no lengthy questioning, people get on with it and lots of farmers experience success. Whether it be on low-lying, flooded soil, wooded areas or dry soils with bushes, or else on slopes in the foothills of the Himalayas, it works everywhere. Lots of different, small farmers from all parts of India have told us proudly and self-confidently of their success. We were lucky enough to see some of these success stories and to have a conversation with the farmers and scientists concerned. In future it will be important to turn over the many compost heaps that have been physically turned over in a spiritual sense too. With this the Indians are on the right track.

In the meanwhile, many Indian States recognise organic and biodynamic cultivation. This was plain for all to see and hear at the Organic World Congress that took place at this time. Here people spoke openly



Elaboration of big quantities of CPP on Binita Shah's farm / VW

about the advantages of these ways of farming, and equally point out the dangers of conventional farming, not least, of the dangers of genetic modification. Moreover, it was evident there how much organic, but also biodynamic agriculture, is already being applied. It was good that the Circle of Representatives of the Agriculture Section in Dornach met this time in a different country, say, India. Thereby a step was taken to raise biodynamic cultivation more onto an international level. Even if the annual agricultural conference in Dornach is an international conference, it is actually very strongly influenced by our European colleagues. Let us hope that the biodynamic movement will further develop into a world movement.

For me quite personally this journey was most interesting and, above all, very inspiring. Thus, I shall definitely have a new go at the application of the preparations and composting on our farm and reinvigorate the application of the cow pat preparation (CPP). The ongoing sharing with colleagues from all over the world, getting to know Indian farmers time and again and the many new impressions allowed no opportunity to get worn out despite the frequent short nights and overexertion. So we would like to warmly thank all those organising it that they made this journey possible for us.

Translated by John Weedon

An amazing experience

STEFFEN SCHNEIDER

The journey I recently made to India and the Organic World Congress 2017 in Delhi, organised by the Section for Agriculture at the Goetheanum, form a wonderful experience, full of contrasts and surprises.

For myself all forms of beauty of the landscape and nature as well as historic and cultural sights, as remarkable as they are, receded to the background, were almost completely overshadowed by the human drama which occurred everywhere before our eyes; in the traffic, to the left and right of the streets, in the shops and in the countryside, surrounded everywhere by the omnipresent refuse and waste, with the colourfully dressed people, who are all living their own lives, side by side with cows, cars, monkeys, dogs,... What is it that all these people are striving for and what is my connection with all of it? These questions and others besided urged themselves on my mind. From my two weeks in India I would like to describe three special events that stood out for me from all the other experiences.

The first of these highlights occurred on the Patels' farm in the 'Bamboo Cathedral', where we met for our work together on the Leading Thought. While I listened to this content and while we got more to grips with it in small groups, I was led to reflect, on



*Everywhere, people clothed in manifold and joyful colors,
living among cows, cars, bicycles ... / BS*

the one hand, on the surreal surroundings of this place outdoors, where we gathered in November so far away from home and, on the other hand, I became fully aware of the complete familiarity in our sharing of thoughts and discussing the content of the Leading Thought. This led me to feel that the "School of Michael" is a global community and that Rudolf Steiner wrote the Thoughts in such a way that allows the content to become alive in any place in the world at any time. They are truly imbued with the dynamic changing of the *Zeitgeist*.

The second outstanding moment happened on the Wednesday before the beginning of the Organic World Congress at a meeting, attended by most of the biodynamic farmers to get to know one another and share their thoughts. Despite the somewhat kitschy seeming hotel atmosphere, I was again fascinated by the ease with which we were able to enter into a genuine and authentic conversation, whereby it made no difference whether I was a farmer in Nepal, Peru, Germany or the USA – lots of us brought similar questions with us and held similar hopes for the future. I would even dare to assert that this meeting encompassed the greatest diversity of people active in biodynamic farming so far, both seen from a geographical perspective as well as from the diversity of nationalities, gender balance, the different age ranges and life backgrounds. This truly goes to show that the biodynamic initiative has become a global reality and that it would like to develop further in this direction; furthermore, that it no longer needs to be predominantly anchored in the German-speaking and European region.

The third special occurrence took place in the lake resort in Nainital. "Listening to the farmer", what a wonderful activity! I do not think I have ever had a more beautiful description of farming than there of Biju Negi. "Today we have stopped listening to the farmer. If we stop listening, we will soon be deaf, then we will be dumb, and soon after that we will be blind and then we degenerate ... Farmers are constantly listening, they listen to life and they listen to the earth. Farmers sow and harvest life, culture, education, medicine, all the arts – farmers sow humanity"... Enough said!

Listening to the farmers, how full of mildness and pride, full of self-confidence, enthusiasm and pas-

sion, they report on their work so expressively and articulately, was deeply inspiring for me and I shall not forget it so quickly.

Even now, back again in life and everyday work in Hawthorne Valley, I am still in the process of digesting and processing all my impressions and observations. What does it mean to live on one planet with such divergent realities, as I was able to detect in India and how, by comparison, do I perceive them here in the USA? What does this mean for my work and my life?

A journey to India

CARIN FORTIN

“THE ONLY CERTAIN THING IN INDIA IS UNCERTAINTY” was a common joke on our journey through India.

I thought being a farmer would prepare me somehow for India. The farmer is part of a farm individuality – which I experience very much as a farm collective – where the decisions he/she is making are very much influenced, challenged and determined by the organism. Days hardly ever work out the way they were planned, which teaches one flexibility and open mindedness. But India brings this experience to a whole different level. India functions as collective. Decisions are made as a collective. Everyday life and rituals are based on being part of a strong collective. One is not seen merely as individual, but more as a part of a puzzle of relationships which all have to be considered in all decision making. One not only hires or marries a person – the web of family, friends and colleagues are part of these steps. Living in America, I am sometimes appalled by the cult of personality and uber-individualism that leads to a sad alienation from the collective. i phone, i pod and pad, i this and i that, i everything – the celebration of the lower case i, where the head is severed from the body. The imbalance of the three-folded human being, a nation divided and ill. India definitely has its challenges as well – piles of garbage everywhere, suffocating pollution levels and farmers abandoning their land and moving to rapidly growing cities, leaving sustainability behind, adding to the poverty in the country. (Also, an underlying level of violence, where the group decides over the faith of the individual). But I experienced the light and darkness in India as equally intense. The



India: suffocating pollution and farmers leaving their land ... / BS

radiant smiles, the enthusiasm and also beautiful fast blossoming of the organic and biodynamic movement are humbling and contagious.

THE SEED FALLS ON FERTILE GROUND. First, India is the land of the worshipped cow. They roam freely everywhere, on highways, intersections, parks etc. cow pies are piled up beautifully in towers along freeways and the sacred offerings of the cow like milk, dung and urine are used in medicine and farming practices. Farmers used to check in with elders for the best days to plant, breed or build structures. The change to a biodynamic planting calendar is an easy one. And lastly, when teaching biodynamic farming practices in the western world it can be challenging to “translate” and convey the idea of planetary rhythms, cosmic influences and the divine relationships and dialogue between kingdoms – India is based on these perceptions and a deep understanding of these relationships.

COSMIC DANCE. Navigating through traffic in India can be a nerve-racking experience for a westerner and only shows how linear we think. Directions seem optional – trucks coming the “wrong” way on highways, dogs, cows and monkeys build part of the choreography, and people are piled up on mopeds, in tuk-tuks (little 3-wheeler taxis) and on top of trucks already loaded sky high with bags and sugarcane. Constant near misses and a seeming absence of fear show a radically different perception of (personal) space ... And it all works. It is a beautiful dance, an or-

ganic flow with swirls and waves, and all seems to be based on a deep karmic trust and connection to earth.

SPARKLES. Traveling in a large group of at times 70 biodynamic farmers was a challenge in itself and a wonderful exercise in experiencing collectivism.

The outcome – fantastic relationship building, amaz-

ing new impulses and projects, wonderful inspirations and learning and building bridges and understanding – the energy was tangible, an enkindling gathering, an energy accumulation and impulse that will ripple out, especially into the western world, with India being the inspiration and spark ...

Some Indian biodynamic Initiatives

The biodynamic preparations in context: the farm of Sarvdaman Patel

PETRA DERKZEN

The farm house of the Patel family has a beautifully landscaped garden with statues of Buddha and images of the god Shiva and numerous small spiritual artefacts that surround us on the veranda. We are in the countryside, but it is buzzing with sounds and people, so it does not feel empty as in some of our countries in Europe. It is a festive time, sounds of musical gatherings can be heard every evening until deep in the night. On our arrival day there is also music in the background which turns out to be a celebration at a temple in the nearest town Anand. Crammed into three little three-wheel "tuk-tuk" taxi's a group decides to see the temple. Women and men have separate entrances, we leave our shoes in a large row of shoes and lucky for me being a woman, I can admire the sea of bright colours of hundreds of patterned Saris the women on the stairs in front of me are wearing. But I and the women with me from Switzerland and Germany are also an attraction, look at them!

The next day Sarvdaman Patel gives a guided tour of the farm. His enthusiasm is a joy to listen to. He displays a playful curiosity in trying out new things. There are a few principles which return several times while we walk the fields and see the cows:

- Don't kill the messenger. Observe sickness in plants and try to learn where the imbalance comes from. We look at papayas which have some disease. The trees are not taken out but whatever affects them is allowed to take its course.

- Select the strongest. Three papaya plants seem unaffected and their seed should be taken.
- Be as self-reliant as possible, a strong farm organism can withstand a lot. Even though foot and mouth disease is all around the farm, the cows were free from it until the purchase of fodder from outside could not be avoided last year. They got sick, but only mildly and recovered.

During the tour it becomes clear how new ideas come to Sarvdaman. They come when he contemplates. Every morning he takes 20 minutes after waking up to sit and concentrate.

It is full moon that week and on Monday evening the moon glows brightly above the small house next to the farm house in which I share a room. I take a seat near the Buddha statue to look at it. Ms Patel walks out to admire it too and invites me to sit under the full moon. It is the day of Shiva she explains and she finds a suitable mantra on her mobile and we spend a while each in our own contemplation.

On our day of arrival CPP is made (Maria Thun's "Fladen" preparation is called Cow Pat Pit). The CPP is stored in shallow square pits in the ground and in other pits green water is fermenting with plants to make natural remedies such as from the neem plant. Other signs explain: "5 leaf liquid for insect control", "seaweed liquid manure provides potash".

The next day 500 is stirred to be spread and CPP is added. Both 500 and 501 are spread while we stay at the farm. After this, the mixed crop green manure is worked into the soil. The word 'CPP' is repeated over the next few days as all presented biodynamic projects make extensive use of it to enliven the soil. In one project, women make large amounts and sell



Sardavman Patel explains the effect of green manure / UJK

them to the members of their community to generate extra income. It is easier to make locally than to make the BD preparations, which is taken care of at three locations in India on a large scale. From the projects presented as well as from the farm itself, there comes across a great matter-of-factness about using the preparations. This is partly the legacy of Peter Proctor who did not theorise but instead worked practically with many groups to learn-by-doing to make good compost and use the preparations. He saw the need for focussing on good trained techniques that would be robust enough to lead marginal farmers out of a negative spiral of highly priced chemical input, high loans, pest ridden crops, more pesticides, soil depletion, more inputs ... and so on. Good compost and preparations, that's BD input for healthy farming. Added to this are other natural inputs such as seaweed manure or neem cake.

What really strikes me is the fully accepted and neutral way in which the BD preparations are used as natural farm inputs. This seems at odds with my Dutch experience among Dutch BD farmers, many of whom experience unease, struggle, great inner and outer searches for how it works, if it works, for the logic of

it, why horns? Why a bladder and yarrow? It usually takes years to come to terms with it, after first feeling foolish for doing things that are not understood. This is also my own experience.

One could maybe think that a deeper search for meaning of the preparations was not present at the farm or in the projects presented. But that would be a big mistake, a thought coloured by my own cultural glasses. From the farm and the projects the idea shines through that there is no question that matter is spirit and spirit is matter. This is a lived truth. A taken-for-granted fact of life. Here the context is made up of, for example, the Ayurvedic knowledge system that has spiritual knowledge of thousands of plants including 'preparations' made out of a combination of substances for various treatments. The spirituality is not confined to the biodynamic preparations, not limited to what Steiner expressed only but it encompasses all forms of expression in daily life. It is me who misses the wider spiritual context in my culture that would make the preparations a normal treatment. In Europe, we had to learn by persevering in our reading of the Agriculture Course.



Two young landworkers ploughing on S. Patel's demonstration farm / BS

"Listen to the farmer"

BIJU NEGI

The second visit to a biodynamic initiative led us to northern India, to the foothills of the Himalaya, to Naukuchiatal (in the state Uttarakhand), where we could participate in a workshop entitled "Listen to the Farmer". Here we reproduce the greeting words of Biju Negi which opened the workshop. On the next day we drove further to visit the "Homestead of the biodynamic preparations in the Himalayas" (see the following article).

Namaste! Good Morning! On behalf of Sarg Vikas Samiti, I welcome you all. I hope you had good breakfast and said your grace to the farmer, because of who we are here. And because of who we are!

I am Biju Negi and belong to a long established small farmers' movement called *Beej Bachao Andolan* or "Save Seeds Movement". For over 30 years now, we have been seeking, with good degree of success, to preserve *in situ* local and traditional seeds, traditional crops and the principles of traditional agriculture, which were always, but are now widely accepted to be entirely scientific and sustainable.

I am pleased to invite on the dais, Jean-Michel Florin, Co-Leader, Agriculture Section, Goetheanum, Global Centre of Anthroposophy (Switzerland) from France; Ueli Hurter, Co-Leader, Agriculture Section, Goetheanum and owner of a resort around a biodynamic dairy farm in Switzerland; Sundeep Kamath, Secretary of

the Biodynamic Association of India from Bangalore and Binita Shah, founder of Sarg Vikas Samiti and our hostess here.

Sarg Vikas Samiti also takes the opportunity to welcome and recognize the work of some scientists who have been supportive of the Biodynamic agriculture movement in our country – Dr RA Ram, Scientist at the Central Institute of Sub-tropical Horticulture, Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh) who has been researching and working on the issues of Biodynamic agriculture for the last 20 years; Dr VS Khadse, Scientist, Punjab Rao Deshmukh Agriculture University, Akola (Maharashtra) who has conducted extensive research on Biodynamic agriculture and also initiated a course on organic agriculture at his University; and Dr Jadhav, Retd Scientist from Parbani Agriculture University (Maharashtra).

We are here about 130 friends and fellow farmers from about 20 countries across five continents – 130 from 20 countries! What a gathering! Perhaps we can safely call this a "Mini World Biodynamic Meet"! This makes it a very important day for us. Coincidentally, it is also an important date in our country's calendar. Today, 14 November is the birth anniversary (129th) of our first Prime Minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru, and the day is celebrated across the country as the "Children's Day". A happy coincidence really.

Most of us are here after participating at the 19th Organic World Congress 17 held at Greater Noida (Uttar Pradesh) a couple of days back (9–11 November 2017), and I understand that our friends from the overseas will be staying here and with the farmers an additional day or two; and so I dare say that a little over 300 kms from Greater Noida to the Uttarakhand mountains and fields, it may seem, we have travelled across one entire continent, one entire world, to a space where the pace of life is a lot more Biodynamic. I am sure, the spirit of Rudolf Steiner must be at greater peace today than it may have been a few days ago. Last evening, as I watched the night sky, I noticed a star shining particularly brightly. Did you too?

Indeed, Rudolf Steiner's spirit must be specially at peace because we are gathered here to "LISTEN TO THE FARMER". Listening to the farmer is especially important because, in the larger world today, we have

stopped listening. This is tragic and portends a greater calamity because once we stop listening, we soon become deaf. From becoming deaf, we also become dumb and then further degenerate to become blind.

It is important to listen to the farmer because she is the only one who when she farms, listens to the earth, to the water and the air.

She listens to the birds and insects and also the pests.

She listens to the wind, the cloud and also the storm.

She listens to the stars and the cosmos.

She listens to the farmers who have been there before her; she listens to our foremothers and our forefathers.

So if we can listen to the farmer, we can listen to everything, and we must listen to everything because they are all – and always – talking to us.

Today many of us gathered here are practitioners of biodynamic agriculture which engages the material with the non-material, the physical with the elemental and sees the farm on the whole as a self-sustaining organism. We all know this and it does not bear repeating. However, I say this as there are some of us here who are not typical practitioners of biodynamic agriculture, but find there are no essential conceptual distinctions between the precepts of Biodynamic agriculture and what our ancients have been practicing through the ages, be it following the lunar traverse or seeing earth and agriculture as a living entity. And it comes with what Mahatma Gandhi so succinctly worded – “The earth provides for everyone’s needs, but not for anyone’s greed”!

In Uttarakhand, as much as 83–87% of our agriculture is rainfed and so we couldn’t have but done this without treating agriculture as a living entity, as an extension of our selves, beliefs and practices. This is what gave us our traditional living bounteous production and diversity. Till barely some decades ago, these mountain areas supplied thousand tonnes of grains and other produce to other regions of the country and there was a healthy trade even across the borders with Tibet. Up here we have seen drought but rarely seen a famine. We worship the forests and the streams. Ganga is always called “Mother Ganga”, land is always called “Mother Earth”, and we worship



From right to left: Sundeep Kamath, Binita Shah, Jean-Michel Florin, Ueli Hurter and Biju Negi introducing the workshop / BS

both. We have special festive occasions for our cattle. At the beginning of the season, when we begin our work in the field, we worship the plough and other implements, and of course, we also pray to the *Bhumiyal Devta* (protector deity of the land). The day we begin our work, is always determined on the basis of the lunar calendar.

So, we will all agree that India (as indeed, most traditional societies) is a perfect ground for practising biodynamic agriculture. And we both realize and believe that a farmer does not simply sow a seed and reap a harvest. He sows and reaps life. He sows and reaps culture. He sows and reaps education, history, geography, sociology, mathematics, medicine, religion and the arts. He sows a human. He sows and reaps humanity.

If we have now fallen on poor days, it is largely because of abandoning our traditional beliefs and practices. Today, however, we realize that our traditional concepts, fortified with biodynamic agricultural practices can help us repair the damage and the loss, and recover for farming its rightful prestige and following the farmers present here, and who we are going to listen to today, are a few examples of the drops that will go towards filling that ocean of hope.

We have just come from the Organic World Congress, and we can say that the future is organic food and the principles that biodynamic agriculture stands for, and that if we as individuals and as societies and our governments can be a little more careful, if we and

our governments can be a little more caring, we can make it a better and sustainable world for the farmers, the humanity and the earth.

So, we have an interesting and enlightening day ahead of us. Welcome all, once again, and we wish you with this Japanese pilgrim's saying "May our five senses be pure and may the weather on the honourable mountain be fine."

The himalayan home of biodynamic preparations. Visit to SARG, Visit to Hof Binitah

BERNARD JARMAN

After a long bus ride along a winding mountain road that climbed ever higher and with ever more precipitous views, we came to stop in a wooded layby. From there we had to ascend on foot for a further mile or so. We passed first through some ancient evergreen oak woodland which we were told includes the species used for making the oak bark preparation. As we climbed up we came across some women farmers busily collecting stooks of hay, carefully bundled using grass as rope, to feed their cattle. As always in India, these women wore beautifully coloured clothes that always remained clean regardless of what they were doing. We climbed on further and soon came on to more open ground. We now felt the cold air of the north, of the high Himalayas on our backs before descending slowly down the southerly slope into the sunshine. Wherever we walked, the stones beneath our feet seemed to glisten as the light fell on to the layers of mica they contained.

We eventually arrived at the farm and learnt that we were now 2600 meters above sea level. The farm belongs to Binita Shah. Her grandfather had originally purchased the land in 1939. It was much larger at that time. Today it covers around 7 hectares. Some ninety years ago the terraced fields were planted with fruit trees. This orchard is still productive and is made up of apples, pears, peaches, plums and apricots. Binita has built her house on top of the hill. From there she can look down on to a broad valley hundreds of meters below. That is where the many small farmers connected with SARG are living and working.

We then took a tour round the farm and first of all came to a building known as «Peter Proctor Hall». Like many others in India Binita had trained with him. This is the preparation store and packaging shed. At the far end of it is the store. The compost preparations are all stored in clay pots and kept moist. In the absence of a ready source of peat or coconut fibre, leaf mould from the forest is used for bedding in the pots. One section has pots set at an angle that are tightly covered with a mix of clay and cow manure. This seals off the surface and ensures that the contents do not dry out. The rest of the pots are not covered in this way because she had been advised that the preparations need to breathe more. The building remains cool throughout the year and provides a fairly ideal environment for the preparations. Between 90 kg and 120 kg of each compost preparation is produced and around 30000 horns are used to produce horn manure. These are sold to farmers throughout the country as well as being made available to the local farmers in the valley. Large-scale production of biodynamic preparations is also carried out in other parts of the country and this demonstrates the extent to which biodynamics is really taking root in India.

There has up to now been no problem in obtaining the required animal organs with the exception of deer bladders. The deer is a protected species and so bladders have always had to be imported from New Zealand. Horns and the other organs have been obtained from carcass disposal centres. More recently however there has been a move among vegan Hindu vigilantes to stop both the slaughter of cows and the opening up of their cadavers. This is becoming a problem as several states have already introduced laws in that direction. There is generally no problem growing the herbs needed for the compost preparations. Out on the hillside among the orchard trees there are a number of terraced beds dedicated to the growing of yarrow, chamomile and valerian, all of which seem to thrive. Dandelions and the Himalayan nettles are growing wild. The nettles look slightly different to our European ones, have more striking needles and issue a correspondingly sharper sting. The Himalayan oak is an evergreen tree that grows everywhere in this district. It is used for making oak bark preparation.

Because so many preparations are made on the site, the season for making them extends over a long pe-

riod – usually mid September to mid November. The aim however is to make as many preparations as possible during the Indian festival of Navaratri whose date is set according to the lunar calendar. It lasts for nine nights and ten days and begins after the new moon in September. This year the festival ran from 21st to 29th September. It is a celebration of the battle and ultimate victory of the great mother Goddess in her nine forms of manifestation over an evil demon called Mahishasura. Legend tells how the demon Mahishasura, gained invincibility over any male assailants and started causing havoc but underestimated the power of the female. To stop him, the Goddess Shakti manifested herself in the beautiful form of Durga and promised to marry him if he were able to defeat her in battle. The battle then raged for 9 days. On each of these nine days she appeared in a different manifestation (see box) and on the 10th day defeated and killed Mahishasura. Interestingly it is somewhat reminiscent of the European legend of St. Michael and the dragon and is celebrated at more or less the same time of year.

Our tour then led to the site where all the horns are buried. There were still many horns to be filled in the nearby building that was used as a store. Each visitor then filled one of the horns with the dedicated home team being left to complete the work.

Wherever biodynamic work is taking place in India, CPP (barrel preparation) plays a major role. This is largely due to the work of Peter Proctor who for many years came regularly to India from New Zealand. He developed the idea of creating simple brick-lined pits in which to make the preparation which Maria Thun had developed. His practical seminars on composting and the preparations have served to inspire many of those leading the work today in India. Our tour then took us to a covered yard containing a series of pits. All the farmers who are being trained are encouraged to make their own CPP and are provided with the necessary ingredients including the preparations. CPP is used for many different purposes – in composting, liquid manures, on the field, for compost teas and for seed baths etc.

For making liquid manure, 1 kg of CPP is used per 50 litres of solution. This can be made using equal parts cow dung and cow urine plus nettles and various

other green plant materials chosen to add nutrients. It is then left to ferment for a few weeks before being diluted and sprayed out as a growth stimulant and pest repellent. Many local plant species are used to address specific issues.

It was also fascinating to see how compost was made and how quickly it turned. A layer of dry plant material about a foot deep is laid and thoroughly watered. Then comes 2–3 inches of cow dung or slurry followed by 3 inches of green matter on to which 250g of slaked lime is sprinkled. Then comes a thin layer of soil and another layer of cow dung. Between each layer stirred CPP is applied. The sequence is then repeated until the desired height is reached. The compost preparations encased in fresh cow dung are then inserted in the usual way and valerian is applied in three holes and across the whole heap. Once it is completed a thin paste is prepared of cow manure and clay. This is then used to cover the heap. It is usually mixed and applied with the hands and serves to seal off the heap. Warmth and moisture are thereby retained inside and the process of change takes place rapidly. After 60 days it becomes a fine crumbly compost. An example of this was to be seen alongside. One reason for this speed of activity and the fact that no turning was necessary is due to the exceptionally high population of earthworms in the soil. The same method used in other regions generally requires the compost to be turned once.

The company which distributes the preparations is called SUPA Biotech Pvt. Ltd. Its products are all



The whole biodynamic group with the SARG staff / BS



Binita Shah explains the storage of the preparations / BS

clearly labelled and marketed throughout the land. Horn manure is sold as <Shakti> which means primal energy and horn silica as <Divya> which means heavenly. The compost preparations are simply <BD 502-507> and the CPP or Barrel Preparation is sold as <S9>.

After a wonderful outdoor meal of biodynamic produce provided by local producers we walked back in the dwindling light of evening. The clouds had lifted. In the distance shining white in the sunlight we could see the peaks of the high Himalayas 200 miles away to the north.

Southern India – Auroville and more

CHRISTOPH SIMPFENDÖRFER

Seven of us added a trip to the South of India to these impressive days. Outside of Chennai, we visited Mahindra World City. A new city with 50 000 work places and the same amount of living places is intended to be a model for rural development. High living quality through good infrastructure (hospital, school, supermarkets ...) combined with less traffic and shorter distances to people's work places is attracting new inhabitants. It is a real estate project from the Mahindra Group. The Chairman of Mahindra is co-founder of the Naandi-foundation. This foundation runs a waste program in this city, separating and collecting all waste. The organic waste from the households (8 t/day) is processed in a biogas plant together with 800 kg/day of sludge from the sewage plant

and 10% cow manure. The electricity produced covers the needs of this plant. All organic material from the public spaces is collected as well and processed together with the biogas slurry to make compost. The compost is treated with Cow Pat Pit (CPP) and the biodynamic preparations.

After sieving the compost, the plastic is stored adequately. The compost is offered to 50 farmers on contract outside the city. The produce of the farmers is sold in the supermarkets of the city.

In Auroville we had meetings with Lukas, Krishnan, Mahesh and Krishnan from the Demeter Certification Office. We could meet some of the biodynamic farmers of the region. They presented their activities and we had a warm exchange of ideas. They confirmed that they could achieve the same yields with the biodynamic method as before. Having less costs and a better product quality, the economic situation has improved quite well even without a special organic prize.

We met Marc Tormo who runs cafés with organic coffee from individual estates, one of them biodynamically® certified. We could experience the different methods of making coffee and the cultivating of taste as a development, as we know it from the wine sector (www.marcscoffees.com).

Near Bangalore we visited two remarkable projects: Akshayakalpa (www.akshayakalpa.org) and the Timbaktu Collective (www.timbaktu.org).

Akshayakalpa is a dairy project initiated by two Indians on an entrepreneurial basis. The starting point of the concept is the knowledge that a dairy herd can form a good economic basis for a farm. They state: "We wish to see farmers become entrepreneurs by changing the way they farm and turning it into an opportunity for steady wealth creation. We enable farmer families to make use of the resources at their disposal to help them earn a steady income and improve their standard of living. These resources include land, water, animal, vegetation and man power. We are on a mission to transform agriculture by setting up sustainable, farmer-owned organic dairy farms to make sure that the food you buy is wholesome and natural. To put it simply, we give you healthy milk from happy cows and empowered farmers!" The strategy is to have a model farm in every village of

the region. If these model farms are successful, other farmers will follow. They work presently with 150 farmers and sell the milk as raw milk directly to the households in Bangalore (12 000l/day).

The Timbaktu Collective is a NGO working in a remote area with marginalized farmers. It would take too long to list all their activities in eco-conversion, with women ("bank without walls"), children (school), rural enterprises and with people with disabilities. It was very impressive to see the results they have, working under these difficult conditions. It is a model for holistic rural development. Some of us helped to make biodynamic compost heaps on their experimental and educational farm. It is planned to make 800 compost heaps with the farmers before the next rains as a way into biodynamic farming.



The Akshayakalpa dairy project: a young farmer is proud to show his cattle and his modern barn / JMF

The Organic World Congress and General Assembly from IFOAM in Delhi

Globalisation of the Organic World Congress

CHRISTOPHER BROCK

The Organic World Congress (OWC) of IFOAM, the overarching world-wide association for ecological cultivation and ISOFAR, the international researchers' society for ecological farming, is an important meeting place and a forum for discussion among people, actively engaged in organic cultivation across the world. Although the findings of scientific studies in the sector can be conveyed by and picked up from specialist articles and other publications in more detail and more in people's own time than at the congress, the personal encounter particularly at this level is of special value. Here people from entirely different life circumstances bump into each other,

who, nonetheless, share common ground in their dedication to organic cultivation and thereby feel a strong connection.

One of the most important experiences of the OWC in the last decade for myself has been that the focus and perspective has become global in a really positive sense. At this event in Delhi this stood out especially clearly for the keen observer and indeed became a pronounced theme in its own right. The industrialised countries of the North – particularly in Europe – and the research and development in organic farming and gardening are no longer the be-all and end-all for the sector on a world-wide basis, even if these countries and their achievements on behalf of the sector continue to have considerable significance. Nevertheless, other countries are contributing their perspectives, experience and findings to the inter-

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Before her own presentation at the "farmers' track", Inga Günther, chicken breeder from Germany, hands over a present to the previous speaker / BS

national community in an increasingly self-confident way – and in return are being finally recognised as partners on an equal footing. This development was essential and has been long overdue and absolutely needs to be supported.

Thus, in the industrialised countries the debate over technological solutions to improve the sustainability of ecological cultivation gains more and more significance. However, in a global context the necessity of technological innovations is overestimated; the situation commonly appears entirely different in regions with an overriding number of small farmers. This realisation alone broadens the perspective in a most valuable way and opens up our gaze again for what organic farming can really do and what it needs.

Finally, I would like to share a further small occurrence in connection with the broadening of our perspective: a few years ago it would have been hardly conceivable to have run a scientific workshop on the subject of "Spirituality and the Invisible in organic Farming" at the Congress of IFOAM/ISOFAR. Precisely this did take place in Delhi – and it was taken up really well.

Translated by John Weedon

The Organic World Congress and the IFOAM General Assembly

ALEXANDER GERBER

Not because the IFOAM General Assembly had been so bad, but because of the terrible smog, I was so glad to be leaving Delhi in the direction of the Himalayas. I spoke too soon. We had to drive for another 200 kilometres through thick smoke, which made it gloomy in broad daylight, and even in the assembly room made us peer at the platform through a fug. When we looked up, only a milky patch indicated that the sun was there and that it was daylight. The grey of the air mingled with the grey of the streets and the dust. In between places there were small pale swabs of colour from the plastic tarpaulins, under which people exist right by the roadside. People are born into this all-pervading filth and live there all their – often short – lives. I was able to fly back to Germany and after I had coughed up green phlegm for over a week, I felt cleaned through and healthy again. On that afternoon on the journey out of Delhi a feeling of the end of the world crept up on me. The

apocalypse will come upon us all like this – if we carry on in this way.

And, of course, the question arises for me whether it is then justified for 2,000 people from across the world to fly to the World Congress of the organic movement and thus the very people who are committed to saving the world around them contribute towards its pollution. On the other hand, I have never experienced an event which had made it apparent in a more impressive way what a global movement of upright, responsible and innovative farmers, with solid values, we are. Proudly a young Indian farmer presented in Hindi, – this was translated into English – how she achieves diversity, a farming cycle, organic combating of pests and produce quality on her farm. An African woman farmer in the audience asks a question in French, another listener translates the question back into English and the interpreter back again into Hindi. Thus, a brief conversation, rich in substance, takes place between two colleagues, who are really close in the substance of their contributions, across languages and continents.

It was our Indian biodynamic friends who insisted that at the Congress that takes place every three years there had to be contributions from ordinary farmers besides the scientific contributions and contributions about certification and market issues. With over 100 biodynamic farmers (both female and male), advisors and representatives of associations we were not only well enough represented as a biodynamic group in the whole congress as to stand out, but roughly half of them presented their impressive work and their special farms in the so-called “farmers’ track”. Christoph Simpfendörfer and I were involved in several panel discussions, for example, on the further development of certification and on social standards. The latter we organised together with *Naturland*; and on the panel concerned Indian representatives of a tea plantation and of a spice-growing co-operative, which were certified by both associations, were sitting as well. There would be a lot to tell about this festival of the movement for sustainable agriculture for the future.

After the Congress the General Assembly of IFOAM took place, which, from the Demeter side, Christoph Simpfendörfer, Sundeep Kamath, my colleague

from India, Jean-Michel Florin from France and Hermann Lutke Schipholt from Switzerland attended – equipped with numerous votes of other people. We, from the Demeter side, especially Antje Kölling, have collaborated intensively on the new IFOAM Organic 3.0 Strategy, with which we want to spread organic cultivation right across the breadth of society. For us it was particularly important that the comprehensive paper elaborating our position on breeding, involving the exclusion of new breeding techniques, was accepted with a great majority. Other important decisions were the rejection of fish-farming in closed systems and, with textiles, the necessity of defining not only the organic origins of the raw materials, but also the production process.

The activities, or more precisely, the co-operation, with other certifying sustainability initiatives like UTZ or Rainforest Alliance formed a critical discussion. In Latin America it is just such initiatives that are making life hard for the organic farmers, because large buyers are increasingly setting these more basic standards and, thus, from our angle are engaged in “green washing” and are ruining the markets and the prices. However, because of their important role it would also not be sensible to break off the thread of conversation with them. Quite a number of other motions were focused on the subject of the inner structure of IFOAM: it was decided to have more transparency, a strengthening of the regions and the improvement of public relations work.

One of the highlights was the election of a new ‘Council’. After six years and a vast number of kilometres of travel and conversations all over the world Andre Leu from Australia no longer stood for election as President. Peggy Miars (USA) was elected as the new President; others elected were Edith van Walsum (Netherlands), Karen Mapusua (Fiji), Hans Herren (Switzerland), Julia Lernoud (Argentina), Frank Eyhorn (Switzerland), Choitresh Kumar Ganguly (India, an important member of the biodynamic movement), Jennifer Chang (South Korea), David Amudavi (Kenya) and Gerold Rahmann (Germany).

India was horrible, fascinating and challenging! For, the way for us to defy the apocalypse became apparent at the meeting in the Himalayas with farmers who work biodynamically: instead of chucking the plant



waste onto the roadside or burning them (which is one of the causes of smog), they can be composted. By this means along with the application of biodynamic preparations the humus content rises and with it the soil's capacity to retain water. Since water is the limiting factor in India, the yields on these soils rise – by half to two and a half times. Without the cost of fertilisers and chemical sprays the economic situation of the farms improves considerably even with the sale of the produce on the market at the same prices. Yet the health of people and their surroundings improves

as well. That is convincing: in the meanwhile, more than 100,000 Indian farmers farm biodynamically. As a matter of course, the biodynamic sowing Calendar is used. For Indians it would be absurd not to take it as a starting point that we are part of the cosmos and are exposed to the workings of the cosmos.

The next Congress will take place in Rennes in France, once again with strong participation of the biodynamic movement in the preparation.

Translated by John Weedon

Reflections

How can East and West (North and South) fertilise each other culturally?

MARIANNE HAENI

Could Rudolf Steiner in 1924 have dreamed that 93 years after his lectures in Koberwitz to the owners

of estates and farmers now, in the present day, in 2017, 75 farmers from all over the world, who work biodynamically, would gather in India and tell one another in lectures and conversations about their projects and work? ...; or that today we are a worldwide movement of approx. 5 000 certified producers with about 154 000 hectares in roughly 60 countries?

Truly, the cultural impulse from Central Europe with biodynamic agriculture has arrived in the whole world. It is alive in people who are researching to understand the interrelationships of life and who are working out new models for plant and livestock breeding. It is living in people who bring farmers and consumers together in a new, jointly responsible relationship and where interest is alive for what traces "I" leave behind me in the world, among other things. To live means to develop further, to change, to create in a new way. The human being becomes a creator, who is able to bring parts of plants and remains of animals together anew in such a way that something completely original arises as a result, the biodynamic preparations. This is an essential cultural impulse.

During the Meeting of the Circle of Representatives we talked about the above question (see title) on 4th day. A younger woman, familiar with Indian as well as German culture, made those who had travelled there from the West aware that there is a great difference between Central European and Indian culture in the present day. In the West we know about the development of the individual: I decide what I want to do. I do not need to ask anyone whether I may do it, I do not owe anyone an explanation. In India (and in a lot of other cultures) the family is the decision-making body. Family members belong together, are aware of each other, are a part of the whole. The family, or more precisely, the head of the family, decides what the individual person may do or not do. This person asks whether they may do it. These are two contrary societal systems. With each person we glimpse only a small tip of their inner values; most of which remain hidden from the view of the other. Each person can only live out their subjective truth. We must not push one culture onto another. The people on the spot have to decide how they want to conduct themselves, using the knowledge that they have been taught by family and friends. Usually people take on the models, lived by parents and siblings, later on perhaps new thoughts and opinions of their own arise, according to how they have been brought up in their cultural circle. Whoever enters a different form of society from outside, should ideally familiarise themselves first of all with it, get to know it so that they can meet people in such a way that leads to mutual understanding. Living with one another and sharing experiences leads to such understanding.



*Everyone of us filled a horn with manure:
a symbol of the universality of the biodynamic preparations / BS*

A further factor in India's past that has left its mark is the colonial period of the Raj and its liberation from Great Britain's rule.

Actually, the production of the preparations has been described by R. Steiner. However, each group of people in the world has its own particular view of themselves and their surroundings; they have different outer conditions, such as climate, topography, other possibilities and limitations, to name but a few things. How people see themselves and the world varies. So it is very interesting for us who work with biodynamics to see what impulses and projects have been realised here in India, how people have been awakened by the biodynamic work and how great projects have followed on from successful work on the basics. India itself has really varied climatic regions, where the soil needs to be worked correspondingly. The questions of irrigation, shade for sensitive plants, mixed crop culture to reduce pests, for instance, vary with the conditions. As visitors we can envisage how the farms grow into farm individualities. Something new develops through the individuals who are at work on the farm and who, with their personal backgrounds and with the conditions of the place, begin to create a new story.

I was deeply moved to see with how enthusiastically compost heaps are built up and preparations applied, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, and how they stir the preparations and spread them on

the fields; and also how the “CPP” (cow pat preparation, N.B. in India CPP stands for “cow pat pit”) is mixed in the group by hand and then is laid in the carefully prepared pit to rest.

Within our group questions came up, for example, regarding the stirring technique and the stirring barrel, and as to which manner of applying, producing and dealing with the preparations and the stirring is the “right” one. These questions and the sometimes vehement answers to them were very much on my mind in the following days. How do we as an international movement deal with such questions and answers? How wide is the range of possibilities and at what point does it cease to be implementing biodynamics? Who has the right and the competence to judge, to evaluate, such issues? Where do we draw the lines to include or exclude? These were my thoughts on it.

This makes me think of the report on the international production of preparations by Ambra Sedlmayr and her group, which has recently been completed. They visited farms in different regions of the world and people told them about their way of producing and applying the preparations. Just as the way the farms portray an individuality in the development of the farm, so is the handling of the work around the preparations very varied.

It appears to me within the biodynamic movement we must take care about precisely this point to avoid any rifts coming between us. There are countries with a long history of biodynamic work and countries where the impulse is relatively young. Equally, there are experiences, which can be passed on, while others can only be had at this one place. We need to be wakeful so that no rift arises between the “old and new” national movements. People joining today are not starting where our biodynamic predecessors started 93 years ago. Certain elements have been worked over and further developed. Some things have been adapted to the local conditions. A new kind of colonialism would be unfortunate, to say the least. Have we not received tools through anthroposophy for getting on with one another as different people and for experiencing the differences as enriching and not as separating us?

World-wide we who are working with biodynamics can learn from one another as to how to deal with a

changing climate. We can learn from the countries in warmer zones how we need to work with our cultures differently – how we can deal more sparingly with our precious water – how pests can be decimated in a different way – how the knowledge about the biodynamic work can be passed on with joy to other people in courses and further training, how people talk and share experiences time and again and thus learn from one another, etc.

Through meeting colleagues who are also working biodynamically in other countries and conversing with them face to face, to my mind the biodynamic impulse truly comes alive. By taking the other person in in their familiar surroundings I gain a more complete picture of all the people, through whose versatile, effective working with the biodynamic preparations the biodynamic cultural impulse in the world is carried out and becomes reality.

Translated by John Weedon

The cow, the preparations and the sacred

BERNARD JARMAN

During our visit to India we became aware of the growing concern about continued access to cow horns and other organs. There has recently been a move within the ruling Hindu nationalist party, to tighten up on rules relating to the disposal of aging cows. Cows have always been considered sacred in India and devout Hindus cannot slaughter them. This is one reason why these animals are often seen roaming the streets. Because of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of the country the issue of managing cow numbers has been dealt with quite practically in that religious groups other than Hindus (notably Muslims and low caste Indians) have been the ones to slaughter cattle and use their skins to make leather and their horns to make ornaments. This has provided a very practical solution to what would otherwise have been a big problem for livestock farmers, namely how to dispose of animals that are no longer needed. This dilemma notwithstanding India has been and continues to be a major exporter of beef. How this will be squared with the more extreme policies now being introduced in some states



Cows are sacred in India / BS

remains to be seen. The new laws aim to prevent all slaughter of cows and also the cutting open of their corpses. This extremist approach is being fuelled by Hindu vigilantes who come and check on farms. This is deeply worrying to all keepers of cattle as well as for biodynamic practitioners who need to obtain bovine organs.

That these animals are so highly revered in Indian culture is something quite special for they are indeed sacred animals. The tendency in the west is to treat them as mere production machines but if we try to really understand them and unlock some of the mysteries that lie hidden in their make up, we find that these animals are true wonders of creation. Their capacity to transform and spiritualise hard roughage material, permeate it with vitality and bring fertility to the earth, is second to none. The cow's organism is in all its parts an image of the cosmos. This is something that has long been recognised in the culture of the country. The cow is seen as the great mother being of humanity. According to traditional ayurvedic

farming practices all the products of the cow – manure, urine, milk, curd and ghee – are sacred and have valuable healing properties. Special preparations are still being made using a fermented combination of all these gifts from the cow together with fruit and other ingredients. This 'panchagavya' wards off pests and disease and is used as a healing medicine for soil, plant, animal and man.

To truly revere the cow and hold her as a sacred being, even as a God, requires an attitude of deep respect. It is not just about forbidding slaughter. It means not abusing her by forcing her into over production or preventing her from moving freely. It would also mean in India not abandoning her to the streets. In days gone by there would always have been plenty of nutritious material available in towns and villages but now it is hidden amongst piles of plastic and polyethylene waste which when consumed makes the animals sick.

What then of the animals which die naturally of old age? Are they revered in death as they are in life? The answer strangely is no. A dead cow is viewed

as an object that must be disposed of and put out of sight as quickly as possible, usually by the so-called untouchables. Yet these people scratch a living by selling the skins, bones, horns and meat. For them the cadavers represent a valuable resource and in this light the various items could also be considered sacred gifts from the cow. For biodynamic farmers this is particularly true. The horns and other organs of the sacred cow are used after her death to bring yet more vitality to the earth. Ayurvedic farming uses panchagavya from the products of the living cow to heal the earth, biodynamic farming uses the sacred organs she no longer needs, to transform the earth and give it new life.

Mother Ganges

One fellow traveler, Klaus Wais, gave us this text that highlights some key issues we met during our stay in India.

“First of all, we have to overcome our inner resistance and learn to think in a more holistic way. Limiting our ourselves to the physical dimension is simply a habit of our thinking.

Nature has material and non-material dimensions.

A friend who has just returned from India, was absolutely amazed to see that there completely different forms of thinking define people’s lives. Every day 60,000 pilgrims come to the town of Varanasi so as

to bathe in the Ganges, to wash themselves free of their sins and to drink a mouthful of the holy water. The Ganges is worshipped as a mother goddess. On the shore of the river hundreds of corpses are burnt, their ashes are cast into the water. Furthermore, the bodies of children and priests are lowered into the Ganges, animals’ bodies float past the people bathing, housewives wash their laundry and tons of faeces and poisonous liquid waste are piped into the water unfiltered. The Coli bacteria count is up to 9,000 times higher than the level permitted in India for bathing, let alone drinking water. The river contains huge quantities of poisons from the corpses, pesticides, heavy metals, cholera bacteria and typhus bacilli, just to mention some of the poisons and pathogens. The degree of pollution goes way beyond the limits of our imaginations. The river has nearly reached the point of biological death. It is almost a miracle that India is not permanently subject to cholera and other epidemics, for the majority of the cities and towns along the river draw 70% of their drinking water from the Ganges. Moreover, the poisons are absorbed via the water into the food chain and are ingested again through all the food. However, for the Indian pilgrims the water of the Ganges embodies the highest degree of purity, it is even regarded as a remedy. The ecological campaign, “Clean Ganges”, tries desperately to convey to the Indian people that the water of the Ganges also possesses a biological component.

For us rivers are either dirty or clean. If we want to bathe or drink, we look out for water of the best biological quality. In India the rivers are more or less holy. The quality of the water depends on the degree of holiness. The most holy water possesses the greatest purity and can help the person bathing or drinking it most easily to find purity. The Indian concept of purity has nothing to do with our concept of cleanness. Whereas we are fixated on the physical aspects of water, on its physical composition, the Indian pilgrims are oriented solely towards the spiritual dimension of the water. Whereas it is difficult for us to recognise the non-material aspects of matter, in India there is no conception of the physical composition of nature. Both forms of blindness will lead in the end to an irreparable, ecological disaster.

As we have already seen, Fritz Albert Popp takes as his starting-point that along with its constituents



Pilgrims along the Ganges / BS

food passes on light information to our organisms. With the same constituents completely different information may be conveyed. A hen that has been living free-range conveys different information through its eggs from a caged hen. Therefore, it is insufficient to determine which poisons are passed on mechanically through food, air or water and how we can get rid of them again mechanically. If we fail to recognise that the radius of the non-material effect goes far beyond the radius of the spreading of the material effect, our biological systems will become more and more unbalanced despite our increasing attentiveness.

Whereas the majority of Indians need to learn to pay attention to the physical character of nature, we should develop our awareness of its non-material aspects. We can no longer afford to have this self-imposed limitation of material and non-material forms of thinking. If we do not want to destroy the basis of our lives, we must be capable of recognising, using and valuing both forms.

We need courage in order to be able to grasp further dimensions of reality.

Pages 157–159 from "Der Quantumsprung des Denkens" (The Quantum Leap of Thought), N. Knapp, rororo Paperback 2011

Translated by John Weedon

A new Outlook. In the Tracks of Sir Albert Howard

UELI HURTER

"Biodynamic agriculture was born out of Rudolf Steiner's stream of working, out of anthroposophy. Like the seed of a new plant species created entirely from the spiritual by Steiner, this impulse fell on the arid soil of European farming practice in the memorable days of Whitsun 1924. This seed germinated and grew during 20th century to its present size and shape. The shoot branched out and the mighty branches of the movement of organic cultivation with all its facets came about".

Until this point I have seen the genesis and history of our movement in this light and, as the need arose, have also told it in this way. In Switzerland it actu-

ally happened like this when the organic movement branched off from the biodynamic movement in the 1930s; this is well documented. For Germany too this branching off, which took place on an organisational level only in the 1980s, is a historical fact.

In this German-centred view the work done by Sir Albert Howard in India and in the British Empire is indeed mentioned, but is not seen as decisive for the mainstream development. The trip to India opened up a completely new perspective for me on the history of the development of the organic movement, that is, regarding the personality and contribution of Sir Albert Howard.

Prior to the trip I had not concerned myself with Howard. In my mind there sticks a hazy picture of a colonial Briton with a walrus moustache, the front cover of the book "An agricultural Testament" and the year 1940 as its publication date, and no more. I cautiously asked the one or other of my fellow travellers if they knew whether Howard had known anything about Steiner and biodynamics, yet no-one could make more than vague conjectures.

My attention was roused and drawn more closely to Howard by the story told by Rachel Pomeroy and Binita Shah at the Circle of Representatives' meeting at the start of our trip about the work of Peter Proctor for biodynamics in India. More than 20 years ago Peter Proctor came to India from New Zealand through the first Demeter pioneer project, the Kurinji Farms in South India, run by the family of Jakes Jayakaran, and through years and years of work he managed to spread the biodynamic impulse. According to their account, at a decisive occasion in 1993 Peter Proctor stood at the very spot in Indore, the historic place of Howard's activity in Central India where Howard used to stand in the 1930s. Thus, biodynamics is considered to have spread out from exactly the same physical spot as Howard's Indore Method. This event is vouched for through the biography of Binita Shah: "by chance" she was present, as a young woman, on this occasion and this experience was the starting point for her such incredibly energetic and successful engagement for biodynamics in North India.

What comes out is a clear picture: the biodynamic impulse has been spreading out from the places, in the fields of research and practice, especially com-



Compost heaps on Binita's demonstration farm / BS

posting, which have been prepared by Howard's work. There has been, and still is, a fertile soil for the seed of biodynamics, Howard's Indore Method. This is an entirely different picture from the one described above. This was not so clear to me in the following days of the trip across India, but, reflecting later on it, I realised that my views had become more sensitised. For instance, the sight of the slow-moving heavy clouds of smoke that rose from the straw heaps on the fields which had been set alight – burning straw belongs to the system of farming with chemicals in India as a form of cleansing and is carried out in such grand style in particular states, such as Uttar Pradesh, that the smoke counts as one of the key causes of the disastrous smog in Delhi. This picture of the smoke evoked a kind of pressing feeling in my belly such that this whole biomass appeared to my imagination transformed into living compost heaps and then into loose, crumbly, humus soil. Or the sight of cows eating plastic and rubbish – with this no form of 'holiness' came to mind in any way, but a similar wishful feeling came up to involve these animals in an agricultural setting, in which feed, the lives of the animals and manure are more or less interrelated. The content of these ideal pictures, rising up in the soul vis-à-vis the actual horrible pictures, is borrowed from the organic school of thought of the pragmatist, Albert Howard.

Steffen Schneider pointed out to me the corresponding principles of Howard and Steiner. I began to re-

search and was flabbergasted to find a mention of biodynamics straightaway in the foreword to "An agricultural Testament".

„During the last nine years the Indore Process has been taken up at many centres all over the world. Much additional information on the role of humus in agriculture has been obtained. I have also had the leisure to bring under review the existing systems of farming as well as the organization and purpose of agricultural research. Some attention has also been paid to the Bio-Dynamic methods of agriculture in Holland and in Great Britain, but I remain unconvinced that the disciples of Rudolph Steiner can offer any real explanation of natural laws or have yet provided any practical examples which demonstrate the value of their theories.“

It is remarkable that Howard distinguishes biodynamics by mentioning it, as the only other method, by name in order to then express his scepticism. It is interesting that Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, who got to know Sir Albert Howard in England in summer 1938 and reports on it in an article (which was sent to me by Bernard Jarman after the trip to India and of which I had no prior knowledge); he reports on Howard's visits to Loverendale, Holland and speaks of the recognition by Howard of the biodynamic work he has seen there. So what does Howard's scepticism, which Pfeiffer does not mention, relate to? It relates to the explanations, to the theory; the thoughts behind biodynamics remain a riddle for Howard, he cannot penetrate them. Accordingly, he calls the group of biodynamic farmers around Pfeiffer disciples of Rudolf Steiner, which implies that they have not completely penetrated the matter themselves. Hands on our heart, do we know of this? Are we not frequently in this very situation even in the present day?

Pfeiffer describes how he got to know Sir Albert Howard at a conference with Lord Lymington. He characterises him and his work, praising him highly. He sees in Howard the founder of the organic school of agrarian science and practice in contrast to the chemical approach of Liebig. He characterises the organic movement of Howard and the biodynamic movement of Steiner as sister movements. It is typical of both that they think agriculture through right up to nutrition and health. Pfeiffer does not go into the specifically dynamic aspects of biodynamics in

any way. We need to bear in mind that the Agriculture Course was not published at this time and Pfeiffer was one of the very few biodynamic farmers, if not the only one, who could hold his own in English at the specialist, scientific-practical symposium.

In summer 1939 a further specialist symposium, or a kind of summer school, took place in England. This time the host was Lord Holbrook. Pfeiffer appears to have been the main speaker at this event, which lasted several days. Lord Holbrook then published a book with the title, "Look to the Land". A lot of what he had heard from Pfeiffer re-emerges there, especially the thought of the closed cycle, of fertility, rooted in the local soil. However, the term 'biodynamic' is not to be found there, the term used is 'organic'. Why? An important reason is surely the outbreak of the Second World War shortly after this event; England and Germany were by now enemies at war. Of course, it was out of the question to mention a German source.

Thus we can see how, despite starting out from the initial will to meet and to work together, later for reasons of differences professionally, politically and in world-views a distance comes about between the organic and biodynamic movements. I would say, to the chagrin of them both. Through the limitation on the organic side the danger constantly lurks of seeing the critical future perspective of agriculture as lying in a kind of useful biology; whereas the human and social side that creates culture gets short-changed. For the biodynamic side the danger lurks, through concentrating too strongly on the dynamic aspect, of entering into spiritual speculation and neglecting the solid, organic practice in thinking and doing.

Against this background the India trip awakened in me a new perspective on the relationship of organic and dynamic. In India you are met by a decidedly strong force for forming organic mass. You can have the feeling – especially in the period after the monsoon rain, in which our trip took place – that the dense air solidifies into plant green and that the loose soil pulls itself up and aside to form plant substance. In addition, there is the constant presence of the cows, which intensifies this process further. This power, this abundance and density of organic life was sensed and recognised by Howard. He went to the traditional farmers to learn from them, he carried out a precise

phenomenology with lots of trials and he used his scientific knowledge wisely in order to synthesise his Indore Method from this mix in an ingenious way. Essentially, this is composting as an art, you could also say a rational way of biomass management. And our biodynamic friends in India have taken this heritage of Howard's completely to heart. The compost and the cow pat preparation (CPP) are by far the most important foundations of biodynamics in present-day India. This is due to Peter Proctor; everywhere he set up compost and instructed people on CPP. He walked, consciously or unconsciously, in the footsteps of Howard. Then using this as a basis, people work with the preparations and with the Planting Calendar; whereby, with the one or the other there is a strong connection to traditional practices. The interweaving of material aspects and spiritual aspects is firmly anchored in Indian traditional wisdom. Biodynamics appears as the new wisdom that continues the old. There were conversations – see the text of Biju Negi – in which you had the feeling Steiner is fully integrated in the Indian culture. What a difference it is from our situation, where the Steiner approach is revolutionary vis-à-vis western agrarian science and where each one of us is involved in an ongoing inner dispute between material and spiritual viewpoints! And how different is the abundance of organic mass in India from our conditions, where life is rather meagre and composting that goes too far can lead to weak and poor vegetative growth! It really is an exciting dialogue which can arise between the Indian situation with its organic richness and a spiritual tradition and the western situation with natural conditions that go more strongly into mineralisation and its clear break between traditional and modern spirituality. The fact that this dialogue can take place as a mutual give-and-take, as learning from one another, in the world-wide biodynamic movement was experienced by many of my travelling companions and by myself in an impressive way – and, of course, we hope, by our Indian hosts as well. Such journeys may endow us with a new outlook and that is a great source of enrichment.

Translated by John Weedon



Bye, bye India / BS

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