



# SPOTLIGHT

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journey – inspired  
by Balashram

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**“At Holi, we wish to fill your lives and ours  
with the brightest colours of joy, love, and happiness.  
Happy Holi!”**

(Children of the Balashram)



Every year in spring, on the full moon day of the Vedic month of Phalguni, the residents of the Balashram celebrate Holi – the Festival of Colours.

The month of Phalguni begins with the new moon in February and ends with the following new moon in March. During this time, we – members and supporters of HAND IN HAND – often visit our projects in India.

Holi is one of India's oldest festivals and marks a special highlight for the students of the Balashram: it is the day when, after their final exams, the long summer holidays begin. The children and young people celebrate this ancient festival all the more exuberantly and joyfully. For thousands of years, people have celebrated Holi as the victory of good over evil – the triumph of love. At the same time, the festival's colourful exuberance heralds the end of winter and the blossoming of new life in the radiant splendour of spring.

Holi is also a symbol of unity among people, transcending all boundaries. When the students celebrate together with their teachers, their joy is infectious and soon spreads to us visitors as well. Laughing, young and old throw natural, brightly coloured powders at one another, and between bursts of colour they enjoy laddus and other delicious traditional sweets from Odisha.

For our editor, this year's Holi celebration was an unforgettable experience. Inside this issue, you can read why – and also learn why there was no HAND IN HAND newsletter this year.

**All the more, we are delighted that you are now holding the new issue of Spotlight in your hands. We wish you much joy and inspiration as you read. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for your continued support – together with you, HAND IN HAND, we celebrate the joy of life that your generosity makes possible. THANK YOU!**



## EDITORIAL

Dear Friends of HAND IN HAND!

**Celebrating life and helping one another – these are two sides of the same coin. And this medal of humanity truly belongs to you, dear supporters of HAND IN HAND!**

Your donations bear wonderful fruit. Nothing makes this clearer than when the children and young people themselves have their say in this edition of Spotlight. In their own words, they tell us how important celebrations at Balashram are to them and how special school trips can be.

Our graduates also share their inspiring successes with us – modestly, yet confidently. Their stories are also **your** successes, dear friends. Seeing former Balashram students now actively engaged in supporting HAND IN HAND, fills me with indescribable joy. In their words resonate health, education and a spirit of joyful solidarity – the three pillars of HAND IN HAND.

A moving interview with one of the older students allows us to see how courageously and wisely – especially the girls – are finding their path in life. And this in a country where discrimination against women can still take on alarming forms. Like this brave young woman, we too want to set another milestone: To contribute even more purposefully to a generation of strong women and to raise awareness of the important role women play in creating a socially just society.

**“The world is one family”** – this famous Sanskrit saying continues to shape the lives of people in Odisha to this day. One HAND IN HAND member experienced this in a particularly touching way when she became very ill during her last visit to India and received great help. Her experience reminds us that all the children of this world are our children, and that all people become sisters and brothers wherever compassion and love for one another unite us. HAND IN HAND is a living expression of togetherness and mutual care within a global family.

From the bottom of our hearts, THANK YOU!

**Yours, Peter van Breukelen**  
President of HAND IN HAND

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# HAND IN HAND supports a new initiative: JNANAPRABHA MISSION

Founded on 27 February 2021, the JNANAPRABHA MISSION  
is dedicated to promoting female empowerment.

As a new sister organisation of the PRAJNANA MISSION, it is dedicated to combating discrimination against women and fostering a new generation of strong, empowered women. The initiative aims to renew awareness of the vital role women play within families and in society at large.

*“In parts of Indian society, women are traditionally regarded as subordinate to men, and the birth of a girl is still seen as a significant burden in many families,”* says Managing Director Swami Sharadanandaji bluntly. And she puts her finger on a particularly painful issue: *“the socially destructive practice of dowry.”* Although long banned, this practice is still widespread in India.

The demands placed on families when marrying off their daughters can push them into *“severe financial distress.”* Female foetuses, the Swami explains, are aborted so frequently *“that this is one of the main reasons why there are significantly more men than women in India.”* The consequences of unfulfilled dowry demands can be devastating. According to India’s National Crime Records Bureau, an alarming 35,493 dowry-related deaths were recorded between 2017 and 2022. The actual number is likely far higher, as very few cases reach the courts.



Dedicated efforts for women's empowerment in Odisha (from left): Swami Satyamayanandaji, Swami Sumedhanandaji, Swami Sharadanandaji, Swami Jnanaswarupanandaji, Swami Jyotirmayanandaji, and Swami Girijanandaji

## Shaking up society in the name of equality

This is the mission of JNANAPRABHA MISSION. The new organisation is currently establishing awareness camps in schools and colleges across rural Odisha, as well as in the slums of the state's major cities. These camps aim to build confidence, self-esteem, and resilience among girls and young women. They offer training in self-defence, stress management, health awareness, and encourage participants to take ownership of their lives. In many places, the situation is still dire, as described by Swami Jnanaswarupanandaji, who also serves on the board of the JNANAPRABHA MISSION: *“Many girls are married young, have no chance of education, are sexually harassed in public spaces, are exposed to domestic violence and have little legal protection.”* And if the husband dies later, some widows are left to *“fight for bare survival”* on the streets.

## A gradual change in mindset is emerging in the larger cities.

In rural areas, women still have virtually no voice, according to Swami Jnanaswarupanandaji. Two-thirds of the population live there and often have no access to education. Only 24 percent of Indian women are engaged in paid employment. At the same time, social media often *“portrays unrealistic role models”*.

Although there are organisations that work to strengthen women's rights and empower girls, such initiatives are seldom widespread in rural regions. This is exactly where the JNANAPRABHA MISSION aims to step in – serving as a resource center for girls and women, as well as for anyone seeking guidance and new opportunities.



*In rural parts of India, women still have almost no voice. The JNANAPRABHA MISSION works for the wellbeing of mothers and their daughters, aiming to empower women and strengthen their sense of self-worth.*



*When their husbands pass away, many widows are left to struggle for survival on the streets. The JNANAPRABHA MISSION provides them with food, clothing, and medical assistance.*

## Health Comes First

A key foundation for lasting change, explains Swami Sharad-anandaji and her team, is strengthening health awareness among young girls and women. For several years, they have been organising educational and preventive health camps, particularly in socially disadvantaged communities. In 2024 alone, more than ten such camps were conducted – in collaboration with Dr. Sulagna Mohanty, a young gynecologist and oncological radiologist from the highly respected *Sadguru Cancer Hospital* in Jagatpur.



In June of that year, the women successfully initiated another partnership with the renowned *Bagchi Sri Shankara Cancer Centre and Research Institute Bhubaneswar*. The focus of these camps lies on the prevention and early detection of breast and cervical cancer. Alongside education on early diagnosis and the importance of regular health screenings, the JNANAPRABHA MISSION also addresses topics such as hygiene and nutrition. In addition, the organisation provides diagnostic tests and medical treatments in cooperation with specialised doctors.



India's President Droupadi Murmu delivering her moving speech at the founding ceremony of the JNANAPRABHA MISSION



Dr. Sulagna Mohanty,  
a dedicated  
young doctor,  
participating  
in a women's  
health camp

## A Visit from the Highest Office

The JNANAPRABHA MISSION was founded on February 27, 2021. After an initial phase, the official and highly impressive inauguration ceremony took place two years later. No fewer than 3,000 visitors attended – including India's highest-ranking guest: President Droupadi Murmu herself.

Having grown up in India's tribal regions, the President now stands at the very top of the nation – and she delivered an inspiring speech at the event:

*"I am very pleased to learn that the JNANAPRABHA MISSION is named after the mother of Paramahansa Yoganandaji, 'Inanaprabha'. Inanaprabha is a shining example for the girls of India – she should guide, inspire, and help them to achieve success in life. The JNANAPRABHA programme contributes to strengthening self-confidence among the girls of Odisha. May this programme spread even further across all parts of Odisha. I wish the JNANAPRABHA MISSION a comprehensive and successful development."*

In India, non-profit organisations must obtain registration under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) in order to receive and use donations from abroad. In June 2025, the JNANAPRABHA MISSION's application was approved. Following the resolution passed at the most recent general assembly, HAND IN HAND can now officially help support this new initiative through donations.

# JNANAPRABHA MISSION – A PLACE OF INSPIRATION

*“These women are doing incredible work,”*  
says Ise Sharp, who visited the MISSION  
two years ago. Read her inspiring  
report about it.

Together with three women of HAND IN HAND, I had the wonderful opportunity to visit in Bhubaneswar, the JNANAPRABHA MISSION, which is located on the ground floor of a house provided by dedicated supporters of the MISSION. The new sister organisation of PRAJNANA MISSION offers a wide range of services for women in Odisha, from medical care and educational and meditation courses to support for widows.

In conversation with the managing director and her deputy, we learned that the small team there works from morning until late at night – caring for more than 1,000 vulnerable women! What an impressive achievement, especially when considering that there is no comparable facility in Odisha.

At that time, one of the MISSION’s goals was to raise funds for a shelter for homeless widows. I learned that many women in India are left without any income after the death of their husbands and, subsequently, fall into severe hardship. Some make their way to Puri to survive as beggars near the Jagannath Temple.

Every Friday, the MISSION’s team goes out into the streets to offer free medical care to these women and to others in need.

We were able to witness the female volunteers’ tremendous dedication and perseverance with our own eyes and were also allowed to participate in an educational program, which took place in a home for vulnerable and orphaned girls. There, we saw how the swamis, on the roof terrace, eagerly imparted precious knowledge and values to the girls.

Some of it had been so taken for granted in my own childhood, for example, hygiene practices or the importance of clean water. Many of the participants were only a few years younger than me, which quickly created a special feeling of closeness and playfulness. At the end, we sang together, and I contributed a song that my own mother had taught me.

Another trip took us to the slums of Bhubaneswar. The women of JNANAPRABHA MISSION have a small room there, which is used as a classroom. Children of all ages poured in, filling the room, standing in the doorways, and peering through the windows. For many, this class was probably the highlight of their week and perhaps the only form of education they received. The atmosphere was livelier than in the girls’ home, but full of energy and joie de vivre. It was moving to see how much the children appreciated the teachings imparted by Swami Jnana-swarupanandaji.

The work of the MISSION inspired me to reflect on the role of mothers in general; on the caring nature inherent in all of us, which is so wonderfully expressed in this Indian organisation. The MISSION has since grown and has been able to expand its services. I was especially pleased to hear the news that the organisation is finally allowed to accept donations from abroad and I hope that its important work will receive plenty of support.



Ise Sharp visited the JNANAPRABHA MISSION (pictured above with its founder, Paramahamsa Prajnananandaji) and took part in an education camp in the slums of Cuttack led by Swami Jnana-swarupanandaji (pictured below right).



At Balashram as well, the girls' self-confidence is being strengthened further – through a new partnership with “Commit to Change” (C2C)



Projects like robotics (top), special computer science lessons (middle), and many other activities stand as powerful symbols of the message: “United we stand – together we are strong.”

Since the beginning of the 2024/25 school year, Balashram has been collaborating with the non-profit organisation Commit to Change (C2C), which is dedicated to sustainably improve, through education, the lives of girls living in underprivileged communities.

As part of the cooperation, the pupils' English language skills and other academic abilities will be promoted in an even more targeted manner. The girls also receive personal guidance in matters concerning their own lives, as many of them come from challenging family backgrounds.

The programs developed by C2C have quickly established themselves and have also been very well received at this school. The ‘Professional Development Classes’ for grades IX, X and XI, which were completed last year, were particularly successful. The current focus is on Grade VIII, where students are learning about Vedic mathematics, computer science, spoken English, and robotics.

In the field of robotics, the girls have already completed two projects – a success they can rightly be proud of.

## Deepa Jena: Embarking on life's journey – inspired by Balashram

Sixteen years ago, Deepa Jena came to Balashram as a little girl. Two years ago, at the age of 21, she passed her Standard XII exams with excellent results. Ilse Nürnberg from Austria and Friedrich Werner from Switzerland – our HAND IN HAND filmmakers – interviewed her in 2023. Here is an excerpt:

### What was your time at Balashram like?

*It was wonderful. I had the opportunity to learn so much. I had really good teachers who gave me a solid education. Up until 10<sup>th</sup> grade, my favourite subjects were biology and dance. Later, in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, I became very interested in political science and economics, as I wanted to understand more about the economic, financial, and social status of my country. But I also learned how to make friends and how to handle difficult situations when problems arise. I had the chance to showcase my skills and take part in various competitions in India – both in dance and in debates. Balashram gave me the opportunity to move forward in life.*

### What does Balashram mean to you?

*I can say: Balashram is my mother. I lost my mother when I was five years old, but here I have received so much love, compassion, and care – from my teachers, my *babas* and *mamas* [the Swamis and mentors]. Balashram is everything to me. It is a place where you learn values and morals and come to understand what good qualities truly are. A place where you can gain all kinds of knowledge – spiritual, physical, and intellectual. Without Balashram, I would not have come to know myself. It gave me the opportunity to discover my inner qualities and to understand who I really am. For that, I thank Shri Guruji Paramahansa Prajnanananda from the bottom of my heart.*



### Do you remember your life with your family?

*It wasn't very good. I come from a lower caste. In India, there are many religions, classes, castes, and freedoms – but also discrimination. I belong to the group of Dalits, the lowest social class. I have experienced discrimination. I want to share a few incidents with you: When I go home – even today – people like us are not allowed to enter the temple. We are not allowed to drink water from the well. Some Brahmins do not permit it. There are many restrictions for us: don't touch this, don't touch that. And if we do, they take a ritual bath. That hurts me deeply. I once asked my father if there's a way to remove this injustice from society. He said, "What can we do? If we try, they will ask us: Who are you?" But he also said: "First, you must learn. Gain knowledge. Finish your studies. Then you can try to change something." At Balashram, it's so different. Here, there are children from all castes and genders – but we are all equal. We are together, we love one another, we support each other. Here, I truly feel 'unity in diversity.' Balashram is completely different from the society outside, where discrimination still exists.*

### What are your plans for the future?

*I want to study political science and become a journalist – and later, a politician. That way, I can bring about change in my society. I want to fight corruption and challenge harmful traditions that still exist in our society. I want to bring the moral values I learned at Balashram into society and work for justice and peace.*

As a woman, I want to empower other women. Even today, I see many girls getting married at 17 or 18. But what kind of life do they have when they marry so young? India has produced many great women. Our President, Droupadi Murmu, comes from Odisha, my home state. She grew up as a tribal girl, studied and got an education. She then got married and started a family – and still had a career: first as a teacher, then as a politician. She even became governor of a state and is now the President of India.

So why shouldn't I also be able to become a politician like her?

Why shouldn't I be able to achieve that?

**I can do it!**



Deepa Jena with her friend at the Holi festival

## Manoranjan Malik – An inspiring success story

By Archana Hariharan

**Manoranjan Malik grew up as the youngest of six children in a farming family in the village of Arua (Odisha). Together with his father, he sold vegetables. He was skilled in arithmetic and showed an early talent for mathematics. To help with the daily sales, he didn't attend school at all even when he was ten or eleven years old. "Why not, when you're so good with numbers?" a customer once asked him.**

That sentence was the turning point for the boy, who then went on to directly enrol in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade at an Odia middle school. After completing 10<sup>th</sup> grade, he was admitted to Balashram in 2018, where he thrived in



mathematics and sciences. He initially struggled with the English language, but with the support and love of his teachers, he overcame that challenge as well. He completed his bachelor's degree in chemistry at Kendrapara Autonomous College, and from 2023 to 2025, he pursued a master's degree in chemistry at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati, in Assam. In June 2025, he became a lecturer at the Sri Chaitanya Educational Institute in Hyderabad – a renowned educational institution.

Looking back on his time at Balashram, he says:

*"Maths was always easy for me. The only difficulty I had was with English. But the teachers and Swamis encouraged me to speak in front of the class and always helped boost my self-confidence. So, I worked hard and focused entirely on English in Grade XI. Through diligence, I improved. Studying biology, which I loved, also helped me get better at English."*

*"Only after leaving Balashram did I truly realise the value of everything I had received there – the value of time, the importance of Kriya Yoga for inner peace, the food, and the teachers who went far beyond their duties and helped me so much to get to where I am today. I owe everything to Balashram."*

*Manoranjan Malik in front of the IIT, where he earned his Master's degree in Chemistry in 2025.*

# Pantu Munda – No success without hard work

By Archana Hariharan

Since its founding in 2004, Hariharananda Balashram has shaped and transformed the lives of many children. In the 2024/2025 school year, the institution celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. On this occasion, we spoke with a former student – and are delighted to share Pantu's story with you here.

## A difficult beginning

When Pantu's father died, he was still a young boy. His mother suddenly found herself alone with five children – three sons and two daughters – struggling to survive each day in the village of Buruhatu in the Mayurbhanj district. She worked as a day labourer in road construction. One day, while working on a construction site in Pattamundai, she found out about Hariharananda Balashram – and enrolled Pantu there in 2007.

## School years and education

Like many new students, Pantu felt homesick at first. He often gazed longingly out of the window, hoping his mother might come to take him home. Before long, he made friends, and the school became a second home to him. He especially enjoyed learning Odia and English. He also took part in art classes with just as much enthusiasm as he did in the various sports activities. He was particularly passionate about athletics, javelin throw, football, kabaddi, and kho-kho. One of his fondest memories comes from 9<sup>th</sup> grade: "My favourite teacher was Smt. Aradhana Mishra, our Odia teacher. She was like a mother to me. She always

asked whether I had eaten enough and made sure I was properly dressed. For her birthday, I wrote a poem for her and recited it at the school assembly – she was so happy! The poem was even published later in *Prajna Deepika* [school paper]."

Pantu completed his schooling in 2021 after finishing 12<sup>th</sup> grade. In 2024, he graduated with a Bachelor's degree with honours in English, from Kendrapara Autonomous College and has since been pursuing distance studies in English at Utkal University.

## Career and future

Determined to stand on his own feet, Pantu followed the advice of the school principal and the Swamijis and applied for a position with the Indian Postal Service (Postal GDS). To qualify, he sat for several exams, including the CUET (Common University Entrance Test) and the CPET (Common Post Graduate Entrance Test).

"On November 1, 2024, I started my job and am now the head of the local post office. The villagers ask me if I've eaten and how my family is doing – they truly care about me. I've never felt like a stranger here," says Pantu. Today, he lives with his mother in Bhubaneswar, works, and continues his studies at the same time.

## Core values and life outlook

When asked about his beliefs, Pantu responds calmly and confidently: "I never leave work unfinished – that's something I learned at Balashram. Whatever I may become in life, I first want to be a good human being. Money isn't the most important thing. If I can make my family happy and help others, that's enough."

His goal is clear: "One day, I want to become a good English teacher." Gratefully, he adds: "I can never repay what my school and Shri Guruji have done for me. But I can become a good person. When people see us, they should be able to tell: That is a student of Balashram."

We sincerely wish Pantu Munda all the very best on his journey – may he fulfil his dreams and become an inspiration to many.



Pantu on a recent visit to the Balashram



Pantu with his friends (in the background)

# BALASHRAM: A PLACE TO CALL HOME

By Christine Schweinöster

They are both mother and father figures:  
The teachers at the Balashram Residential  
School in Odisha.  
Principal Dr. Malaya Nanda offers insight  
into the school – and also a little,  
into the inner lives of its 560 students.

Here at Balashram, they are allowed to be children – to run and play freely outside, to let their imaginations roam. But within, they often fight silent battles: Between their “old” lives filled with loss and hardship, and a “new” existence that still feels unfamiliar.

Most of them have lost their mother, father, or both, to illness and death. The rest of their families can barely afford the basics needed to survive. This school is a lifeline – at least for the 40 new children who arrive each year, carrying with them a backpack full of painful experiences. Bit by bit, they begin to shed their emotional baggage. They make friends, start to reimagine their futures. They pour great effort into their education – because they know: This is an opportunity that few ever receive.

*“Be proud of your child,”* the teachers tell the families. And to the children, they say: *“Don’t forget where you come from.”*

Balashram makes a conscious effort to ensure that students do not forget their social roots. For example, family members are invited to major school celebrations, and their often difficult journeys are financed.

When the holidays begin on May 27, most of the students travel back home. There, they are once again confronted with poverty, hardship, and misery – and girls in particular often find themselves pulled back into old traditions.

## First a good education, then marriage and dependence on the husband

*“We don’t want to get married,”* the girls tell us, the European women who have come to the school for an interview. And there is a good reason for this. The students know that it means giving up their own career plans and staying at home to look after the family.



Swami Karunanandaji (HIH Austria), Swami Divyaswarupanandaji (PM) and Christine Schweinöster in front of the main entrance of PM – the HIH partner organisation operating the school



Manaswini Dash has been teaching at the Balashram primary school since 2010.

Yet they are just now full of energy, building their independence – through solid education and a future job of their own. According to Dr. Malaya Nanda, half of all young women over 18 years old fall back into the old traditional roles after leaving Balashram, even though they actually wanted to study or become nurses or teachers. However, he doesn't give up easily. When he receives the news “*got married*,” he tries to get in touch with the student. In the remote areas of Odisha, this is an extremely difficult task – especially when the family blocks all contact.

“*Then the girl simply disappears from our lives and we hear nothing more from her*,” explains the principal, recounting how a former student once came back to him. With tears in her eyes, she explained that she had made a big mistake by getting married because she could no longer study.

This only deepened the principal’s commitment especially to support those girls who receive no encouragement from home to lead an independent life.

### **The “Social Gap” often takes a toll on the principal**

“*But boys, too, often have to struggle against the conflicting plans of their relatives*,” the principal explains. At the moment, he is doing everything he can to track down one boy who hasn’t returned since going home for the holidays.

Is the family holding him back? Has he perhaps fallen victim to child labour or exploitation, or drifted into drug circles? “*No one knows*,” says Dr. Malaya Nanda – and it’s clear how much such incidents weigh on him.

“*Supporting the students in all aspects of their lives doesn’t automatically end with graduation*,” he emphasises. He and his team assist not only in job searches, but also in finding further education opportunities.

### **What stands out most at the school:**

#### **The respectful way everyone treats one another.**

Inside the school building, it’s completely silent this February – it is exam time. A door gently opens, and boys and girls quietly step out. The relief is written all over their faces. Getting good grades is important to them.

But what they receive at Balashram goes far beyond good grades. It’s a school of life where moral values form the basic framework. A strong sense of responsibility is instilled through projects like “*How to make the surrounding happy*” or “*How to save the environment*.” We read about these on posters along the walls as we wander through the school halls and take a look inside the classrooms.





The students are getting ready for their final exams.

The school principal showcases the students' projects on "How to Save the Environment."

We see, for example, a well-equipped computer lab and a physics room that sparks curiosity and a love for experimentation.

Tools for water purification and waste disposal have recently been developed there.

There is just as much creativity in the visual arts subjects. Competitions are held to help students develop and strengthen their personalities.

*"A good balance between competition and solidarity is important,"* the principal emphasises, before taking us to the school garden, where small hands have planted vegetable crops. Not far from there, we hear cheerful children's voices echoing across the schoolyard.

And we European visitors realise:

**This place is a source of inspiration for big dreams.**



At the parent-teacher meetings (as seen here in October 2024), mothers and fathers share their joy and gratitude for the new opportunities in their children's lives.

# CELEBRATIONS ARE GIVEN GREAT IMPORTANCE AT BALASHRAM

Especially Diwali, the Festival of Lights, holds a special place. Integrated into subjects like art, storytelling, and shared rituals, it takes on a deeper meaning for the students. Through these communal celebrations and playful activities, their cultural identity and sense of belonging are strengthened.

They help the children build connections, gain self-confidence, and engage joyfully in school life.

Below, Tejaswari Kanhar shares her experience of the Diwali festival:

*This year, we – the students of fourth grade – celebrated Diwali with our teachers, friends, and all the volunteers. We all know that Diwali, also known as Deepavali or the Festival of Lights, is a Hindu festival that symbolises the victory of good over evil. On this day, Lord Rama returned to Ayodhya after defeating the demon, Ravan. We also worship Goddess Laxmi for blessings and prosperity. We cleaned our room in the dormitory and decorated it with Rangoli (patterns made from coloured powder, flower petals, or rice paste, placed or painted on the floor) and clay lamps. Teachers and students exchanged sweets. After the celebration, we ate prasad and more sweets. It was a very beautiful day for me.*

**Tejaswari Kanhar – known and appreciated at Balashram as a ‘warm-hearted girl who has developed very well’ – also shares her life and future plans as follows:**

*I’m in fourth grade here, and I’m proud to be part of the Balashram family. When I first came to the school, I was very scared and shy, but little by little, my fear disappeared. I have received love and affection from everyone. Now I am very happy. I really like my school. The teachers, the Swamijis, and everyone else truly care about us. I enjoy playing with my friends, dancing, and creating art. My favourite subjects are English, Computer Science, and Hindi. I love reading storybooks and always take part in our school events. When I grow up, I want to become a teacher. I want to teach students in a way that makes everything easy for them, so they don’t struggle at school. And I want my teaching to help the pupils become good citizens. Being a teacher is so wonderful because it allows you to change society for the better.*



# VISITING THE BOOK FAIR – A BOOK LOVER TELLS HER STORY

Banya Malik is known at school as a ‘quiet, friendly, attentive, and eager-to-learn student.’ Because she particularly likes books as well as music, she was looking forward to this excursion, which she herself recounts



*In December 2024, I travelled to the book fair in Bhubaneswar with my classmates and a few older students. For as long as I can remember, I've loved reading books, so I was really looking forward to this trip!*

*There were soooo many books at the book fair! Some told exciting stories, while others explained different topics. Our teachers advised us to choose books that teach some-*

*thing valuable or important for life. So, I always started by reading the text on the back – that's called the ‘blurb’ (short summary or description of a book, usually found on the back cover or inside the dust jacket) – and then decided which book I wanted. In the end, each of us got twelve books!*

*There were also stalls with beautiful things like stationery, bookmarks, and small reading lamps. I imagined how nice it would be to read at night in bed with one of those lamps. Some authors and publishers were there too – I thought that was really exciting!*

*That day, I felt so happy and content! It was just wonderful that we were allowed to go to the book fair. Next year, I definitely want to go again – and buy even more books!*



Banya Malik (center) enjoying the book fair in Bhubaneswar with her friends.



Banya Malik, a sixth-grade student, shows great talent in art as well. This drawing titled “Save Mother Earth” is one of her creations.



At the Friendship Day celebrations at the Balashram, Banya Malik in the front right

# A great asset for HAND IN HAND: ARCHANA MA AND HER TEAM

Balashram graduates are now working for HAND IN HAND

Since July 2024, Archana Hariharan has been working as Information Coordinator for the PRAJNANA MISSION and HAND IN HAND. In this short time – and entirely on a voluntary basis – she has become an invaluable support for HAND IN HAND. Thanks to the tireless dedication of Archana Ma – as she is affectionately called by everyone – project communication has reached a new level. Our HAND IN HAND filmmaker, Ilse Nürnberg, conducted the following interview with this warm and inspiring woman, who together with her team – two graduates of the Balashram – has become a great asset to HAND IN HAND.

**Could you tell us a bit about your background?**

*Pranam. [a traditional, respectful Indian greeting] I am from India – more precisely, from Chennai (known as Madras in earlier days), in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. That's where I grew up and completed my schooling and undergraduate studies. In 1996, I moved to Bengaluru (then Bangalore) to pursue my postgraduate studies in Management – and I have been living here ever since. While Tamil is my mother tongue, Kannada has now become my “father tongue”!*

*I have spent most of my professional life in market research – first a few years in full-time positions, and later many years as a freelancer or part-time consultant. Today, I run a small boutique firm offering research and consulting services.*

*On the personal front, I live with my husband, Kaushik, who works as a software architect, and our two children, Nandita and Siddharth. Both are in college now – my daughter will graduate next year with a degree in Commerce, and my son started his engineering studies this year. I feel truly blessed to have such a supportive family that rarely gives me anything to worry about. I love working and learning – both are essential parts of my life. In my free time, I enjoy quiet moments: getting lost in a good book, solving cryptic crosswords or Sudoku, or studying a new language. I love nature – both the sea and the mountains – and, of course, the occasional good cup of chai shared with old friends. As a family, we enjoy trips to peaceful places, away from the usual tourist routes. I've always believed in quality over quantity and feel most at ease with a small circle of close friends. Crowds are something I prefer to avoid whenever possible.*

**How did your journey with the humanitarian work of PRAJNANA MISSION/HAND IN HAND begin?**

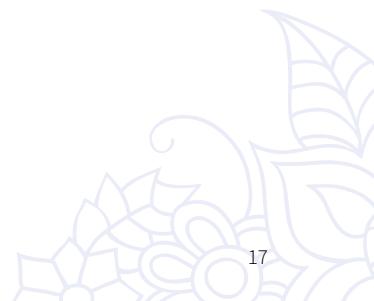
*It must have been divine providence that in October 2017 we got new neighbours in our apartment building. When I went over to greet them and offer them a welcome cup of tea, my eyes fell on a large photograph of Mahavatari Babaji in their living room. Earlier that same year, I had had the blessing of visiting Babaji's famous cave.*



*The committed PRAJNANA MISSION/HAND IN HAND project communication team (from left): Sandeep Baba, Swami Sugitanandaji, Archana Ma, and Jagannath Baba*



*Archana Ma with her loving and supportive family*



*That was the beginning of many conversations.*

*My neighbour told me that a year earlier she had been initiated into Kriya Yoga by the PRAJNANA MISSION.*

*Being a rather skeptical person, I began exploring the PRAJNANA MISSION's website. I was especially drawn to the photograph of Shri Gurudev Paramahamsa Hariharanandaji. Today, I know that it was through this great monk that the humanitarian activities of PRAJNANA MISSION and HAND IN HAND began. Soon I felt that I wanted to get to know this organisation better.*

*Since I had some free time alongside my family and professional responsibilities – and as my freelance work allowed me flexibility – I offered to help wherever there was a need. I assisted here and there, especially with system-related or documentation work, depending on what was required.*

*Swami Divyaswarupanandaji, the General Secretary of PRAJNANA MISSION, was kind enough to give us opportunities for seva (selfless service). Gradually, I began helping with some editing work for the Sthita Prajna magazine – and in this way, one opportunity for seva led naturally to another.*

### **So, you work as a volunteer?**

*Yes, I try to help wherever I can. It gives me a deep sense of fulfilment and joy. For me, happiness means making someone else happy – not owning things that money can buy.*

### **What exactly is your role?**

*Within HAND IN HAND, my role is to support communication activities – helping to document important events and developments, as well as the day-to-day operations, and to share them with the HAND IN HAND team, along with photographs whenever possible. These reports and monthly newsletters are prepared by our team here and, after review and approval by the General Secretary, are shared with the HAND IN HAND teams in Europe and the USA.*

### **How is the work carried out? Do you have a team?**

*Yes, it's entirely a team effort – it only works when we all work together!*

*There was a clear need to strengthen communication, both from the Balashram and from the health centres. For the health centres, statistical data was already available, which could easily be used for reporting. In addition, we stayed in touch with the respective heads for special events or current updates.*

*At the school, however, there's always so much going on that the biggest challenge was to regularly and reliably*

*capture all the important activities and events.*

*During my visit to the Balashram in June 2024, we concluded that the best reporters are those who actually live there! So we spoke with Swami Sugitananda Giri, who is responsible for day-to-day operations at the Balashram. He introduced us to two senior students who had completed their schooling there and were now pursuing their undergraduate studies while still living in the Balashram hostel. One was passionate about photography and videography, while the other focused on writing reports.*

*To supplement their work, the Principal, Swami Bodhatmananda Giri (Dr. Malaya Nanda), also provides regular monthly updates. With information coming from all these sources, it became much easier to cross-check and compile the monthly reports. Initially, this was an experiment. We wondered whether the photos would meet the desired quality, and whether the reports would arrive on time, considering the students' academic commitments. But our worries soon proved unfounded – the reports arrived punctually, the photos were excellent, and the team worked wonderfully well.*

### **What difficulties or joys do you experience in this work?**

*There are no difficulties at all. I feel grateful and happy to have been given this small responsibility, and I truly enjoy what I do. I welcome every new opportunity to contribute even more to these noble projects with open arms.*

### **What does working for the PRAJNANA MISSION and HAND IN HAND mean to you personally?**

**Has it enriched your life?**

*Oh yes – in the deepest way. It fills me with joy and humility to be, in a small way, part of this wonderful journey, where so many kind-hearted people from around the world continue to support the Balashram and the health centres.*

### **What, in your view, can each of us do to support the MISSION's work?**

*Simply keep doing whatever we can – as the motto says, every drop counts and can make a difference, a positive one! The vision is clear, the faith is strong, and the will to act is there – and with that, God and the Gurus will continue to make everything unfold as it is meant to.*

***It is especially close to my heart to let the two reporters from the Balashram have their say – without them, we couldn't support HAND IN HAND in the way we do:***



**Pranam. My name is Jagannath Soy.**  
I belong to the Kolha tribal community and come from Ranibhol village in the Mayurbhanj district. We are a family of five, and farming is our traditional occupation.

I was admitted to the Hariharananda Balashram in 2006 as part of the third batch, when I was still very young. At school, I was an average student. During the holidays, while others went home to spend time with their families, I stayed back at the Balashram. Those times are especially dear to me because I was very close to the Babas and Mamas [affectionate terms for teachers and caregivers].

I am currently in my second year of a Bachelor's degree in Economics. After completing my studies, I plan to prepare for various administrative entrance exams. I am very interested in office and computer-related work, and in my leisure time, I love gardening.

I took up photography for HAND IN HAND because many of my best memories are connected with the Balashram, and I know every corner of this place by heart. This helps me to capture and document its important events and activities more effectively.

It is by the grace of God and our Gurus that I have had the opportunity over the past year to support HAND IN HAND with photos, videos, and reports from the Balashram. In the future, we hope to put even more effort into improving the quality of our photos and videos, to show the world how magnificent and special the Balashram truly is.



**Pranam to everyone.**  
**My name is Sandeep.**  
I come from a flood-prone village in the Jajpur district of Odisha. Because of those difficult conditions, I was admitted to the Hariharananda Balashram.

I am the youngest of three siblings. My father runs a small catering business, which hardly provides enough to support our family.

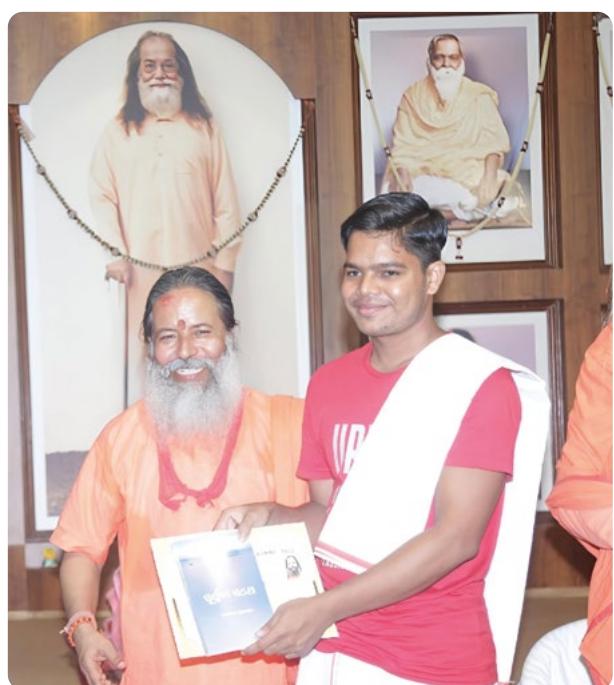
The Balashram has become much more than just a home to me. Even during the holidays, I longed to return,

because the sense of family and belonging I felt there was even stronger than at home. When I see the children dancing with joy today, it reminds me of my own childhood here – and fills me with a gentle nostalgia for how quickly time passes.

My education at the Balashram was truly transformative. I scored above 95% in both my Class 10 and Class 12 exams. My teachers were deeply caring – not only about my studies, but also by encouraging me to take part in extracurricular activities. Through that, I earned the love and respect of my teachers as well as of my juniors and seniors. I am now in the final year of my Bachelor's degree in Political Science in Cuttack, Odisha. I chose this field because it closely aligns with my dream of joining the civil service – a profession that fascinates me more than any other. I enjoy organising events and have a great interest in learning, sports, and travel.

Working with HAND IN HAND has given me a creative outlet through photography and the opportunity to meet inspiring people – each encounter has been enriching. Over the past year, I have supported HAND IN HAND by contributing photos, videos, and written reports documenting the various activities at the Balashram. This work has been deeply fulfilling and has helped me grow in both skill and perspective.

Looking ahead, we hope to keep improving our work for HAND IN HAND and to make the most of every opportunity to enhance the quality of our contributions.



Sandeep during his school days, receiving an award in a public speaking competition.

# 25 YEARS OF HARIHARANANDA CHARITABLE HEALTH CENTRES (HCHC)

## A quarter of a century of selfless love in action

On 28 February 2025, the anniversary was joyfully celebrated with a special ceremony at the HCHC in Jagatpur. Among the guests of honour were Paramahansa Prajnananandaji and Peter van Breukelen, the founding fathers of HAND IN HAND, along with many distinguished personalities from Odisha – including Dr. Mukesh Mahaling, Minister of Health and Family Welfare; Sj. Bhartruhari Mahatab, Member of the Lok Sabha (India's lower house of Parliament); S. Souvic Biswal, Member of the Legislative Assembly; and Dr. Prasant Kumar Hota, Chief District Medical Officer.

25 years of HCHC represent 25 years of hope, compassion, and healing. What began as a vision – to provide free medical aid to people in need – has grown into an extensive network of care, professionalism, and humanity. The celebrations served as a reminder to all involved that true healing goes far beyond medicines: It begins where knowledge, competence and compassion meet.

### Providing healthcare to people in need since 2000

Since their foundation in 1999/2000, the HCHC health centres have set themselves the goal of providing medical assistance to people without access to healthcare – free of charge and with wholehearted commitment. Five health centres have now been established in structurally weak and poverty-stricken regions. To date, around 1.9 million patients have been treated there.

More than 30 doctors – most of them volunteers – offer a wide range of healthcare services at the HCHC centres:

- **General medical and dental care** in Balighai (Puri District) and Bhishnudipur (West Medinipur District)
- **Homeopathic treatments** in Bhishnudipur, Athagarh, and through the Village Health Project (VHP) in Arua
- **Ayurvedic and homeopathic medicine** in addition to conventional treatments at HCHC Balighai
- **Comprehensive medical care** at HCHC Jagatpur, which has developed into a modern-day clinic since its opening in February 2014. Every day, 200 to 300 people from the region come here for essential medical care – from general medicine to surgery, paediatrics, gynaecology, dental care, and other vital services.



Invitation to the celebrations marking  
25 years of the HCHC



Paramahansa Prajnananandaji, founder of PRAJNANA MISSION, welcomes the guests of honour – among them Peter van Breukelen, who has served as president of HAND IN HAND for 25 years.



Many visitors at the celebrations

## Progress and development in the Anniversary Year

The year 2024/25 was marked by the modernisation and expansion of diagnostic and therapeutic capabilities:

- **Improved Dental Treatments:**

Since July 2024, a modern dental light cure machine has enabled more precise fillings and better illumination during dental procedures.

- **Expanded Laboratory Diagnostics:**

A new electrolyte analyser has been in use since February 2025, significantly enhancing the accuracy and efficiency of laboratory evaluations.

- **Modern hormone testing:**

An immunoassay analyser enables the precise measurement of thyroid hormones (T3, T4, TSH).

- **Planned improvement in diabetes monitoring:**

The planned acquisition of an HbA1c device will allow for more accurate monitoring of metabolic values in diabetic patients.

- **Ultrasound diagnostics:** Since May 2025, a 2D echo ultrasound machine has been in use – an important step in cardiological diagnostics. The device was purchased in 2024. However, using ultrasound equipment in India is not straightforward, as its use is strictly regulated. This is because ultrasound machines can be used to determine the sex of a foetus – an act prohibited under Indian law, and for a good reason: The government aims to curb a serious social issue – the targeted abortion of female foetuses (female foeticide).



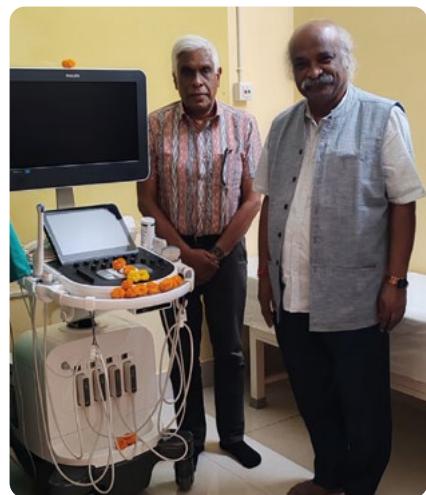
*The use of ultrasound equipment in India is strictly regulated to prevent the selective abortion of female foetuses.*

The so-called PCPNDT Act mandates strict registration requirements for all facilities and devices that can be used for prenatal diagnostics. It can take many months from the time of application to the issuance of the registration licence, and without this approval, no ultrasound equipment may be installed, let alone operated.

In addition, only licensed doctors with recognised qualifications are allowed to operate the device, and registration is mandatory for them as well. Once registered, the use of this machine is subject to numerous other obligations, including monthly reporting to the competent authority. The registration certificate must be displayed in the clinic. HCHC Jagatpur received this in May 2025.



Paramahansa Prajnananandaji with Dr. Prasant Kumar Hota, who has been volunteering for the HCHC since day one.



Inauguration of the new ultrasound device: Dr. Prakash Mishra (left) and Dr. Purna Chandra Mohapatra



In the 2024/25 financial year, a 3p electrolyte analyser was purchased thanks to your donation.

## Partnership between the HCHC in Arua and the LV Prasad Eye Institute (LVPEI)

The aim of this cooperation, established in 2024, is to provide high-quality eye care to people in rural areas of Odisha.

Balashram has also benefited from this collaboration. From 11 to 13 January 2025 and on 4 February 2025, the LVPEI team carried out eye examinations on around 600 pupils.

Twenty-nine students received glasses, some were treated on-site, and a few were referred to Bhubaneswar for further evaluation.



*The children are being registered for their eye check-up.*



*The Balashram students receive an Ayurvedic immunity booster.*

## Holistic health and prevention

At HCHC Balighai, it was decided to introduce Ayurveda treatment to add a holistic component to medical care.

On 6 April 2025, all the pupils at Balashram also received an 'Ayurvedic immunity booster' to naturally strengthen their immune systems.

# ART AND CULTURE IN SUPPORT OF HAND IN HAND

## Two musicians sing and play for the children of Balashram

By Mette Koivusaloo

**One of them is Julia Steber, who has been musically active since childhood: She plays piano and guitar, and writes her own music. The other musician is Swami Svatantantrandaji, who plays the harmonium and loves to sing spiritual songs.**

Julia lives with her family in Germany, while Swamiji resides at the Kriya Yoga Centre in Tattendorf, near Vienna, Austria. Together, they have joined forces and have been organising charity concerts since 2014. *“What could be more beautiful than raising money for the children of the Indian Balashram School in Odisha?”* they ask enthusiastically, and it is precisely this feeling that they convey to their audience.

Sometimes joined by other musicians, they create an interactive atmosphere that encourages their audience to sing along. In the meantime, musical contributions by other artists have become a regular and valued part of the seminars in Tattendorf. The two women truly paved the way for this development.

Julia and Svatantantrandaji have also performed in earlier years with the talented musicians Christian Weiss (tabla) and Kevin Hume. Julia’s husband Marcus Noichl was also actively involved. Julia has also performed alongside him in charity concerts across Germany, captivating audiences with her beautiful voice.

Julia’s own compositions are combined with spiritual songs by other authors. Many of the pieces are musical interpretations of sacred mantras, performed in a joyful and uplifting manner.

The artist has recorded two CDs, one of them together with Swami Svatantantrandaji. All songs are also available on SoundCloud and on the website [julia-steber.de/mantra-klang](http://julia-steber.de/mantra-klang) – inviting everyone to sing along and enjoy. A share of the proceeds from the CD sales goes to HAND IN HAND. **Our heartfelt thanks for this wonderful support of the Balashram!**



Swami Svatantantrandaji and Julia Steber have performed many concerts in support of the Balashram.



## The wondrous world of artist Petra von Langsdorff

By Christine Schweinöster

**For the Hamburg-born artist, painting means diving deep into the soul. The proceeds from her auctioned paintings go to HAND IN HAND.**

Outwardly, this woman is a true bundle of energy – still planning projects at the age of 90. But inwardly, through Kriya Yoga, she practices letting go of all things worldly

– drawing inspiration from various religions. After all, she has been moderating an ‘interreligious dialogue’ in a Protestant church in Hamburg for 25 years. The metropolis is, after all, a melting pot of different faiths. The artist seeks to express through her paintings that, at their core, all religions are one. Her canvases are interwoven with countless stories.

*“It’s always about messages I find within religions – messages that should be preserved,”* the artist explains with great charm, at her exhibitions.

### Career – and then a descent into the depths of life

Petra von Langsdorff had once been a sought-after illustrator for the emerging German television industry. Starting in 1956, she drew set designs for fairy tales such as *The Little Mermaid*, for educational videos, and for school television programmes. But one day, she had had enough of luxury, prestige, and high earnings – and turned instead to art therapy which she practiced in an orphanage and with cancer patients. But she also wanted to help the outcasts of society and, together with her life partner Amandus, she founded *‘Werkhaus GmbH’*, a company with facilities in Hamburg and in rural areas. The couple cared for hoarders, alcoholics, drug addicts, neglected children, prostitutes, the homeless, and former prisoners. *“We went from one problem to the next, slept very little ourselves, and lived with the bare minimum,”* the Hamburg native recounts, smiling. *“It was good training for life, and I wouldn’t want to have missed it.”* Through *Amnesty International*, she also began working with child soldiers from Sierra Leone – drawing and exhibiting art, together with them.

### A private museum for religions – featuring her works

Mecklenburg has become a second home for her. For the past 20 years, she has spent the warmer months painting in a beautiful old manor house in Bobzin. And it is here that, in 2026, a *private ‘Museum for Interreligious Dialogues’* – showcasing the interreligious paintings of Petra von Langsdorff – is to be established. Visitors may even find the artist there, painting her many symbols and mythical figures. She plans to bequeath her works to the Kriya Yoga Association Hamburg, because Kriya Yoga makes her *‘very happy.’* Proceeds from auctioned works already go to *HAND IN HAND*. And, because the essence of religious painting is *‘completely without ego,’* the original paintings are unsellable. Instead, *‘individually reworked copies’* are the ones being auctioned, the artist explains.

*“There are statements that only painting can make. Some of my works take decades to create – and even then, they’re never quite finished.”*

– Petra von Langsdorff



Petra von Langsdorff usually paints at a country estate in Bobzin (pictured), but occasionally also in public – as shown below, outside the “Documenta 2022” exhibition in Kassel.

# A NEW LIFE

## or: Why there was no newsletter this year

By Kriemhild Leitner

**A trip to India planned as a short stay – and yet it turned into an encounter with life itself.  
Amid illness, compassion, and boundless care, I experienced what it truly means to be part  
of a global family, to be part of HAND IN HAND.**

### **A journey that changed everything**

Holi is a celebration of spring – of blossoming in the warm sunlight after the end of winter. It celebrates the victory of good over evil. This year, the festival fell on March 14 – exactly one month after I had set off on my carefree journey to India. I had actually planned to be on my way home by then. But just a few days after my arrival, nothing was the same anymore. Holi, which marks a new beginning in the annual cycle, took on a much deeper meaning for me: A new life – the beginning of a new life. I believe that is what is truly being celebrated on this day with such exuberance and in the radiant colours of spring.

### **On the path to healing**

In the first few days after my arrival in Odisha, I was busy with photo shoots at Balashram and HCHC Jagatpur together with photographer Agnes Ackerl, the youngest daughter of our treasurer at HAND IN HAND in Austria. After that, we joined the ‘Prachi Walk’, a seven-day hike through the villages along the Prachi River, which is threatened by drought. Step by step, it is a journey of healing – for nature and for us humans.

We set off early in the morning. After eleven kilometres, we took a break for breakfast and enjoyed the bright blue sky above us. Everything seemed fine. I only found it odd that I felt full so quickly – when usually I couldn’t get enough of the delicious vegetarian Odia cuisine. “*The jet lag is making me tired,*” I thought, when suddenly, and literally out of the blue, there was blood on my clothes.

Before I could really comprehend what was happening, Swami Sharadanandaji was at my side and would not leave me for the next twelve weeks. Discreetly and with calm determination, she led me away from the crowd and called a doctor. From that moment until the day I

said goodbye at Bhubaneswar airport three months later, she was my rock. Whenever I wanted to thank her, she waved it off and said: “*You are my sister – it is just normal to help each other in a family.*”

Swami Sharadanandaji is the managing director of JNANAPRABHA MISSION, the new sister organisation of PRAJNANA MISSION. Together with gynaecologist and radiation oncologist Dr. Sulagna Mohanty from the Sadguru Cancer Hospital & Research Centre, she leads prevention programmes to raise awareness about breast and cervical cancer.

This young, competent doctor and her team played a decisive role in the fact that I am able to write these lines today – in fact, that I am still alive.

### **With flashing lights through chaotic evening traffic**

On the evening after I collapsed during the ‘Prachi Walk’, I was rushed to Bhubaneswar in a tiny ambulance, accompanied by Agnes – who was deeply worried about me in the days that followed – and a loving young woman from Iran whom I had never met before. There, Swami Sharadanandaji took me from one doctor to the next, while Swami Sampurnanandaji coordinated everything in the background – with the care of a mother.

On the evening of February 24, a biopsy was performed at Sadguru Hospital. The diagnosis: Advanced cervical cancer.

Agnes fought with the strength of a lioness to get me transported back to Austria – but that was no longer possible. The blood loss was severe, the carcinoma advanced, the prognosis poor. To make matters worse, my blood type, A negative, is a rarity in India – only about five in a thousand people have it.



After Paramahansa Prajnananandaji lovingly shared the legend of Holi with the children and guests, the colorful festivities began. The author (front left in the photo) felt truly blessed – by the incomparable Balashram smile that each child radiated toward her.

Today, I know how phones were ringing day and night to find blood supplies for me, and how prayers for my survival were offered without ceasing. Meanwhile, I myself became increasingly peaceful inside.

I remember the powerful and loving words of Swami Sampurnanandaji, the alarm sounds of the monitors, the crowded intensive care unit – and Dr. Sulagna, who stood at my bedside at two o'clock in the morning in her pyjamas to carry out a blood transfusion.

Only hours later, once she was sure everything was stable, did she leave the hospital – just in time to start her shift at the MRI centre.

And I remember Swami Sharadanandaji, who sat by my bedside the entire night, removing my fears with every glance – even before they could arise.

*“It’s a miracle!”* she exclaimed the next morning. Exhausted but happy, she reported that three more units of blood had been found. For her, there was no doubt: It was due to the blessings of ‘God and Gurus.’

In the weeks and months that followed, I was privileged to experience just how deeply the lives of the people in Odisha are still rooted in their millennia-old spirituality.

### **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – the whole world is one family**

The Sanskrit saying *‘the whole world is one family’* clearly shapes people’s outlook on life. Women I had never met before came to my hospital room, recited prayers, mas-

saged my legs – with a natural maternal tenderness I had never experienced from strangers.

I also had many *‘brothers and fathers.’* One of them was Chandrakanta Mishra, the former information and communications coordinator for HAND IN HAND. For more than five weeks, he brought me lovingly prepared meals, every morning and evening, with indescribable patience, care, and encouraging words. Day after day.

Not for a single minute was I left alone in the hospital room that had been specially arranged for me at Sadguru Hospital.

Without hesitation, Anna Konchenkova from the HAND IN HAND Board in Austria also stayed by my side for many days – attentive and with a helpfulness I will never forget. When she had to return home, Swami Sharadanandaji arranged for a young nurse to care for me. From the very first moment, she treated me as if we belonged to the same family. She sat down with me, tried in vain to teach me Odia, and told me about her parents and brothers, the mud house they lived in, her village, and her IT training – and about the thousand questions on her mind about marriage after graduation.

For six weeks, thanks to Dr. Sulagna Mohanty and her parents, Dr. Samita Mohanty and Dr. Pradip Kumar Mohanty, as well as Dr. Saumya Ranjan Mishra and the dedicated team, I was able to experience exceptionally compassionate cancer treatment at Sadguru Hospital in Jagatpur. Subsequently, I was transferred to the Bagchi Sri Shankara Cancer Centre, where brachytherapy was

performed with impressive success by Dr. Rabi Shankar Das and Dr. Sasmita Priyadarshini Sahoo, under the supervision of Dr. Bidhu Kalyan Mohanti. From then on, I was only in treatment for two days a week, spending the rest of the time living with a supporter of PRAJNANA MISSION or rather of JNANAPRABHA MISSION:

Jayashree Ma, a woman whom I had never met before, took me in like a mother and sister at the same time. For five weeks, she cared for me with such loving kindness that I still don't know how I could ever thank her enough.

During this time, I experienced more spontaneous connectedness than ever before in my life.

### To the Holi Festival in Balashram

And rarely has anything given me as much strength as the words and actions of Swami Sampurnanandaji, who one day simply 'kidnapped' me from the hospital and took me to the Holi Festival in Balashram. She was convinced that the children's laughter would do me good – and she was right.

Dr. Malaya Nanda (Swami Bodhatmanandaji), the school's principal, placed me among the honoured guests with such heartfelt warmth that there was no room for protest. Paramahansa Prajnananandaji opened the celebration by recounting the Holi legend of Prahlada and Holika with fatherly affection. Hundreds of children sat cross-legged in the schoolyard and listened attentively. Then the colourful joy began: the children and guests of honour sprinkled each other with gulal – coloured powder. Every single child gave me an exceptionally beautiful smile – a smile I know only from Balashram.

Before I drove back to the hospital in Cuttack that day, Paramahansa Prajnananandaji, whom so many call 'Baba', said to me, *"To finish treatment here in India. Then back to Austria. And then – a new life!"*

### I am indescribably grateful to so many people

First and foremost, Paramahansa Prajnananandaji, Swami Sampurnanandaji, Swami Sharadanandaji, Dr. Sulagna Mohanty and her parents Dr. Samita Mohanty and Dr. Pradip Kumar Mohanty, as well as Dr. Saumya Ranjan Mishra and the team at Sadguru Hospital in Jagatpur, and equally to Dr. Bidhu Kalyan Mohanti, Dr. Rabi Shankar Das, and Dr. Sasmita Priyadarshini Sahoo from the Bagchi Sri Shankara Cancer Centre in Bhubaneswar, and everyone who stood by my side.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Chandra-kanta Baba, Swami Achalanandaji, Swami Divyashwarup-

anandaji, Jayashree Ma, Anna Konchenkova, Mandakini, Peter van Breukelen, Agnes Ackerl, and all the ashramites.

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**I bow to you with all my heart – THANK YOU.**



**"This one is mine, that one is not,"  
say the narrow-minded;  
but the noble-hearted regard  
the whole world as their family.**

– Maha Upanishad, Chapter 6, Verses 71–73



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