

A journey to India

West Bengal
November 2010

The real aim of
agriculture is not to
grow crops, but to
cultivate and
improve human
beings

(masanobu fukuoka)



In 1993 the Bengali activist and scientist Debal Deb founded CIS (Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies), an organization which promotes studies and researches in various fields mainly concerning the environment, agriculture and sustainability. Since 1997 CIS has been fostering the preservation of different varieties of autochthonous rice through Vrihi, the seeds bank which has so far preserved over 800 rice types to which farmers, on request, have free access and can exchange.

Few years later in the countryside of the Bankura District in South-Western Bengal, Debal Deb gave life to the experimental farm Basudha (meaning Mother Earth in Sanskrit) where – together with a group of local farmers – the varieties preserved in the Seeds Bank are cultivated following sustainable and biological methods. Besides spreading the knowledge of natural methods of cultivation (following principles of bio diversity and soil protection, energy economy and natural architecture), Basudha has become the propelling centre of preservation activities and for the spreading of know-how as well as of the culture and traditions of the District community.

During my three week stay on the experimental farm I had the opportunity to assist to the various activities of the scientist and of his collaborating farmers: the rotation of autochthonous rice cultivations, the selection of the seeds to be preserved, the maintenance of the buildings according to traditional methods (however updated with modern scientific information) and, last but not least, the extraordinary contribution of their common knowledge and sense of belonging.

Thanks to this exceptional task to which Debal Deb is devoting his entire life, the songs and traditional dances, the sports and the oral tales, the traditions linked to the natural environment and to the ancient cultural and religious heritage of the various District ethnical groups have become again common reference values and elements of social cohesion. In the gestures and the eyes of the Bankura farmers I could understand the real meaning of a population's "identity awareness" ; together with them I experienced the joy and the harmony of people who, in a natural, simple and, at the same time complete way, love their land and defend its noblest and most deeply rooted values. With dignity, sweetness and generosity.