

Presentation: 'Hermann Gundert - close to India'

Stuttgart, Germany, 11. October 2010⁴



Hermann Gundert - Gundert-statue in Thalassery/India - Dr. Frenz giving his lecture



Twenty participants gathered in Hornbergstrasse in Stuttgart to hear a lecture from the Theologian and expert on Indian studies, Dr Albrecht Frenz.

His topic was: 'Hermann Gundert - close to India.'

The event was organized by the Women's Federation for Peace, Stuttgart and supported by UPF Stuttgart. Before the lecture, we enjoyed refreshments in an informal atmosphere.

Dr. Frenz then gave a presentation about the life and work of the missionary to India, Hermann Gundert, and many interesting details and photos brought this remarkable personality to life.

Hermann Gundert was born in Stuttgart to a Pietist family from Wurttemberg. He attended the seminary in Maulbronn and studied theology in Tübingen, where he gained his doctorate. When invited in 1836 to be the private tutor to an English missionary family in India, he eagerly seized the opportunity.

In his travels through the south of India he made the acquaintance of many missionaries and witnessed their successful work in the school system and mission field. In Malabar, in today's Kerala, Hermann Gundert became a missionary for the Basler Mission. Within a short time he learnt the local language, Malayalam and translated the Bible into that language. He established schools, and wrote school books and edited the first Malayalam language newspaper. Through his research in languages, he was able to write what is still today considered an important Malayalam dictionary and grammar book, and to demonstrate that Malayalam is a language in its own right and not simply a dialect. This

fact later enabled Kerala to be established as an independent state in India. Hermann Gundert made contact with the highest-ranking Sanskrit Hindus and local Moslems, and he had their writings collected and studied.

Even to this day, Hermann Gundert is highly respected for his accomplishments by the inhabitants of south-west India, and in Thalassery, there is a statue of him which stands several meters high.

In India, Gundert married the very religious Swiss Calvinist Julie Dubois, who supported him in the mission, and with whom he had six children, five sons and one daughter. In 1859 the family had to return to Germany because of Gundert's health, and he was given the task, by the Basler Mission, of supporting the work of the Christian publisher in Calw. From 1862 this publishing company expanded the topics and number of its publications and flourished under his leadership.

Later his daughter Marie and her husband, the Basler missionary Johannes Hesse, supported him in this work. One of their sons was the famous German writer, Hermann Hesse, who admired his 'Indian grandfather' very much.

Hermann Gundert died in Calw in 1893. Dr. Frenz' presentation impressed us all very much. We admired the amazing abilities of Hermann Gundert; his gift for languages, his writing skills, and his great contributions to the culture in India.

We then had the opportunity to ask questions and ended the event with refreshments together.

Ute Lemme