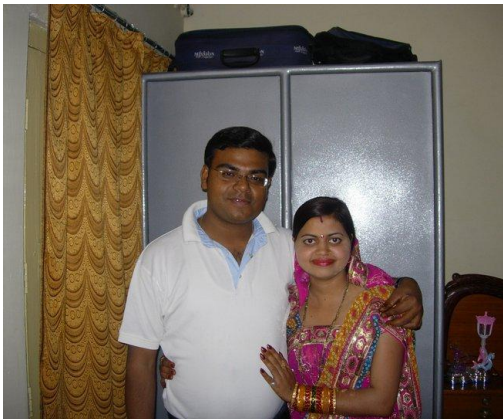


SUMMER NEWSLETTER ISSUE 31

AMARPURKASHI NEWS

- On the 29th January, 2012, Lekhni became the proud mother of a daughter, Deepanshu. Lekhni lives in Lucknow and is enjoying her new life as wife and mother!



Lekhni and her husband

- The youngest Gupta daughter, Deepu, has done extremely well in her exams. Last year, she gained her B.Ed. with First Division and this year she is completing an M.A. in English Literature. She hopes to go on to do an M.Ed.
 - In February, Vibha Aggarwal, pv from October 1996, came for a visit, this time with her two small daughters.
 - In March, APK welcomed Adam Merchant, a volunteer from the U.K.
 - Another visitor in March was Moppy Barr from the U.S.A. Moppy was a project visitor in November 2003. This was her third visit to APK.
 - On 19th July, Pawan, VRI trustee, and Kiran, project visitor from October 1999, will take their children, Dylan, 6, and Reiya, 4, to stay with family in Amarpurkashi for one month.
 - For the first time, our primary school was able to cover all costs, including staff salaries, without outside funding,
- due to the efforts of the Acting Headteacher, Renu Singh.
 - Annual board and university examinations have finished. This year, the Inter College was again an examination centre for high school and intermediate students. As well as 110 students from our inter college, 610 students from four other inter colleges sat their exams at our centre.
 - This year, the Hari Mangal Degree College in Bilari was not allowed to receive the university's question papers until the morning of the exam. Instead, their papers were kept at our college. At the end of the exam, they had to take the completed papers to our college where they were kept until deposited at the university's centre for marking. The university did not trust them but they do trust us!!
 - The computer centre in the college campus has been refurbished and there are now ten computers.
 - On 6th April, the results of elections for members of the U.P. Legislative Assembly were announced. Amarpurkashi is now the centre of a new constituency which is largely rural, with just one town, Bilari. The M.L.A. is Mohammed Irfan with whom the project has a close relationship. He was one of the first students to attend the junior high school in 1972.
 - The Amar Cricket Club of Amarpurkashi has organised a cricket tournament in a patch of ground by the college. It began on 24th May. Teams from Bilari, Deori, Arikhera, Fatehpur, Sahaspur and Ibrahimpur are participating. Interest in cricket began about ten years ago, when local boys started playing with makeshift bats and wickets on a patch of ground by the college. Now there is a keen team who meet regularly.

UPDATE ON THE POLLUTION CAMPAIGN

The Shakumbri Straw Products Factory used to include three production units and a separate one for generating electricity. However, two of the production units and the one for generating electricity have closed. The remaining unit does not appear to be working full time and there are rumours that it is in a lot of debt and may have to close. We have therefore suspended our campaign until the situation becomes clear.

CONGRATULATIONS!

To Pushpa who was project visitor co-ordinator at APK until 2005 when she came to the U.K. on a student visa. Pushpa is now a British citizen with a British passport!

FUND-RAISING

One of our trustees, Anita Duggal, pv from February 2010, initiated a fund-raiser using Music Magpie which raised £223.

VRI has had two generous donations from a donor who found our website and sent £2240. This will enable us to build another classroom at Jafarpur. We also had a donation of £960 via the Big Give.

Aditi Shah, pv from February 2011, has suggested we use the "Come Dine With Me" scheme for future fund-raising.

- Get together a group of 4 or 5 people.
- Each person has a budget of £10 to make a meal of two courses or £15 for three courses for the whole group.
- Each member puts in another £5 (or whatever amount is decided) and this goes to VRI, with some put aside to buy a small prize for the winner.
- Each person takes it in turn to cook a meal for the group. At the end of the meal, the cook is rated for quality of food, presentation, hosting skills, entertainment etc.
- The money, with a deduction for the winner's prize, is donated to VRI.

This would be a fun way to raise money which anyone can do, wherever they are.

TRUSTEES' LUNCH AND FAREWELL

On Sunday 11th March, trustees met at Sakoni's in Harrow for an excellent vegetarian buffet lunch and a farewell to David Blair, our fund-raising co-ordinator. We thanked David for the work he had done, and wished him all the best in his new life in New Zealand.

RECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

On Sunday, 29th April, trustees met for an informal meeting to discuss the recruitment of volunteers for APK. The discussion was lively and focused. Suggestions included:

- We should offer specific structured projects at APK which would be priced per person per week and would not run unless a minimum number of people joined. Staff at APK would run these.
- Such projects could include yoga, cooking, teaching English for TEFL graduates, preparing and teaching basic IT skills to college students and Hindi classes leading to a certificate in Basic Hindi.

A further meeting is planned for 8th July to work out all the details.

TRAVELS IN INDIA AND NEPAL

by Monika Morawietz, project visitor from November 2009

On my third visit to India this winter, I returned to Kerala where I had volunteered the year before. The plan was to stay for 6 weeks and then join my brother in Nepal, after stopovers in Goa and Varanasi on the way up north. Traversing the whole of India by bus, train, plane and taxi all worked perfectly!

After a stay in the beautiful rural compound of Mitraniketan teaching English and enjoying many colourful temple festivals there, I stopped over in Fort Cochin, the spice capital of Kerala, where spice markets stretch for miles and lorries from all over India load up. On the night train to Goa I shared a

compartment with a group of food and cloth merchants on their way to Delhi for a day of strike action against higher taxes. It is a journey of two nights and one whole day, hardly imaginable on these shores. They shared delicacies from their shops and the mood was quite jolly.

I spent a week in Anjuna meeting old friends from England but my onward flight to Varanasi was cancelled as Kingfisher airline had gone bust. I reached Varanasi at the end of February. It was fascinating, with the guesthouse right on the Ghats, the evening Puja ceremonies by the river, the old city with its tiny alleyways, dark interiors built high around a courtyard, temples, markets, a hustle and bustle like many India towns and the burning cremation Ghats belching out smoke over the city.

On to Lucknow by train and to the border at Rupaidiya/Jamunaha by shared taxi with a lovely Nepalese family. This is not a very well-known border post for foreigners; Nepalese and Indians can cross any time. From here on it is cycle rickshaw only. I signed out of India and signed up for my Nepalese visa. My Indian Sim card stopped right there so I got the friendly border guard to call my brother who arrived by cycle rickshaw. We caught the last bus to the small town he was based in. There was darkness all around - my first experience of 'load shedding' - the power cuts that occur daily for up to 10 hours. Next day was strike day. Nothing moved; all shops, schools and transport closed down.

Everyone was buying coloured powder and water pistols for Holi. When we set off to the community hall for food and drinks, we were greeted with 'Happy Holi' and colours rubbed into our faces. The whole town was let loose with clusters of youngsters to avoid but it was such good fun. We stopped over at friends' houses for more food and drinks before retreating to the house hoping there would be enough hot water to wash off the powder.

At the weekend we went rafting on the Karnali River, bordering the Bardya National

Park but at that time of year, there wasn't much water and we had to carry the boat over stones to get moving again. We stopped for a trek through the park with tiger and elephant traces abounding but we only encountered a rhino. At night around the campfire the guide told us what to do if we meet a tiger - look him in the eye!

I moved on to Pokhara, a 20 hour bus journey with a few breakdowns! This beautiful town on the Phewa Lake is a starting point for trekking to the Annapurna range which looms high over the town and is mesmerising when rising out of the shadows at sunrise. The climb to the viewing point at Sarangkot is a killer but a must.



Nepalese women getting water

Spending the last week in Kathmandu I realised how hard it is for the Nepalese to lead a normal life with power cuts every day and night and no running water in most homes. In the old city there are hand pumps and wells near the temples. Only hotels and restaurants can run generators; most of the city is plunged into darkness until 10pm. There is a strong religious fervour which means temples at every corner. I climbed up to the Stupas overlooking the Kathmandu valley, witness to a large Tibetan population, and loved the bustle of the streets around Durbar Square. Old and young linger around watching the world go by and sometimes the Kumari appears. Despite the heavily polluted air, it is a pleasure to explore the beautiful old wooden houses, the life around the courtyards that always have a shrine at the centre and the great food – momos, Nepali thalis and masala dosas of enormous proportions.



Stupa in Nepal

Safely back in the U.K., I hear that the strike in the Terai lasted two and a half weeks and the temperature has risen to 45 degrees Celsius. The Nepalese are now waiting for the monsoon and a new constitution.

FILM REVIEW – “The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel”

by Karen Padley

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel is a newly restored, beautiful and luxurious hotel in Jaipur, India, targeting the market of retired British folk in need of some relaxation and pampering in the sun in their autumn years. The marketing is successful and brings in a range of older clients. Of course, being India, it's not quite what the customers expected!

Dev Patel is the over-eager-to-please manager of the hotel. At first, I found his acting a bit exaggerated and stereotypical, but the character develops well as the film goes on. The rest of the cast are all actors you will either know or at least recognise - Judi Dench, Bill Nighy and Maggie Smith, for example. I am no film buff, so I couldn't list the films they've been in, but they are all very familiar and already well-loved.

I really enjoyed the film, despite possibly being the youngest member of the audience! It does seem to attract a more mature crowd, but I think anyone who has been to India will enjoy it. It's quite authentic; the backdrop and extra characters are realistic. Sometimes the actors looked like they weren't acting much. I mean, it doesn't take much skill to look sweaty and uncomfortable on an Indian bus journey! But there is more to it than placing unlikely characters in a challenging environment. The retirees all have a back

story with some interesting interactions developing along the way.

In the end, they (mostly) end up seeing the warmth and charm that we all know India has to offer.

NEWS

- There will be an informal meeting of trustees on Sunday 8th July at 2pm to look in more detail at the ideas and suggestions for recruiting volunteers. All members are welcome.
- The **Annual General Meeting will be held on Sunday 5th August at 2pm.** All members are welcome.

PAWAN'S RECIPE FOR MUSHROOMS

1lb small mushrooms 1 large onion
1 knob fresh ginger 4 cloves garlic
½ tspn ground cumin ½ tspn turmeric
1 tspn ground coriander ½ tspn chilli powder
Pinch ground black pepper Salt to taste
1 knob butter or 2 tbsps. olive oil
2 tbsps cream (optional)

Cut mushrooms in four. Chop onion, garlic and ginger finely. Heat the oil or butter in a large frying pan. Add garlic, ginger and onion. Fry until onion is transparent. Add all the spices and roast for a few minutes. Add the mushrooms, stir well, add salt to taste and cook on medium heat, stirring occasionally, until nearly all the water has evaporated. Add cream. Stir and cook a few minutes more. Serve with chapattis, parathas or purees.

Volunteers for Rural India

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