

WINTER NEWSLETTER ISSUE 34

WEDDING BELLS FOR DEEPU!



Those volunteers who knew Deepu at Amarpurkashi will be delighted to know that she is getting married on 8th February.

She still doesn't look a day over 16 but she is actually 24 now and has an M.A. in English and a B.Ed. She has been teaching in a secondary school near Bilari for the last year. She is very excited about getting married and very happy with the boy her parents have chosen.

We wish her all the best for her special day and a great married life in the future.

AND FOR KARAN!

Karan Rawal, brother of VRI trustee Pawan Rawal, was married on November 23rd in the college campus at Amarpurkashi. Pawan and I both went to India to attend along with my son, Rajit and his girlfriend, Rachel, for whom it was her first trip to India.

The wedding was a lavish affair, with amazing decorations, lighting and food.



VRI NEWS

- Two new volunteers, Florence O'Connor and Hannah Clarke, are going to APK in March.
- Work has begun on updating the website and we have also bought a new domain name – volunteersinindia.org.uk – which we hope to put to good use soon.
- On 4th August, there was a successful Annual General Meeting where the year's events were presented in the Chair's Annual Report as well as an Annual Report from Amarpurkashi.
- Members of the Executive Committee met in October 2013 and in January 2014. Work is continuing on new courses in Hindi and cookery which should be ready soon.
- In November, Sarah Voaden, project visitor in October 2006 and now married to Manoj Singh, gave birth to a daughter, Jaya Beth, a little sister for Eesha Rose.
- VRI was again invited to have a stall at the UEL student conference in November. Trustees, Karen Padley and Nayan Shukla, represented VRI. Those students who stopped at the stall all expressed interest in our scheme and took leaflets away with them.



Nayan talks to students at the UEL conference

A SAD FAREWELL

On December 19th, one of Amarpurkashi's most loyal and committed supporters passed away a few days after celebrating his 96th birthday.

Major Sedley Sweeny was born in Canada and became an officer in the army. During an assignment in Britain, he and his wife fell in love with Wales and bought a farm there where they raised their three daughters. For many years, Sedley ran the Tibetan Farm School which imparted useful rural skills to Tibetan refugees with the expectation that they would return to India or, hopefully, to Tibet. Unfortunately, this did not work out.

When Sedley met us in the early 1980s, he became very interested in the project, joined our committee and paid several visits to Amarpurkashi. He worked tirelessly to raise much-needed funds for the project and was successful in securing a three-year grant from the EU. Later, because of ill health and the break-up of his marriage, he decided to return to Canada where he lived a very simple life on the island of Cortes, off the coast of Vancouver. There he met his second wife, Trude, and spent many happy years.

AMARPURKASHI NEWS

- There are now 209 students in the primary school, 836 in the secondary school and 2255 in the college.

Jafarpur High School has 301 students.

- A tailoring class for girls began in December 2013
- The annual Science Fair was held on 31st October and was a great success. This year the theme was local agriculture and the problems of small and marginal farmers.
- On 1st October, 2013 the Health Centre re-opened with a fully qualified doctor, a practice manager and two compounders.
- A free eye camp was held on 22nd November 2013. 450 patients (42% men and 58% women) were examined by an eye surgeon from Moradabad. 26 patients had successful cataract surgery.

I was fortunate enough to be there for the eye camp. It is always a moving experience. One elderly woman was led in by her granddaughter to see the doctor. The doctor's face fell visibly when he examined her eyes.

"How long have you had problems with your eyes?" he asked her.

"Since I was a child," was her reply.

Then he had to tell her that there was nothing he could do for her. She was blind.



There was also a disabled woman who had cataract surgery. Thirty years earlier, she had been sitting in the verandah of her village home when the roof collapsed. One of the beams fell on her leg which had to be amputated.

She was wearing a very crude and clumsy prosthetic and also used a crutch. It was painful to watch her slow progress to the operating room and then out again but she never complained, just got on with it.

- On 23rd October, 2013 there was a most disturbing incident in Amarpurkashi when thugs from a local family stopped students and staff from holding assemblies and meetings on land that is legally owned by the Society. Local police have been slow to take action and, although they have been ordered by their superior officers to remove the thugs from this land, they have yet to do so. Meanwhile, students have protested peacefully against this illegal occupation.
- B.Ed. students carried out a survey of the village which showed that the ratio of men to women is 1000:1052. This makes APK almost unique in India in that there are more women than men. Elsewhere in the country, the ratio is reversed and in some areas, is as low as 860 women to 1000 men.
- Work has begun on a new project experiment in sustainable agriculture. It is being set up on the site of the brick kiln which is now defunct. The official name for this new project is “Sadbhavna Eco-harmony project”. A tube well has been established and electricity connected. Currently, the land is being cleared.



A NEW PARTY FOR INDIA

On 26th November 2012, a new political party was launched in India, the *Aam Aadmi Party*. *Aam Aadmi* means ordinary man and the party purports to support the ordinary person. It arose out of a popular movement against corruption and is led by Arvind Kejriwal.

The party has already protested against several key issues and at the beginning of this year, contested the election for Delhi’s Chief Minister. They managed to win 28 out of 70 seats and were able to form a minority government with the support of the Congress party.

AAP, as it is popularly referred to, has gathered tremendous support throughout the country. For many, it is an antidote to Narendra Modi, a very right-wing politician with a huge following.

General elections take place in April. They will be crucial ones for the future of India.

FILM OPPORTUNITY

We are looking for a returned project visitor/volunteer who has some experience in film. We would love to have someone make a film at Amarpurkashi, showing the changes over the last forty years.

If you are interested, please contact Jyoti by email.

KADHI PAKORA RECIPE



Kadhi pakora is a spicy yogurt-based dish with pakora dumplings, usually served with rice. It is one of my favourite Indian dishes, not as difficult as it looks. I have cooked it three times and it has turned out perfectly each time.

Serves 4 to 6 people
Cooking time: 45 minutes

Ingredients:

For the pakoras:

5 tblsp chick pea flour (besan)
1 tblsp hara dhania (coriander leaves)
1 tsp red chili powder
½ tsp baking powder
Oil for deep frying
Salt to taste

For the kadhi

1 cup (approx 180ml/6fl oz) natural yoghurt
2½ tblsp chick pea flour
1 tsp chilli flakes (or to taste)
½ tsp whole cumin seed
¼ tsp mustard seeds
¼ tsp fenugreek seeds
½ tsp turmeric powder
1 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp ground coriander
1 1/2 tsp salt
2 tsp finely chopped ginger
2 tsp crushed garlic
¼ tsp garam masala
1 green chilli
1 tblsp coriander leaves
Oil or ghee for frying

Method:

Mix all the pakora ingredients except oil for frying.

Now add ½ cup of water to the mixture little by little. The batter should be thick but should fall off a spoon when dropped.

Heat oil deep enough for frying the pakora. When piping hot, drop small balls of the mixture in the oil. Fry in batches of 6 - 7 at a time. When the pakoras are golden brown, drain them on kitchen paper. Keep them aside.

In a separate bowl beat the yogurt and chick pea flour. Blend thoroughly to ensure that there are no lumps. Add turmeric powder, salt and 4/5 cups of water. Stir thoroughly.

Now heat oil in a large saucepan. Add the fenugreek, mustard and cumin seeds. When they begin to spit, add ginger and garlic. Stir fry for 15- 20 seconds and then add turmeric, ground cumin, ground coriander, salt and red

chilli flakes. Immediately add the chick pea flour and yoghurt mixture. Stir well and bring to the boil. Let it simmer on a slow heat for about 15 minutes. Stir occasionally until it thickens.

After 15 minutes add the pakoras, garam masala, green chilli, cut along its length, and simmer for a further 5 minutes.

Serve with rice and garnish with finely chopped coriander.

NEXT TRUSTEES' MEETING

The next meeting of VRI trustees will be on Sunday 1st June at 1pm at 12 Eastleigh Avenue, South Harrow HA2 0UF.

Members and supporters are welcome to attend.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of VRI will take place at 12 Eastleigh Avenue, South Harrow on Sunday 3rd August at 1pm.

All members and supporters are welcome.

If you have an idea for an article or something you wish to submit yourself, such as a book/film review or a recipe, please get in touch with Jyoti, details below.

Volunteers for Rural India (formerly IVCS)
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