



WINTER NEWSLETTER ISSUE 27



Happy New Year!

Doesn't that picture make you think fondly of APK? Slow, lazy days in the warm, dry sun, a leisurely walk to the school or college, rice, dal, *subzee*, roti and bananas for lunch, one hand waving away the flies, half an eye looking out for any monkeys nearby – how remote and far away it all seems when you're back home in the west, rushing around in the usual mad way.

So why not pay another visit? Returned pvs are always welcome and it only costs £2 a day for full board and lodging! Did you see Diwali, festival of lights, on your first visit? Or Holi, festival of colours? Were you invited to a wedding? If you missed any of these the first time round, take the opportunity to come again, at a different time of year, and enjoy these glorious events.

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Buy a Brick Scheme

This Christmas VRI ran our "Give a Brick" alternative gift scheme to raise money for building new classrooms at Jafarpur Junior High School. Now entering its second year, the scheme was again a great success, with over £2,300 raised since we launched it in 2009. As a result we have completed construction of two new classrooms (see photo), enabling the school to apply for High School and Intercollege status. Once this is granted, village children will be able to study up to the age of 18 and take their Intermediate (Indian equivalent of A level) exams at the school.



The idea started when the villagers of Jafarpur approached the APK project, asking for support to provide secondary education at Jafarpur and thus enable rural children to attend school and take their exams without travelling to far-off towns. The secondary school particularly benefits the girls as towns are seen by villagers as distant and dangerous, with cautious parents especially wary about sending their girls there. Education in a town is also much more expensive. Providing a secondary school closer to home has already increased female education in this rural area. The enrolment of girls in the junior high school has risen from 9% to 36% in the six years since it began.

The villagers at Jafarpur had already started raising funds from within the community to begin building, but needed help to achieve their goal. Friends of VRI generously provided this

support by giving and receiving bricks for Christmas - with the important feature that the bricks would not appear in stockings here in the UK; they would be purchased in India and used to build the Jafarpur classrooms. Those who bought one of these gifts received a certificate to pass to their friends, family or colleagues to show the impact of their gift.

Thank you to everyone who has supported the Jafarpur scheme so far. By increasing rural education, your support will help the children in the village of Jafarpur to look forward to a more secure and prosperous future. And to anyone stuck for ideas for birthdays, Mother's Day, Valentine's etc, please do visit <http://www.vri-online.org.uk/india-charity.php> - the Jafarpur bricks have even made an appearance on a wedding gift wish-list!

Yes, that's right. Jyoti's nephew, Daniel, who lives and works in Canberra, Australia, was married earlier this month. When he and his fiancé compiled their wedding gift list, the item they put at the very top was a donation to the Buy a Brick scheme. So if you are stuck for gift ideas.....!!!!

Project Visitor Update

In October 2011, we were pleased to welcome Thierry from France and Sophie from the U.K. They quickly involved themselves at APK and proved most enterprising, making a short film of the pollution and posting it on YouTube and Facebook. They also helped the students of the secondary school with maths and science models and posters and assisted with the computer demonstration for the Science Fair.

In November, Steve Perry from Scotland visited us.

We have three pvs due to arrive at APK in February, one from Germany, one from Estonia and one from the U.K. In March, we have one pv of Indian origin who knows Hindi very well and is particularly interested in the PGRRM course and we have one more soon to be interviewed.

Dates for 2011/2012 have now been finalised and are on the website.

Congratulations!

- To Tarini (daughter of Mukat and Jyoti) and Stephen on the arrival of their first child, a beautiful baby girl, Maya Rosemary
- To M Jolly (pv from Feb. 2009) on the arrival of her lovely daughter, Wren
- To Sue White (pv from Feb. 2000) on her forthcoming marriage
- To Liz Allam (nee Doel, pv from Sept. 2008) on her recent marriage to Raj Allam



Pollution Campaign

This is the Aril River, now polluted beyond belief. Since the paper factories established themselves in the Amarpurkashi area in 1994, we have been fighting to stop them polluting land, air and water. We don't want them to go. The factories provide much needed employment for local people. But we do want them to behave more responsibly. We want them to run the filtration and treatment plants regularly; to treat all waste material inside the factory grounds, not outside; to recycle both the water and the ash; and to compensate the poor farmers whose land they have encroached and whose crops they have ruined.

The struggle is now in its sixteenth year. We have written over 600 letters and postcards of complaint, staged a four-day sit-in and organised several independent tests of the water by both private and government laboratories. There has been no response and no action from anyone, not from the government officers responsible for the environment and not even from the regional office

of the Pollution Control Board whose sole job it is to protect the environment.

But the struggle continues. At the beginning of February, Mukat Singh will start a relay fast in front of the office of the Sub-Divisional Magistrate in Bilari. Some of us will be fasting here to express our solidarity with him. The fast will begin at 11am on the first day and last until 7pm. If there is no response from the government officers, it will continue for a second day, adding one more hour. It will continue in this way, adding an extra hour every day until government officers take some action.

If you would like to fast with us, please email Jyoti on jan_singh2002@yahoo.co.uk and she will send you the exact date and times as soon as they are known. The idea is to fast at the same time as Mukat Singh. Given the time difference, this means that our fast here will begin at 5.30am and run until 1.30pm on the first day, adding one extra hour for each day of the fast.

Not everyone can fast but there is another way that you can help. Send e-mails expressing your concern to the following:-

- 1.Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh
cmup@up.nic.in
- 2.Chief Secretary of U P
csup@up.nic.in
- 3.Chairman, UPPCB, Lucknow
info@uppcb.com
- 4.District Magistrate, Moradabad
dmmor@up.nic.in
- 5.Union Minister of Environment
envisect@nic.in

If you know anyone else who would be interested in supporting this campaign, please refer them to the excellent film that a volunteer, Blossom Carrasco, made in 2009. You can find it on YouTube if you go to their site and key in 'Pollute and Prosper'. The direct link is <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1EG1CKgkBgq> You can also see the film on Facebook if you go to the 'Campaign against pollution at Amarpurkashi' group. The direct link is <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/group.php?gid=124295464279639>

SWING NIGHT FOR INDIA!

An exciting new VRI fund-raising event, "Swing Night for India", is to be held in Watford on **Saturday 9th April** from 7pm until midnight with a modest charge of £10. We urge all members to attend and bring friends, family and colleagues to what promises to be a swinging event! Don't worry if you haven't done any swing dancing before. The first hour will be a lesson in this fun style of dancing. For details, please contact Nayan Shukla at nayan.shukla@openreach.co.uk

EIGHTH INTAF WORLD CONFERENCE

"Experiences of Working with the Rural Poor"

On **Saturday 18th June 2011**, there is a conference in London where those who have worked among the rural poor, donated to their cause, carried out research into their issues or volunteered their time to help them, will have the opportunity to talk about their experiences. It takes place at **Development House, 56-64 Leonard Street, London EC2A 4LT** from **10.30am until 5pm** with a nominal charge of £10 which includes a light vegetarian lunch.

Please reserve this date in your diary and tell your friends and families. For more details and to confirm your attendance, please contact Jyoti Singh at jan_singh2002@yahoo.co.uk

INTAF AWARDS

On **Sunday 19th June**, INTAF will hold its tri-ennial general meeting at **12 Eastleigh Avenue, South Harrow** from **11am until 3pm**. Lunch is included.

At this meeting, INTAF will present two awards to Indians who have lived and worked with the rural poor and made a valuable contribution to their development. If you would like to nominate someone for this award, please send your nomination to jan_singh2002@yahoo.co.uk before 1st May.

INTAF members and prospective members (£5 annual and £30 Life membership) are most welcome to attend. Please let Jyoti know if you are coming.

News Items

- If you are a returned project visitor who graduated from university in the last five years, could you please let us know whether you are willing to make contact with your university and ask them to let representatives from VRI make a presentation to their students about our PV/volunteering scheme? We have material for a presentation ready and now need universities to present it to! Please help.
- On 27th October 2010, Anita Duggal and Jyoti Singh, both trustees of VRI, gave a presentation on the project visitors' scheme at Buckinghamshire New University. Anita spoke of her own experiences as a PV in February 2010 and showed some of her excellent photos. Jyoti gave a little background to the project with accompanying photos and concluded by outlining the many benefits to doing the scheme. Liz Monks, PV from January 2010 and one of our new trustees, designed a colourful hand-out which was given to the students. This was our first university presentation and went very well.
- Don't forget to follow us on Twitter - [Twitter \(VRICharity\) www.twitter.com](#) and join our 'Campaign against the pollution in Amarpurkashi' group on Facebook as well as our Volunteers for Rural India group on Facebook.
- The next Executive Committee meeting will be held on Sunday 20th May 2011 at 2pm. Members are most welcome to attend.

Book Review

Holy Cow: An Indian Adventure

by Sarah Macdonald

The author is an Australian radio journalist who returns to India against her better judgement as her husband has to work there. She had visited India before as a backpacker and had hated it and sworn never to return, despite a beggar reading her palm and predicting she would be back.

So, she certainly does not have the romantic ideas that some people approach India with. If you already love India and are a bit sensitive to criticism, she may come across as a bit judgemental, while if you haven't been to India yet, she might scare you off! But she does have an open mind and decides to try to make the most of her stay there, and get under the skin a little bit. She investigates many of the religions that are practised in India and even stays for 10 days at an ashram where she has to remain silent the whole time.

I really loved this book (and by the time I read it I was already totally in love with India). It made me laugh out loud on several occasions and frequently I had to read sections out to my travelling companion as they seemed so appropriate. However, I have to say, when it was my friend's turn to read it, she did not enjoy it so much, but maybe that was because she had already heard most of it from me!

So, in the end, does India redeem itself for the author or are all her prejudices confirmed? I do suggest you read it and find out!

Review by Karen Padley, PV February 2010

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