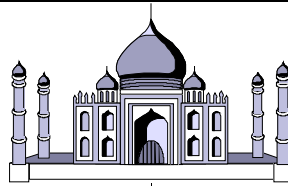




*Patron: Robert Evans, Member of the European Parliament*

# Newsletter



## **DRIVE**

The current year 2006/2007 got off to a good start with 4 pvs in September, 9 in October and 7 in November. They came from England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Australia, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Canada, U.S.A. and France and ranged in age from 18 to 60. All got on well both with fellow pvs and with local staff and students and seemed to enjoy the experience at APK.

It is never easy to get involved in an activity during the three weeks' orientation and we are always happy for pvs to spend the time settling in, observing, learning some Hindi and getting familiar with travelling on public transport, shopping in nearby towns and making friendships with staff and students.

Nevertheless, some do manage to get involved. One pv who had learnt quite a bit of Hindi before leaving England was able to help in the B.A. English Literature lectures while another experimented with taking small groups of primary school students out of class and teaching them extra English. This experiment worked very well and we hope that future pvs will continue it.

We were also fortunate to have a pv who is a graphic designer and is going to design our new

Guidelines booklet.

## **WEDDING BELLS**

On Monday 12<sup>th</sup> February, Rajni (current pv co-ordinator at APK) will be marrying Arun Gautam of Southall, U.K. Rajni has invited all the pvs to her wedding and lots of them are coming back from their travels round India especially for the occasion. The wedding will take place in the college campus and should be a grand event.

The only downside, of course, is that we will now need a new co-ordinator for project visitors. Rajni has suggested her cousin, Arati, who is a B.A. student in the college. Arati is 19 and lives in the village. She is studying English but is not used to speaking it. However, Rajni has promised to do as much as she can to prepare Arati before she leaves.

## **PGRRM UPDATE**

This academic year, the Post-Graduate Diploma in Rural Resource Management restarted with eight local students. Most come from the immediate area but one comes from as far away as Kanpur, a large industrial city in U.P. They range enormously in ability and education so teaching them is a real challenge.

There was also a totally unexpected development in the course this year. Laura Van Ree, a pv from the September batch, decided to stay on and

join the course. Later, Sarah Voaden, pv from the October group, also decided to join.

They both worked hard, particularly at learning Hindi, but the difficulties of language and different educational backgrounds caused them to have second thoughts and they eventually decided to withdraw. After returning from a Christmas break with their families, they are now in APK again, though this time just for a visit and to wind up their affairs.

Having two international students on this course proved to be a truly educational experience for everyone concerned. It was very useful for the Project Director who designed the course and runs it. Until you actually have students from abroad, you do not really understand what arrangements you will need to make. The PGRRM website has been modified in the light of these experiences. We did consider restricting the course to local students only but in the end decided to keep it open for international students but with some essential changes. We already have one applicant from Canada for September 2007 who has not been deterred by the extra requirements, not to mention all the red tape necessary to get a student visa.

### **ORIENTATION REPORT**

*Shobhana Singh*

On 2nd July 2006, Nayan Shukla held a training session for people interested in running orientations. For many years now, Nayan has been the primary orientation leader with Jyoti hosting, organising and cooking. Occasionally a past pv has stood in, but mostly it's been Nayan for as long as I can remember. It was felt that it was time others were fully trained too so that there was less pressure on him.

The training was well attended. It included very full discussion and notes on how to present IVCS in a responsible, professional and positive way, and went through each section of the orientation format, how it should be run and what the participants are expected to learn from it. It was a successful session and created some very interesting discussion, especially with input from ex-patriates, Pushpa and Pawan, who both grew up in India.

In November 2006, I visited APK with my family for 10 days and absorbed as much as I could about the project and the DRIVE scheme,

following the pvs round on their day trips and excursions and joining them for evening discussions with my father, the project director.

I then felt adequately equipped to help run the next orientation which was on 16th December 2006, a week after my return, and so it was at this point I took a deep breath and agreed with Nayan that we would share the leading of the format 50/50. At the last minute, David Blair kindly offered to assist as well, which was a very welcome extra pair of hands for what turned out to be a challenging day, especially as none of us had ever been left on our own to cope without Jyoti there!

There were 6 participants and although it was a very new skill I was practising - leading group discussions - I felt that it all went very well and the participants left having learnt and understood what they needed for their trip to India. The biggest challenge for me was keeping group conversations on track and asking the right questions to elicit the desired responses from the participants.

I have grown up with the IVCS office in our home and have witnessed and sat in on orientations for years now as they were always in our living room. I have been fascinated by the group dynamics and inspired by the excitement of participants at their adventure ahead. The biggest satisfaction in sharing the leading of one was that it had never occurred to me that running one was something I could actually do one day!

I enjoyed it immensely and would highly recommend it to anybody who feels it is something they would enjoy doing or who thrives on working in a team. Nayan would be more than happy to run another training day in the summer, and the more IVCS members and past pvs get involved in it, the more fun and the more value we can provide to future pvs.

### **KOPAL II**

This rather strange name refers to a campaign funded by Plan International, an American organisation which started working in India in 1979. Their efforts focus on children's rights. Last year they introduced a new campaign in U.P. which we agreed to take on. The campaign aims to raise awareness of the evil practice of female foeticide and to encourage people,

particularly those in rural areas, to register births and deaths.

The extraordinary advances in technology in the last thirty years have brought a very mixed bag of blessings. Ultrasound is now frequently used to detect the sex of the unborn child and female fetuses are often aborted. Statistics over the last fifty years show a steady drop in the ratio of women to men, particularly in north India. In the district of Moradabad, for example, there are only 870 women to every 1000 men.

The problem is that no one is looking at the root cause of female foeticide and infanticide which is, of course, the dowry system. One would have thought that with more and more girls now receiving an education and increasing numbers of them getting jobs and earning good money, demands for dowries would decrease. Astonishingly, the opposite has happened. Finding a husband for a high caste, highly educated girl earning a competitive salary in a respectable job is more difficult and more expensive now than ever before. The parents of the boys demand huge sums of money (10 lakhs or £11,760 is not uncommon) as well as a car, washing machine, fridge, television and so on. The ordinary average man, who has proudly encouraged his daughter in her education all the way through to post-graduate level, now pays a terrible price when the time comes to arrange her marriage.

Is it any wonder then that parents are tempted to terminate the pregnancy when they discover that the foetus is female?

But Kopal II is not concerned with root causes. The dowry system is sometimes referred to, just in passing, at the meetings and protest marches I have participated in but no one shows the slightest interest in following it up. The irony is that the dowry system has been illegal for fifty years but no one ever implements the law. It is blatantly flouted every day.

On December 6<sup>th</sup>, I attended a meeting of the Association of Women Doctors in Moradabad. Adil Hussein, one of our senior members of staff who is currently in charge of our Kopal II programme, managed to get us in as guests to their monthly meeting. It was an extraordinary experience for me.

Adil Hussein spoke very well about the whole campaign and explained how he wanted the doctors to support it by doing whatever they could to ensure that no Moradabad doctors allowed the ultrasound technology to be used for the purpose of female foeticide.

The women doctors' response was one of outrage. There were no such doctors in Moradabad and never had been. The two doctors who had been prosecuted were the innocent victims of media lies. All the doctors in Moradabad were honest, hard-working people of outstanding integrity who would never, never dream of allowing their equipment to be misused in such a way.

If we hadn't had the statistics right there in front of us, their outraged protests might have carried some weight. But these are statistics that have been very carefully compiled and there is no reason to doubt them. Moreover, it is very likely that, if anything, they underestimate the problem and the ratio of women to men is even worse.

I was also amused but saddened to watch as all Adil's efforts to get a sensible discussion on this topic failed and the women quickly closed the meeting and rushed eagerly into the adjacent restaurant where they greedily consumed a very expensive afternoon tea. They spent longer eating and chatting informally than they did discussing the business of the meeting.

### AMARPURKASHI NEWS

Highlights of the last seven months include:

- § Scholarships, in the form of fees and school dress, were given to 75 children (42 boys and 33 girls) from the Gramodaya Primary School.
- § There are 256 children on roll at the Gramodaya Primary School, 93% of them from the backward and scheduled castes.
- § At the Intercollege, there are now 828 students, 35% of them girls and 91.8% of them from the backward and scheduled castes
- § At the Degree College, this year has seen the highest number ever on roll – 857. Of these, 37.5% are girls and

- 74.5% are from the backward and scheduled castes.
- § Thus the educational institutions run under the auspices of the project continue to provide important opportunities for the most disadvantaged sections of society.
- § The other schools that Amarpurkashi supports are also doing well. These include the junior high school at Jafarpur which has 162 students this year, 23% of them girls and 92.8% of them from the backward and scheduled castes; and the junior high school at Karia Mayee which has 181 students, 29.3% of them girls and 67% from backward and scheduled castes.
- § Results in the degree college continue to excel with 98% of final year B.A. students gaining their degrees.
- § The long-running dispute with the university over B.Ed classes has finally been settled by the Supreme Court and classes will resume this month. This has been a very stressful and extremely expensive time for the college. B.Ed lecturers had to be kept on staff even though there were no students. There was no way to tell when the course would resume and it was far too risky to let them go as qualified lecturers for this particular course are few and far between. The cost in salaries has been enormous; it will take the college a long time to recover from the financial losses incurred in fighting this case in the Supreme Court.
- § The annual Science Fair was held on 18<sup>th</sup> October and was once again an outstanding success.
- § November saw visits from Pawan, (whose parents and siblings live in APK), his wife Kiran (pv from 1999) and their baby son Dylan as well as my son Rajit and daughter Shobhana who had not been to the village for six years.
- § Saturday evening, 11<sup>th</sup> November there was a magnificent *Jaagan* for all the

villagers. This is an all-night affair with great music and entertainment from a company of singers and musicians. The following day, there was a wonderful feast to celebrate the official naming ceremony for baby Dylan.

### **BIHAR**

The second poorest state in India, Bihar has a notorious reputation for insurgence and corruption. Its last Chief Minister (now Minister for Railways) managed fifteen years in office without building a single new primary school.

Ajit Kumar Singh, state co-ordinator for the Bihar branch of INTAF (International Task Force for the Rural Poor) organised a conference in Patna which included not only INTAF members but grass-roots workers from a range of NGOs working throughout Bihar. At the end of the conference, twelve participants became Life members of INTAF.

The conference focused on two acts recently passed in parliament – the Right to Information Act and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. There is great optimism nationally that these acts will improve transparency in official dealings and provide work for the poorest section of society. However, those who work among the poor and especially the rural poor are already finding that the implementation of these acts is far from trouble-free. Decades of secrecy, red tape and corruption cannot be discarded so easily, no matter how impressive the provisions of the acts may be.

Already, people are finding their paths to information blocked by un-co-operative officials and those entitled to employment are being pushed to the bottom of the queue in favour of others who are not in fact eligible for the scheme but have sufficient funds to grease the palms of those in charge of implementing it.

The meeting was, however, a very positive one. We pledged our full support and subsequently requested funds from IVCS to enable training to take place in five different zones in Bihar so that NGO workers will be able to advise people of their rights and help them to follow the necessary steps to ensure that they get those rights.

## **SUMMIT OF THE POWERLESS**

An impressive title for a seminar and one that certainly attracted us. On 20<sup>th</sup> November, Mukat and I went with the PGRRM students to attend this seminar at the Jamia Millia Islamia University campus in Delhi.

It was organised by Tehelka, a weekly paper that is possibly the only one in India that carries out any real investigative journalism and certainly the only one that has any genuine interest in development and rural issues.

The key speakers were well-known, influential figures, including Tarun Tejpal, editor-in-chief of Tehelka, who vividly described the paper's struggle; Aruna Roy, who spoke powerfully about the importance of not being merely a sleeping, passive citizenry; a representative from the corporate sector; Anna Hazare, a social activist who runs a school which, instead of expelling students who fail, gives them priority; the leader of the Communist Party Marxist who spoke of a vision of a modern India which encompasses all its diversity and excludes rigid, one-tract ideologies; Arjun Singh, Minister for Human Resource Development; Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev who talked about the unbalanced nature of progress that has resulted in a "silent tsunami of the hungry"; and finally, the guest everyone was waiting for, Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the President of India.

It was exciting to see the President in person, just a few feet away. He was a friendly, genial presence who clearly enjoyed public speaking. His style of delivery was excellent and he spoke in very clear, simple English. The content, however, was disappointing. He spoke briefly of government initiatives in every state and then made a request of the audience, most of whom were students from the host university. He suggested that they each help three powerless people and then he recited some 'inspirational' phrases for the audience to repeat after him. He obviously wanted to inspire the audience, particularly the students, to 'do' something but the phrases were far too long and complex and would have been forgotten within minutes and the whole speech was way too vague and totally lacked any practical focus.

I found it interesting that the topic of the summit was the powerless but there didn't seem to be

any powerless people there. The audience comprised middle-class, highly educated students and academics. Indeed, out of our ten PGRRM students, the only ones who were allowed into the inaugural session were the two international students. The rest were denied admission. Could it have had something to do with the fact that they were wearing the official PGRRM dress, chosen because it truly represents the rural poor – plain white *khadi* kurta/pyjamas?

The arrangements for lunch reflected the nature of the audience too. An outside caterer set up stalls with a very limited range of foods on sale at extremely high prices, way beyond the pockets of any of our students.

In the afternoon, there was a range of workshops to choose from. There were some interesting speakers who talked about their own organisations and work, giving fascinating glimpses into the brave struggles that some people take on.

We had left the village at 5am to attend this conference and returned late that night. My overwhelming feeling was that here was yet another conference held in a middle-class, urban setting, far removed from the focus of the topic. Why not organise such an event in a village where the powerless are? How else can the audience learn and understand what it is to be without power of any kind?

## **IJRS**

The International Journal of Rural Studies is published twice a year from Amarpurkashi. Annual subscription to the journal is £20 and past issues can be obtained at £5 per copy.

The Oct/Nov 2006 issue included articles on:

- the fishermen of Bangladesh
- the cultivation of *jatropha* in Rajasthan
- a women and children's rights organisation in Nepal
- SOPHIA, an NGO working in the Himalayas

## **FUND-RAISING**

Let's get the negative news out of the way first! There was no rounders or go-karting last year. It seems the demand for these events has finally been met. We hope to try something new this year, possibly a run or even a half-marathon.

However, lots of pvs, past and present, have been active in contributing funds.

- £2740 has been raised so far for the Health Care Fund. The target is £6,000
- Individual donors raised £484 for Jafarpur Junior High School. They included Sue White's primary school students, Dimple Parmar (who donated money for the eye camp held in February 2005) and Charlie and Vince, pvs from September 2005.
- AFP (Asian Foundation for Philanthropy) gave a grant of £1200 to build a boundary wall at Jafarpur
- Shelley Chadda, pv from November 2002, and her family donated £350 for the next eye camp. We had hoped to hold it in November 2006 but the doctor who carries out the laser surgery on those with cataracts was completely booked till the end of the year. However, he has promised us his services in February 2007.
- Thanks to the unexpected generosity of the October 2006 pvs and Greg from February 2006 who was visiting at the time, we now have enough for another eye camp.
- Two of our trustees, Deepak and Fatema, have found a new and very effective way of fund-raising. Deepak works for London Underground and discovered that it is possible for a registered charity to 'book' a tube station for a day and have up to two of its members at a time shaking a tin and asking the public for funds.
- Deepak and Fatema support the International Association for Human Values and assisted them in raising money for their Kashmir Orphanage. The station booked for the day was Canary Wharf. It proved highly lucrative with volunteers raising over a pound per minute per person!
- We are currently investigating this and hope to book a station soon. It won't be Canary Wharf which is fully booked up for the rest of the year but there are other busy stations that will be available.

- If you can spare an hour or two at any time between 6 am and 10pm, please let us know.

### PAST EVENTS

- Meetings of the Executive Committee were held on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2006 and 14<sup>th</sup> January 2007.
- On 2<sup>nd</sup> July, Nayan held a very successful orientation training session for all past pvs and trustees interested in assisting at future orientations.
- At a special meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> July, Mukat Singh talked about the history of the Amarpurkashi Project.
- The Annual General Meeting of IVCS was held on 23<sup>rd</sup> July.
- On 3<sup>rd</sup> September, Ruth Borgars, who used to work for the Charity Commission, led a very useful and interesting training session for members of the Executive Committee. She explained their duties and responsibilities as trustees of a registered charity and clarified a number of concerns.
- On 27<sup>th</sup> January 2007, the General Secretary was invited to speak at the monthly meeting of DKG (Delta Kappa Gamma), an international organisation whose members are all women and all involved in education in some way.

### COMING EVENTS

- § The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be held on Sunday, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2007.
- § The next orientation for prospective pvs will be held on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> July.
- § The Annual General Meeting of IVCS will be held on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July.
- § We have had requests for another talk from Mukat Singh about the current programmes at APK and plans for the future. Date to be confirmed.

- § We have also had a request for another orientation training session. Date to be confirmed.
- § We hope to organise a run or half-marathon in the summer. Date to be confirmed.

