

**IVCS**

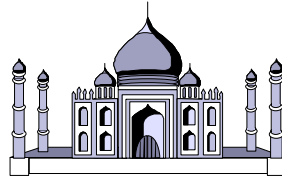
**INDIAN VOLUNTEERS FOR  
COMMUNITY SERVICE**



Registered Charity No. 285872

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

# Newsletter



## **WEDDING BELLS!**

On Saturday, 25<sup>th</sup> July in London, Tarini Singh (older daughter of Mukat and Jyoti) will marry Stephen Critchley.

## **GREAT EXPECTATIONS!**

Sarah (nee Voaden), PV from October 2006, and Manoj Raghav are expecting their first child at the beginning of September.

Shobhana Singh (younger daughter of Mukat and Jyoti) and her partner, Julian Snow, are expecting their first child at the end of August.

## **PROJECT VISITORS 2009**

In February, four pvs from the UK spent three weeks at APK. They participated enthusiastically in Holi and helped with PGRRM students and the primary school.

In the same month, APK welcomed two pvs from January 2008 – Paul Bradley and Steve Ostrowski.

A month later, Danny Ashton, pv from November 2008, also paid a return visit while Jenny Loughran, pv from February 2009, returned for a week at the end of May.

## **INTAF COMMITTEE MEETING**

On Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> March, the first meeting of the newly elected International Co-ordinating Committee was held at the offices of *Chandrika Social Upliftment and Rural Development Society* in the village of Jamhor, Bihar. The meeting was hosted by Ajit Kumar Singh who is secretary of *Chandrika* and Bihar state convenor for INTAF.

The aim of the meeting was to formulate a three-year action plan and this was successfully achieved.

## **HAPPY HOLI!**

On March 11<sup>th</sup>, the project campus was a place of riotous colour and a lot of very wet people!! Holi was, as usual, a totally over-the-top event, enjoyed by all those brave enough to venture outside their rooms and be soaked in bright pink, purple and green.

Next day, wearing clean clothes but still sporting strangely coloured hair and pink-tipped ears, pvs saw the traditional post-Holi *mela* or fair that takes place in the open ground by the market area. This year invitations were sent to nearby villages and many came with troupes that sang and danced the age-old Holi folk dances. The event proved a great success.

### **CONSULTATION IN DELHI**

On Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> March, Mukat and Jyoti attended a national consultation organised by AVARD (Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development) in Delhi. The consultation looked at the position of women in *panchayats* (village councils) and their contribution to rural development.

### **ANNUAL STAFF OUTING**

On Saturday, 4<sup>th</sup> April, 104 project staff and their families travelled in two large hired coaches to Nainital, a small town in the Shivalik Mountains, 150 km north of Amarpurkashi.

Nainital is a popular hill resort in the summer. There is a large lake from which the town takes its name.

This day trip was an educational experience for all and a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for some. Among those who went was *Lalaji's* wife who had never even been as far as Moradabad before.

It was a long day, as the coaches left at 5am and returned at 9 in the evening. People were not used to the height or the zigzag road up to the mountains and there were many cases of travel sickness. However, staff had long wanted to see what the mountains were like and now everyone's curiosity had been satisfied!!!

### **PEOPLE'S MANIFESTO**

National elections took place in India in May. These elections were marked by a new

proposal, initiated by the India Development Forum which contacted the Society at APK and asked it to organise consultations with local people in three neighbouring parliamentary constituencies in order to prepare a manifesto outlining the issues and concerns that they would like the new government to address.

These consultations took place on 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> April and resulted in three 12-point manifestos which were published in local newspapers. It was a very good exercise for ordinary people, making them more aware of their own issues and the need to vote sensibly.

The results of the national election were a great relief to all as the moderate Congress Party was successful while the extreme right and left-wing parties received far fewer votes than they had expected.

### **TV INTERVIEW!!**

On Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> May, Mukat Singh had a moment of fame on Venus Channel (Sky) when he was interviewed about the recent elections in India.

The interviewer on "My India", a weekly, hour-long programme, was Krishan Ralleigh, founder/editor of India Link International, a bi-monthly magazine for Indians abroad. Also on the programme was Krishan Tyagi, a freelance journalist.

### **YOGA AT APK**

Swami Ram Dev, a yoga guru, has become widely known among Indians both at home and abroad. He has regular programmes, morning and evening, on *Aastha* channel (807) on Sky in which he demonstrates a range of yoga poses and breathing exercises. He also promotes a healthy diet, ayurvedic medicines and a simple lifestyle.

He has set up a university devoted to yoga at Haridwar with branches in the USA and UK. More recently, he has extended his work to include a campaign against corruption and pollution.

At APK, Mukat Singh and two of the intercollege lecturers have joined his

campaign and been trained in yoga exercises. They aim to train more people locally and organise regular yoga sessions.

### **FREE HEALTH CAMP FOR WOMEN**

On Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> April, six women doctors and consultants came from the Moradabad branch of FOGSI (Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecology India) to talk to local village women and give free advice and examinations.

Although the weather on the day was very hot with strong dusty winds, 75 women from 6 nearby villages took advantage of this opportunity. The camp was so successful that the doctors have offered to make it a regular event.

### **Villages - ESPOIR**

Toby Whitfeld, PV from November 2006, has remained active and involved since his return to France where he lives and works. He has set up *Villages - ESPOIR*, an association which raises money to help villagers in India.

APK has already benefited from this initiative. *Villages - ESPOIR* provides scholarships to local villagers to study computing and last year sponsored a summer course in Conversational English.

We were delighted to hear recently from Toby that his association would like to donate £574 as the full cost of the next eye camp, due to be held in November 2009. It is also exciting to learn that both Toby and the secretary of *Villages-ESPOIR* are planning to come to APK and see the eye camp at first hand.

Many thanks to Toby and his supporters.

### **OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS!**

Don't think the recession is all gloom and doom! Although companies are not recruiting new graduates this year, that is no reason to be down-hearted.

Steve Ostrowski, PV from January 2008, speaks from personal experience when he says that going to India could be the best

way of facing the recession. Life there is much cheaper than in the UK and if you join our 'Experience India' scheme, you will be able to make a valuable addition to your cv. Steve is happy to talk to anyone interested in finding out more. His email is [stevieo1958@aol.com](mailto:stevieo1958@aol.com)

### **FACEBOOK**

Would you like to rediscover the friends you made during your time at APK? Nothing could be easier!! IVCS is now a group member of Facebook. Please visit their website and add yourselves to our group.

### **BOOK REVIEWS**

- **"The White Tiger" by Aravind Adiga. 2008. London: Atlantic Books. £7.99 (pb) 336pp ISBN 9781843547228**

Aravind Adiga's Booker Prize winning novel *The White Tiger* is a well crafted novel that like many in its genre does not just tell a story but also aims to enlighten the reader about India. It is written in the first-person of Balram Halwai, the son of a rickshaw-puller who grew up in a village in rural Bihar. It is in the form of letters written by Balram to the Chinese premier, hoping to enlighten him about the 'new India' prior to a state visit.

The narrative of the book is Balram's life story. Despite showing promising academic credentials, his family is too poor for him to finish school so he ends up working in a teashop, breaking coals and wiping tables. However, Balram observes and learns about the society around him. By his satirical perception, it is one of poverty and corruption, where there are only two castes '...Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies...'

Throughout the book the rural setting is described as the Darkness. Controversially the character describes how the River Ganges is the river of death and where 'this river flows that area is the Darkness' For many Hindus to see the River Ganges in this way would be totally incomprehensible. However, the description of the injustice for many of the rural poor in India is arguably much more familiar. Yet some reviews in the

Indian press have felt that Adiga's dark and angry portrayal of the life of poorer Indians is oversimplified and incompetent. These reviews tend to quote his Western-educated background as the reason for these inaccuracies.

The story moves on. Balram learns to drive and gets a big break as a chauffeur in Delhi. It could have collapsed into a sentimental rags-to-riches tale but actually Balram is no saint. In fact he is quite the opposite and there is still a twist to come. People who have visited India may well recognise a lot in this novel – I certainly do. It is likely to make you uncomfortable, being an exposition of how harsh realities can sometimes result in a malevolent moral outlook. Whether you agree with Adiga's critics that the view is oversimplified, or not, he makes his point powerfully in a gripping narrative that is a page-turner as a result.

Review by Vincent Mitchell (PV from September 2005)

- **“Life of Pi” by Yann Martel**

I had no idea when I picked this book up that it came with such great reviews and even a Booker Prize, but the cover alone had me intrigued as it illustrates an Indian boy curled up on a boat with a tiger, in the middle of the sea with sharks circling below.

The story of the 16-year old boy "Pi" who survives the sinking of a cargo ship along with a hyena, a zebra with a broken leg, an orangutan and a Bengal tiger, seems such a completely implausible story and yet is written so utterly convincingly, you find yourself questioning whether it could actually happen in real life.

This absolute gem of a book was a pleasure to read from beginning to end, taking you from India to Japan and across the Pacific, leaving you with its protagonist in a large life boat where he is forced to use all the survival skills he can muster with memories of his zookeeper father's advice to avoid being eaten alive.

What a unique and moving story this is, where most of it is set in the ocean, no

dialogue, just Pi's own thoughts and a developing relationship with the tiger he ironically believes without whom he would not have survived.

I would recommend this book to anyone, but particularly if you have previously liked films such as "Castaway" or "Open Water".

Review by Shobhana Singh

### COMING EVENTS

- The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be held at the IVCS office on Sunday, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2009 at 2 pm. All members are welcome, especially those interested in becoming trustees.
- The Twenty-Eighth A.G.M. (Annual General Meeting) of IVCS will be held at the IVCS office on Sunday, 13<sup>th</sup> September at 12 noon. All members are welcome. Lunch will be provided.

