



## August 2010 Newsletter

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We've had another year of big developments with the programs we support in Bodhgaya. For those not familiar with our work, we have for many years supported two programs in the Bodhgaya area: a school, the Prajna Vihar (PV) School and a regional program for women and girls.

In our last newsletter we reported that after literally years of applications and attempts, the PV School finally got approval from the Indian Government to receive funds from overseas for land and building. As a result of that, we were able to send funds over and after much debate on whether to move the school and build outside the Bodhgaya World Heritage area we decided to stay put and buy the land next to the school and build extra classrooms there. This land was bought in May this year. It's not huge, it's around 1200 square metres and being close to the Mahabodhi temple it wasn't so cheap: it cost close to \$A60,000. The outside boundary wall is currently being built.

Three of the BDA committee members spent time in Bodhgaya in the last twelve months. Kerstin Liebchen-Meades and Crissi Schmidt were in Bodhgaya in December with Kerstin leading more in-service teacher training workshops for the teachers and looking at the curriculum and educational issues. Crissi led English classes and worked with students' conversation skills.

I was in Bodhgaya in November looking at the overall state of the school and funding arrangements, helping with the decision on whether to buy land next to the school or build a bigger school somewhere else and getting to know the current principal Sister Shobha and some of the people on the school board. There were a number of reasons why we decided to buy the land next to the existing school and build extra classrooms there but one of the reasons was that it was very much the safer option in terms of funding. The wisdom of taking the safer option was born out since we made the decision: one of the older and bigger schools funded by westerners, the Maitreya School closed due to lack of funds. This meant that over thirty staff were laid off and many students had nowhere to go. The PV School is already very stretched with its 584 students and simply isn't currently in a position to take more.

At the moment the PV School has an application in for the full FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act) approval and if this comes through it we'll be able to easily send funds for school running costs.

We have started funding a separate program for women and girls in the Bodhgaya area that has been running for a few years but could do so with some support and expansion. It's called Nari Jagran Manch (literally Forum for Women's Awakening) and there's more on it on page 4. Nari Jagran Manch provides education and support in different areas but one of these areas is micro-credit. There was a short film made recently about micro-credit in different countries and one section of that film covers Nari Jagran Manch and has an interview with the coordinator, Sister Mary Lobo. We're happy to provide a DVD of the film for anyone interested.

Once again we'd like to thank all of you who have supported the projects in the last year. My own time over there late last year very much confirmed how worthwhile our programs are.

Victor von der Heyde



*PV students in winter on the roof of the school building*



*Crissi Schmidt (left), Sister Shobha (school principal), and Kerstin Liebchen-Meades*

## **Report on Prajna Vihar School December 2009 Kerstin Liebchen-Meades**

In December 2009, Crissi Schmidt and myself went to Bodhgaya to spend time at the Prajna Vihar (PV) School and in particular provide support to the teachers. We had long talks with Sister Shoba, the school principal and much of the focus was on buying the land next to the school, plans for that land, the pedagogical aims the teaching staff in the following year and teaching strategies that will help student learning.

This year (2010) the school bought the neighbouring land and this is a real milestone: additional class rooms can be built, extra space can be used for a play ground (which was very small for the nearly 600 students) and there will be enough space for sporting competitions. Student numbers in the lower grade classes are currently too large and for effective teaching the school needs lower numbers of students per teacher.

Current plans include buying equipment to help with the development of fine and gross motor skills of the students in the lower and upper kindergarten classes and hopefully engaging an additional primary teacher to help reduce class sizes. We also considered the idea of extending the school to Year 12 but it was thought that a priority at the moment was developing a good foundation in the early primary years.

One of the other initiatives at the moment is the start of a superannuation scheme for staff.

We also had discussions about the school with Rick Peterson, the founder of the PV school who now lives in the South of India.

In addition I led small workshops for teachers and modelled teaching strategies which they could use themselves. Our long term goal is to move from a more traditional curriculum with rote learning tasks to one that is more interactive and self-directed. In a traditional classroom model, students' learning is often restricted to trying and retrying rote tasks and students are immobilized to some degree at their desks. The approach I shared with the teachers emphasised instead opportunities for student movement and interaction in a structured environment that supports children's natural curiosity. The curriculum could be broadened to give greater emphasis on social skills, health and hygiene, self-discipline and community.

The visit was very productive and it's lovely to see how the school is developing.



*PV School teachers*

## **5th September: Teachers' Day Sister Shobha**

India has been celebrating Teachers' Day on the 5th September since 1962. The day commemorates the birthday of Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, a philosopher and a teacher par excellence, and his contribution towards Indian education system. Dr Radhakrishnan believed that "teachers should be the best minds in the country". On this day, we gratefully remember the great educationalist, as well as honoring all the teachers who have enriched our lives. The birthday of Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan came to be celebrated as Teachers' Day when one day, some of Dr Radhakrishnan's and friends asked him to allow them to celebrate his birthday. In reply Dr. Radhakrishnan said, "instead of celebrating my birthday separately, it would be my proud privilege if September 5th is observed as Teachers' Day". From then onwards, Dr. Radhakrishnan's birthday is observed as Teachers' Day all across India.

We celebrate Teachers' Day by allowing the senior students to pose as teachers for a day. It is a fun-filled activity, which is enjoyed by both the acting teachers and their junior students. On this day, students bring gifts for their most admired teachers as well. It is an equally special day for teachers, as they get to know how much they are liked and appreciated by their students. Gifts to teachers include flowers, greeting cards and other items. Some students also write poems and leave messages for teachers.

Students look forward to Teachers' Day with a lot of anticipation, for the sheer spirit of the occasion. Acting as teachers, they get a fair idea of the responsibility, so efficiently burdened by their teachers. It requires a lot of hard work and dedication to be a good teacher and earn the fondness of the students at the same time. Teachers, on this day, are reminded of their school days and feel nostalgic. All in all, it is celebration mode for everyone!

Our school too celebrated Teachers' Day. The school contributed some money for this day and gave thanks for the 584 students. There was a tea party for the 17 teachers and a cultural program given by the students. They managed the show very well with a short and well-disciplined program. One could see the self confidence and the emerging potential in them. Many of our Year X students too came to express their love & gratitude to their teachers.



*Can I answer?*

## PV School Expenses, 2009

	Indian Rupees	Australian Dollars
Books, periodicals, educational expenses	91,795	2,258
Salary and bonuses	788,790	19,404
Phone	2,091	51
Water	372	9
Electricity	2,696	66
Stationary, functions and meetings	73,622	1,811
Travel and study tour	49,392	1,215
Milk, snacks and fuel	10,279	253
Maintenance: building and furniture	8,746	215
Audit and legal expenses	48,000	1,181
Total	1,075,783	26,464

## Poverty in India

Despite a growing Indian middle class, a recent study by researchers from Oxford University found that there were more poor people in eight states of India than in the 26 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and that 410 million people live in poverty in these Indian states, including Bihar (where Bodhgaya is), Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The study used a new multi-dimensional poverty index, or MPI to look at the various aspects of poverty and found that the "intensity" of poverty in these states was equal to if not worse than that in Africa.

*(Source: Guardian Weekly, 23.07.10)*

## Nari Jagran Manch: a new program the BDA has started funding

Victor von der Heyde

Nari Jagran Manch translates as *Forum for Women's Awakening* and it's a grass-roots program for women and girls that has been running for many years in three areas near Gaya. One of these areas is Bodhgaya. It's co-ordinated by a Sister Mary Lobo whom we have known for over ten years. Sister Mary has participated in Insight Meditation courses, has long term connections with the Buddhist community and her work and program covers similar ground to the program that Sister Jessy ran. One difference between the two is that Nari Jagran Manch has approval under the Indian Government's FRCA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act) rules and this makes it very straightforward with funds going to India.

Nari Jagran Manch works with the women and girls from lowest castes, through community workshops covering women's rights, sanitation and other health issues, family planning, organic farming and self-esteem. Women in low castes often don't even feel comfortable sitting on chairs on the same level as people from higher castes and the program aims to work with issues like this. It also sets up micro-credit schemes and provides material support (eg water pumps) or subsidised items such as pressure cookers (they need less fuel) or smokeless cookers (smoke inside small shelters is a major health issue). The smaller program with girls provides support (eg literacy tutorials) for Dalit girls attending government schools.

The approach used in Nari Jagran Manch is to provide training for women in the communities who have been through their programs to then become workshop leaders and trainers themselves.

Sister Mary outlines to the BDA how funds we provided could be used and this outline cover the period April 2010 to March 2011. This outline (using the words as they were received) covers the following:

*1. Education / training for the women at cluster levels (i.e. groups of 50 - 60 in the village set up and includes transport for the staff). Themes : health rights, self esteem, awareness /organising to access Government schemes, environment, economic activity, participation in local self-rule. We will use charts, songs and sometimes DVD's. 10 of these day long cluster level training sessions at Rs 800 each = Rs 8000 (approx A\$195).*



*Sister Mary Lobo*

*2. Incentives for the formation of 4 new groups (Rs 1200 will be put in each of their new bank accounts as incentive)  $Rs\ 1200 \times 4 = Rs\ 4800$  (approx A\$117).*

*3. Support for micro credit : Micro loans for 6 women, to support small sustainable businesses, care of livestock etc at Rs 3000 average = Rs 18000 (approx A\$440).*

*4 Leadership program (2 days ) for 30 teenage girls enrolled in our NIOS Program (i.e. National Institute of Open Schooling)  $Rs\ 75\ per\ girl \times 30 \times 2 = Rs\ 4500$  (approx A\$110).*

*5 Staff education (1 seminar or exposure program) = Rs 4000 (approx A\$98).*

*6 One water pump in an interior village (Rainpuri) = Rs 14000 (approx A\$342).*

*7. Support for 1 community worker (staff)  $Rs\ 2200\ pm \times 12 = Rs\ 26400$  (approx A\$644).*

*8. Administration / support for one office worker ( $Rs\ 1650\ pm \times 12$ ) = Rs 19800 (approx A\$483)*

*TOTAL = Rs. 99500 (approx A\$2428).*

We'll be looking at these programs and considering increased funding for 2011.



## Donation Form

Please note that you can transfer funds directly to our bank account:

Bank: Bank of Queensland  
Branch Cannon Hill  
Account name: Bodhgaya Development Association Inc.  
BSB: 124-001  
Account Number: 10142193

If you do transfer funds directly, please let us know who you are and how we can contact you.

Cheques can be made out to "Bodhgaya Development Association Inc" and sent to

147 Richmond Road Morningside Qld 4170

Name: .....

Address: .....

Email: .....

Phone: .....

Amount: .....

Donation form on reverse

Dance is a feature of the curriculum at the PV School. Apart from it being part of the cultural heritage, it helps with self-esteem particularly for students from lower castes.



Often after a dance performance for westerners, some of the dancers try to get the westerners to come into the stage area to dance with them. The westerners sometimes do free-form dancing which can seem very strange and inelegant to Indian eyes. This is some of the PV students watching westerners dance.

The dance program covers classical Indian dance to modern Bollywood and PV students have done well in inter-school dance competitions. This past student above, Ajay Kumar, had dance lessons from a PV teacher then learnt by watching dance shows on television. He graduated from the PV School with good results and is now studying French language in Delhi. When he comes back to Bodhgaya he helps with dance presentations at the school.



Photos of elegantly dressed Indian students dancing could give the impression that these students don't come from such poor backgrounds but the clothes or costumes belong to the school.





*Year X students who came in from their holidays to do some English practice*

## **BDA Finance Report 2009 – 10**

Donations this past financial year (Mar-09 to Feb-10) were \$ 9,615.50 + Interest \$2,586.72 = \$12,212.22 total revenue. Last year was \$15,938.50 + Interest \$7240.46 = \$22,178.96.

We are pleased to see that despite the GFC and its impact everywhere, our former targets of \$6,000 PV School + \$3,500 Sister Jessy were reached. And .. there are still some funds in reserve. 2 new donors joined us. 17 recurrent donors continued support. In accord with our past reporting practice, to keep everyone informed, 4 individual donations exceeded \$500 with a total of \$5,100 from these four.

Thank you all for your donations. Every \$1 given is a blessing and generous. Your continued support is, as always, precious and vital. The School land has been acquired !!! Now an acceleration of actions to benefit the Bodhgaya children and their community is inevitable.

Running Costs .. Audit fees, bank charges & transfer fees to India = \$640 paid for by committee. Postage, newsletter costs and the like are also gifted by committee. Thanks to our auditing firm for their reduced charge.

Funds to hand this financial year

Cloudroom - by donation for room use & meditation nights	\$ 725.00
Dharma teaching services by committee members	\$ 355.00
Dharma teaching services .. others	\$ 0.00
Direct Credit deposits to bank a/c	\$2,866.50
General	\$3,655.00
Newsletter response	\$1,020.00
Sangha communities/groups	\$ 823.90
Interest earned	\$2,586.72

Donations were specified as ...

Pragya Vihar School	\$ 1,433.90
Sister Jessy	\$ 431.50
Interest .. Discretionary	\$ 2,596.72
Discretionary	\$ 7,750.10

Finally, the \$4,500 previously allocated for Sister Jessy has been delivered. The PV School received \$30,000 from us towards land purchase plus \$6,000 for running costs.

Once again ... thank you all  
Pamela Grayson  
Treasurer