

The Prajna Vihar (PV) School is an inspiration to many people who visit it and has certainly captivated the attention of our committee members who have been working on its behalf for the past 21 years. Watching and reflecting upon the evolution of the school from its beginnings as a fledgling project with 40 students in a mud brick room in 1990, to a school that today educates 560 students from Kindergarten to Year 10, has given our work in raising funds for the school and other worthy projects in Bodhgaya, an ongoing focus.

The objectives of the Bodhgaya Development Association are:

- 1. To establish a set of activities for the on-going support of community projects in the Bodhgaya region, Bihar, India.*
- 2. To raise funds and secure donations for use in community projects targeted to the poor and needy of this region. The projects should deliver benefits such as: Education, Health, Literacy, Community Care.*
- 3. To raise and distribute funds with minimal operating costs, thus ensuring the greatest transfer from the donor to the final recipient.*
- 4. To raise the self-esteem and self-reliance of the communities involved.*

This edition of our yearly newsletter includes: an update on our renewed effort in gaining FCRA status and tales of the Kafka-esque saga it used to be with a 'happy ending' in the making, impressions from Eoin Liebchen-Meades' recent visit to Bodhgaya in February, the PV School article written by Victor von der Heyde, the PV finances table, an article by Suhani Kumar of Class X on the school trip to Kolkata, and an article on the second program we're involved with: the Nari Jagran Manch project which offers help to outcast women and girls. To round out this annual newsletter, an article describing two scholarships provided to past students is included and followed, finally, by a finance report from BDA's Treasurer, Linda Meades.

The saga of trying to gain permission to transfer funds to India in foreign currency, under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) seemed to be an endless one. The process went on for twelve long years. When an email from Christopher Titmuss alerted us to the wonderful news that the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) had finally granted FCRA status for the PV School on the 4th of July 2013, we were ecstatic. We are very thankful for the tireless work of our leadership team at the PV School and members of the Prajna Vihar Inter-religious Education Society in Dehli and Bodhgaya. We are now in a position to transfer funds directly to the school.



Christopher Titmuss who is a long-term supporter of the PV School comments on the most recent development thus:

We are grateful to the Ministry for Home Affairs for granting the FCRA. Our school runs on the highest ethical considerations with comprehensive and detailed accounts and a reliable, committed and trustworthy management

committee.

The PV School is a unique school because it is an inter-religious school with its 560 pupils, teachers and management. It is inter-religious/secular in its very DNA. This is something very rare, very precious and very important in a world with so much division between science and religion, secular values and religious values, between one religion and others, and substantial conflict within sects of the same religion.

The PV School has adapted itself to the 21st century without neglecting the ancient culture of India. There is a vision of a fulfilling and creative education which the Committee, the Head Teacher, the teachers, the pupils and the international community supports.

In October, I will travel to Bodhgaya and hope to offer support to the school and wider community. Having recently finished a Master of Development Practice at the University of Queensland, I am eager to put some of the theory into practice and work with students, teachers and the communities of Mastipur and Peeperpati villages. I feel both inspired and privileged to be involved with the work the BDA does here in Australia and am eagerly looking forward to working with the community in Bodhgaya later this year.



PV School in early 2013, before the painting

When this newsletter goes to print a fabulous six minute film of the school will be uploaded on our [BDA website](#). A DVD will also be produced. The film's narrator, Jyoti Kumari, speaks better English than most teachers at the school, having studied at an English medium school before coming to PV School. The film was shot by one of the school's supporters, Tom Riddle, with music for the film and some of the editing done here in Australia by Carla Thackrah.

We have recently set up a [Facebook page for the BDA](#) and primarily, the PV School. It is still in its infancy, but you might like to take a look and 'like' us on Facebook.

In gratitude for your ongoing support and interest,

Kerstin Liebchen-Meades
BDA management committee member

We're happy to put you on the email list for this annual newsletter. Please let us know at bda@dharm.org.au if you'd like to be on the list. We're also happy to send you a printed version.



School in late April 2013, after the painting. This is probably the freshest-looking building in all Mastipur

Impressions of Bodhgaya

My-oh-my, how Bodhgaya is changing! Besides the dust, car fumes, beeping car horns and larger crowds of people, we now have noise pollution from Indian weddings that blare into the night. Peace truly can only be found internally.

After about five years of not having visited Bodhgaya, I returned to the PV School – our ‘island paradise’ (half of our boundary is water) – earlier this year. The school flourishes; Sister Shobha our principal and her team of teachers are doing great work.

As is always the case when visiting the school after some time of absence, I was overcome with emotion as I realised what worthy effort and work the team of teachers put into the school and that we, too, in our small way contribute to that.

Every year in February when the Vipassana meditation retreat, led by Christopher Titmuss, is held in Bodhgaya, a cultural performance is organised. The dance and singing performance from students of the PV School was inspiring.

So too was the artwork, maths, and written work which have all noticeably gone up a notch – so much so that more and more students are going on to further studies and into small businesses. I can quite confidently say that education has contributed to those who have finished their schooling with the PV School leading more competent and fulfilling lives.

It is over 20 years now that our committee and you, our valuable supporters, have stayed with the school, and I can easily say it is a most worthy cause to be associated with.

Yours in heartfelt thanks,

Eoin Liebchen-Meades
BDA management committee
member

Prajna Vihar School
Expenditure 2011, Budget 2012, Expenditure 2012

	Particulars	Expenditure 2011	Budget 2012	Expenditure 2012	Australian \$ 2012
1	Books , Periodical & Educational Expense	36,751	100,000	108,612	1,986
2	Salary & Bonus	1,045,800	1,050,000	1,067,100	19,513
3	Phone	1,500	6,000	1,800	33
4	Water	684	500	186	3
5	Electricity	3,567	6,000	14,018	256
6	Stationeries & Functions	53,513	80,000	70,154	1,283
7	Traveling & study Tours	72,141	40,000	33,370	610
8	Milk Snacks & Fuel	11,418	12,000	12,578	230
9	Seminar & Training	0	35,000	0	0
10	Building and Furniture	2,376	20,000	0	0
11	Audit & lawyers	36,420	30,000	24,944	456
	Total	1,264,170	1,379,500	1,332,762	24,370



PV student outside her home

Prajna Vihar School

The school is still thriving with 560 students, 15 full time teachers, 2 part time teachers and 2 non-teaching staff. There are always extra things that could be provided for the school. This year one of the BDA committee members, Eoin Liebchen-Meades, saw the state of the paint on the outside of the school and decided to give the school funds for external painting out of his own pocket (way more than was in his pocket actually). We are also looking at replacing the four very old computers and increasing the number of computers. An issue here is security: the more expensive the thing is in the school, the more chance there is it will be burgled and the principal is justifiably worried about this.

Given that the School currently relies on funding from three sources, the BDA, a good fundraiser (Felix Helg) in Switzerland and one (Christopher Titmuss) in England, the principal has been keeping an eye out for where other funds can come from. In early 2012 the Dalai Lama was in Bodhgaya leading a Kalachakra initiation, with a huge number of participants coming to Bodhgaya. The school was made available to a Tibetan group, and this group bought a large new water tank for the school and provided more funds for running costs.

We've been conscious of how currencies have been changing in relation to each other and decided last year to switch to giving a set annual donation in rupees rather than Australian dollars. This gives a little more certainty to the school in terms of their finances.

Originally, just over 20 years ago, the school was set up to provide education to the local village of Mastipur. Mastipur was made up of mud huts and very poor kids. Some years later there was a government program helping build brick houses and the village started to look better. Some of the families in Mastipur also benefitted from the influx of pilgrims. There are still very poor families with children going to the school, both from Mastipur and the neighbouring outcaste village of Peeperpati. Sometimes students in photos of the school look very neatly dressed for kids coming from poor communities. The principal, Sister Shobha, tries to encourage an attitude where students present themselves well and this seems to have an impact on how the kids see themselves. Students can get sent home if they're looking particularly ragged if it is not due to family circumstances.

At the request of the PV School we have started a [website for the school](#). This is largely to help or encourage fundraising from other people or groups. By the time you read this, the website may be finished.



The main thoroughfare in Mastipur village, very near the PV School

The PV School is not registered with any state or federal education board. This is largely because of the board requirements for pay scales for teachers. The school does not currently have the finances to pay teachers the amounts set and some of the teachers don't have the qualifications needed. In Year 10, students enrol in both the PV School and the local government school and take exams at the government school. You might think that students could go to a government school all along, but these schools have a poor reputation: it is common that teachers don't turn up to teach. The PV School is well regarded. Sister Shobha says that the hardest week in the year for her is the enrolment week, where many more parents want their kids to come to the school than the school can cater for. She says that some mothers don't leave once they're told that their child doesn't meet the entry criteria. They just stay there, wait and hope.

Each year students from Class X are taken on an excursion. This is a big event as students' families often don't have the funds for travel. In recent years the excursion has been funded by one of the founders of the school, Rick Peterson. This year the excursion was to Kolkata. A report from one of the students is below.

Being involved with this school really does give a perspective of how fortunate we are in the West, living with very little dust and smoke pollution, living with a good government health care system and with good education and sanitation. Many of the people in Bodhgaya have no safety net at all: just relatives who may or may not be able to help. Giving them a hand feels very much the right thing.

Victor von der Heyde
BDA Chairperson

We thank Gerard Alford and Eric Frangenheim from ITC Publishing for the donation of educational resources on thinking and learning strategies. These will help PV School teachers incorporate some very innovative learning and teaching approaches.

My experience of Kolkata Tour

Hay!! I am Suhani Kumari. I am a student of class X. I study in Prajna Vihar School. I am a daughter of Rickshaw puller. My father is a poor man he earns very little just hand to mouth. We are four children. I am the eldest daughter. Prajna Vihar School is great support for my family because we get free and the best education.

Every year our school arranges for the education tour. This year it was arranged for the class X students on 20th to 23rd January 2013. I was very excited to travel; it was my first journey by train and with my class mates - which I have only imagined. I used to think how it will be? How people travelled from one place to place?

After long awaiting, the day came. We left for Kolkata. Our seats were reserved, after boarding the train, we were relaxed and slowly the train moved. Lo and behold I thought why trees and houses and moving opposite side. Then I remembered the Geography class may be in class VII we have studied. I was thrilled and happy. It was certainly an experience of exploration for me to travel by metro. To me it is a wonder how the train runs under ground and on the top of it people are walking and buses are running.

Victoria memorial and Birla Planetarium is again another experience to see the planets just above our head. Science City too was wonderful; I came to know more about the wild animals and their world. About sea and sea weeds we saw the Howrah Bridge which was built by British and the trams. On the whole it was a wonderful experience especially to me because my father is not able to meet the expenses.

I do not know whether in future I will again get a chance to travel again but this Kolkata educational tour will be a unique one in my life. I am very grateful to Rick uncle who made it possible for us.

Thank you very much,

Suhani Kumar
Class X



Nari Jagran Manch

We've been supporting the Nari Jagran Manch program for some years now. This program focuses on outcaste (Mahadalit) women and girls. It involves setting up small local community groups to save as a group and give micro-credit loans (as opposed to micro-credit bank loans). It helps to encourage life-skills training and education for illiterate women and girls, support for girls from outcaste communities who are going to school and occasional basic infrastructure projects, such as village water pumps.



Outcaste and illiterate women in the Nari Jagran Manch program. They are often very focussed in training programs.

Both Eoin Liebchen-Meades and myself were in Bodhgaya at different times in the last 12 months and we each spent time at Nari Jagran Manch micro-credit groups and education programs. BDA funds are used to support the program in a number of ways – to pay for trainers (called animators), to provide teaching materials, and as a type of bonus that is given to those community micro-credit groups that do well. BDA funds have also been used for the purchase of water pumps.

What stood out this time was how physically close some of the communities are to Bodhgaya itself – with some communities right on the outskirts, not way out in remote areas. There are also villages served by Nari Jagran Manch that are further out, but we were advised not to visit. The last time a westerner had been seen visiting one particular remote group there was a burglary right after the visit. Locals imagined that the westerner might have left something of value.

While the women in these outcaste communities are looked down on by so many people from other castes, leading to a number of issues including very low self-esteem, they aren't looked down on

by their peers in other villages. One village we went to, where most women were totally illiterate, is known for their skills and knowledge as midwives and they were sought out for their skills.

The Nari Jagran Manch training programs deal with everything from health issues, to working as a community, to knowing one's rights, to accessing government service, and even learning to critically question the promises of politicians hoping to get elected.

Outcaste women seem to relate and listen to people from their own community, and Nari Jagran Manch has a policy of teaching outcaste women, where possible, to be the trainers.

One of the changes that appears to be happening is the attitude towards education. Years ago, education was not valued like it is now. In one group, where the question as to their biggest issue was raised (in English, translated to Hindi, and then to the local dialect), a common response was that they never received an education, they never learned to read and write.

Family sizes in outcaste communities are larger than in the low caste communities. There are often five or six children, compared to maybe 4 in slightly higher caste groups. The larger family size can make it even harder to afford adequate food and dowries for the girls.

We think supporting these programs is a very good use of donated funds.

Victor von der Heyde



Nari Jagran Manch training program close on the outskirts of Bodhgaya



Donation Form

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 or money orders can be made out to "Bodhgaya Development Association Inc" and sent to 147 Richmond Road Morningside Qld 4170

Name:

Address:

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Email:

Phone:

Amount:

Donation form on reverse

BDA Scholarships

At times there are academically gifted students who leave the Prajna Vihar School and are able to go to university or some higher education or training. This is still rare. It's often the case that lack of finances limit what further study students can do. There are also cultural restrictions on what girl students can do.

In the last two years, the BDA has offered two scholarships to past students.



The first, offered in 2012, was to Upendra Kumar, who started at the Prajna Vihar School in the school's very early days, the second year of operation, when classes were still held in a tent. After finishing school, Upendra was able to enrol at Shanti Niketan

University in Kolkata. After completing a Bachelor's degree in Chinese, he then managed to get a place at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in Delhi. JNU is one of the most prestigious universities in India and classes are taught in English. It has some places reserved for low caste students and this may have helped. On completion of the Masters course, Upendra was offered the choice of two scholarships – a PRC scholarship for further Chinese study in mainland China, or a Taiwanese Government scholarship to study in Taiwan. The better of these, and the one that Upendra took, was the one in Taiwan. The scholarship only helped with tuition fees and a contribution towards living expenses. The BDA decided to help Upendra with the additional expenses involved.

In the end, these expenses were somewhat more than anticipated, and BDA members felt enough BDA funds had been given to support one past student. A decision was made by members to give Upendra extra funds from our own pockets.

Upendra is in Taipei for one year and has just over one month left. He is studying at NTNU, the

National Taiwan Normal University, where Kevin Rudd studied Chinese. Upendra has been very dedicated to his study and has done well. It hasn't been easy for him socially. We've been skypeing with him regularly and hope that this provides some support. Upendra says his parents don't know what a computer is, and they find it hard to relate to his circumstances. Upendra's father works making clay teacups. The clay needs to be dug and brought home, the cups made and then fired. He receives the equivalent of 2½ cents US per cup.

Studying at this level will mean Upendra will get a good job when he returns to India and will be able to help his aging parents and his extended family. He has a niece and nephew currently at the PV School and he has committed himself to supporting them through further study when they finish school. It is exceptional for someone to come from a low caste family, leave school with very basic English, then excel at a course taught in English at a prestigious university and go on to study overseas.



The second scholarship was offered this year to Pushpa Kumari to do teacher training in a Montessori College in Hazaribag, about two hours drive south of Bodhgaya. Pushpa was recommended for the scholarship by Sister Shobha, the school

principal. The teacher training program is taught in English and Pushpa needed to work on her English to pass the entrance test, which she did. Pushpa is the first girl student from Mastipur to study outside Bodhgaya. Sister Shobha drove to Hazaribag with Pushpa's parents to show them where Pushpa would be staying and to give them confidence that Pushpa would be safe.

We think both Upendra and Pushpa will serve as models to others in their community, to show what is possible.

Victor von der Heyde

BDA Financial Report 2012 - 2013

Total donations for the past year, March, 2012 to February, 2013, were \$17,417.70 and interest \$3,343.64, giving us a total revenue of \$22,527.64. This is an approximate increase in revenue of \$4,000.00 from the previous year and again allows us to continue our projects. Interest received was down due to decreasing institutional returns; however, we endeavour to actively pursue safe, competitive rates to enhance this passive income.

We wish to acknowledge the generous donations from BDA supporters, many of whom have been consistent in their giving for many years. Your continued support is received with appreciation and our warmest blessings.

There are minor running costs associated with transfers of money to India and bank charges; committee members reimburse these costs. Postage, newsletter and other administrative costs are gifted by the committee members. This ensures that all monies raised, including your donations, go directly to the BDA projects.

Also, we would like to acknowledge the very generous support of our Auditors, GCY Accountants in East Brisbane. Their assistance has been invaluable and we cannot thank them enough for giving their time and energy to us.

Financial Breakdown:

	Funds received	Funds allocated
Donations from Cloudroom Use	\$1,585.40	
Donations - General	\$14,014.74	
Donations for PV School	\$1,819.56	
Interest received	\$3,343.64	
Prajna Vihar School		\$10,995.51
Assumpta Society		\$2,924.55
Education Scholarship		\$2,387.75
Total	\$20,763.34	\$16,307.81

Thank you all,

Linda Meades
BDA Treasurer

Figures updated 21st May 2015, based on audited financial statements.

Photo to the right is a Nari Jagran Manch community micro-credit group meeting record. Women who are not able to sign their name put a fingerprint on to signify their agreement.

