

KALYANAMITRA FUND

Taking Light into the Dark Places of the World

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Dear Friends,

The year has flown by and I find myself once again sharing with you all the good work we were able to achieve with your generous donations.

This year our charities running costs have doubled, but so has our work. We received funding of \$10250 (Au) from Buddhist Global relief for a proposal we made for a 6 month slum tuition Centre for 40 children, with the promise of that much funding again for the remainder of the year. However, we are still in need of more funds. This year we did many things to combat the poverty of India and offer spiritual solace to the estimated several million Buddhists in the middle of India. Our activities were:

- We ran a retreat for young girls with temporary ordination to give girls a taste of an independent and spiritual life.
- Organised a life saving operation for a girl with a severely bent back.
- Employed four new employees; three social workers and two tuition teachers (part time).
- Hosting and offered training/school/ living costs to two young nuns for 2 months
- Identifying a boy who was deaf and getting hearing aids and speech therapy for him
- Running English classes, anger management and meditation for poor teenagers as well as some

computer classes

- Counselling women suffering from domestic violence
 - Helping several women create their own small businesses (communal laundry and catering service)
 - Women's self help group
 - Women's Dharma Class
 - Hosting a volunteer from Australia
 - Offering food, clothes and medicine to impoverished children and the elderly.
 - Sponsoring 12 poor children to go to better schools and giving food/clothing to their families
 - 230 children in part time English and meditation classes
 - Taking slum children and women on a pilgrimage to Bodhgaya and the holy places of India.
 - Participating in two conferences – one on Buddhism and the other on women's empowerment.
 - Escorting poor people to hospital and aiding in the cost of their medical bills
 - Teaching health and sanitation in slums
 - Aiding with housing for desperately poor orphans
 - Creating a small medical service for slum people whereby a health care professional visits and offers quality medical treatment for basic conditions or referral.
 - Computer classes for slum children
- We thank you for your interest, generosity and encouragement. We wish you all a very Merry Festive Season and a Happy New Year. May you be filled with the peace that comes from living a wise and compassionate life.

Tentative Goals for Bodhicitta Foundation by 2015

- A excellent quality residential school for village/urban poor children with a wholistic education system
- A nun's training centre
- A knowledge centre for children, with music, languages, information technology, books and youth centre
- Women's empowerment centre and income generating programmes (education/health/pension plans)
- Constructing a Vihara
- Starting a vocational training centre for youth
- Retreat Centre



Volunteering in Bodhicitta Foundation – One Australian's experience.

My name is Sarah and I visited th Bodhicitta Foundation in October as a volunteer. I met Sr Yeshe in Australia in 2010 and heard all about the work she was doing in India to help the Dalit (ex 'untouchable') people of Nagpur. It was not until August 2011 that I decided to visit India after feeling disillusioned with the way I was living my life in Sydney. I had a good job, adequate material wealth and I lived comfortably with my family in a beautiful seaside location yet I still felt dissatisfied. Mother India was the land the Buddha had chosen to be born in and so I wondered what

she could offer me. I decided to visit to see if I could find some clues about how to live a more satisfying and meaningful life.

Week 1:

Orientation

During my first week Sr Yeshe and Mahendra (her translator) showed me around orienting me to the city, peoples and culture of Nagpur. I visited many places that showed me the extreme polarities of wealth present in India, from the poor people who lived in the slums to the wealthier elite who employed those who lived in the slums. To my amazement five people could live and sleep in one tiny room. Houses could be made of anything found on the street, plastic, hessian bags, tyres, bricks, stones etc. Out of necessity people had creatively made a shelter of whatever was available. There was no running water, people drew water out of the local pumps. Dogs roamed around and rubbish was burnt in the street, there were no garbage men to take it away. I saw children running around with old and torn clothes many without shoes. Around one slum area, three factories spewed out black smoke creating a polluted and toxic haze that residents and their children breathed in on a daily basis. I imagine for some readers this is a normal scenario, but for me such a situation was a shocking and overwhelming experience. I had never seen such poverty before and yet the people I met particularly the women, carried on stoically making the best for themselves and their children, often working long hours to support their families.

I also visited Diksha Bhumi where Dr Ambedker converted to Buddhism in 1956 with 500,000 people. He was a champion for the Dalit people and in every house I visited I saw pictures of Buddha and Dr Ambedker together, reverently honoured with garlands of fresh flowers.

Finally, I spent some time at the Sevagram ashram where Mahathma Gandhi stayed. I saw

how simply he chose to live, making huts out of mud and wood. It is a beautiful and quiet place where I could experience some peace and physical space. All religions are equally respected, and at evening prayers we heard prayers from Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Jainism.

Week 2

Dharma and Socially Engaged Buddhism

I was very keen to learn more about Dharma and how this worked in practice in the community. Whenever possible I received teachings on the six perfections which are ethical principles that will guide me to lead a good life. They are part of the traditional practices for a Bodhisattva – a person aspiring with compassion to free all beings from suffering. They are generosity, morality, patience, joyful effort, concentration and wisdom. On suggestion from Sr Yeshe, I decided to take the 8 precepts for three days, becoming an 'Anagarika' (a postulant monastic in training) to get an experience of selfless service and deepen my spiritual practice.

I went out to the slum communities at Pulinadi to teach English classes to the children and we had a great time! The children were very keen to learn and very well behaved. I enjoyed reading stories about Australia, singing songs and dancing especially to the strains of 'locomotion' by Kylie Minogue. It was not all hard work though! I also played cricket with the children and a favourite game of the children called 'cubbity' which looked like chaotic fun to me...I got out fairly early when a swarm of children caught me!

I felt very welcomed by the Buddhist community in Nagpur. Everywhere I went I was invited for chai and food. I was a popular guest and I am sorry that I did not get to visit all the homes that requested my presence. Since people live in smaller spaces, I felt that family members are much closer here than in Australia. Actually, people seem generally closer here, relationships

are given time to develop, there is less emphasis on doing this and that and there is time to simply 'be' with each other. Not once did I ever feel lonely, I always had loving company around me who treated me like family. The pace of life is also slower here. I realised how 'rushed' I had become living in Australia where there is an emphasis to achieve, to meet goals and targets, to succeed. The challenge here was to slow down, let go and surrender to the rhythm of India.

Week 3

Special Memories of Nagpur

During this week, I enjoyed the variety of social work projects I was involved in. We took a 12 year old suspected deaf boy for some medical tests confirming his severe deafness and immediate need for hearing aids. His language was also delayed and required speech therapy. Luckily Bodhicitta Foundation had enough money to pay for his medical bills so we could purchase two brand new hearing aids. As he tried them on for the first time, his eyes lit up and his face broke into a big smile as he heard clearly for the first time in twelve years. To witness this was a deeply moving and satisfying moment for me. For poor people in Nagpur, medical treatment is far too expensive meaning they normally go without. In Australia we have health and welfare programs readily available supporting those who are sick and disadvantaged, we truly are a lucky country. Now thanks to the charity he has brighter future.

I made many good friends in Nagpur and it was hard to say goodbye. I learnt the value of giving my time, skills, experience, resources to help others and how deeply satisfying this feels. Even more so, the value of letting go of my egoic and self grasping needs and putting others first even when I don't feel like it. But I also learnt to come back to myself in the present moment.

I am reminded of these words from 'The

Bodhisattva's way of life' – a classic Buddhist Text by the Indian Master Shantideva,

" All the happiness the world contains comes from cherishing others,

All the suffering it contains comes from self grasping and selfishness "

Thank you to everybody who made my trip so special, I will carry your memories in my heart. May you all be well and be happy and continue travelling on the path of Dharma.

The Challenges of Social Work in India – One Man's Journey

By Akhilesh Singh

I became a social worker because I wanted to make a difference in the world. Like many Indian young people with few job options and financial constraints, I did a degree I had no interest in the hope of securing every middle class Indian's dream: a Government job. That means a life of security, a health plan, children's education, insurance and a pension. Of course, like the majority of Indian youths, I failed to secure this. I found accounting work incredibly boring and decided to go out on a limb and study something I was passionate about. I decided on social work.

After getting my degree I worked in various charities and government organisations implementing strategies to eliminate poverty. I like a good challenge, so every two years or so, I would change jobs to improve my skills in various fields. I enjoy field work the most, but I'm also quite experienced in policy development and administration. Mostly I've worked in the Tribal areas of India in the states of Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. The tribal people are wonderful.

They have very little, but if they have enough to eat that day, they are happy. Much of their culture is still intact and they are honest, direct, friendly and family oriented.

A real tribal person will walk into the forest like I would walk into a supermarket, they know where to get food, medicine, meat or 'bush tucka' as Aussies would call it! Tribal people in India are not that different from average Indians in appearance. They look a little different and have different languages, but there is not so much of a clash as there has been in say America or Australia.

Tribal people face many problems however. For example - being equipped to face the hungry growing and developing society of modern India, where due to poor education, they often end up becoming poor building labourers. They are also prey to Christian missionaries who undermine their traditional beliefs. There is also the huge problem of the destruction of their natural habitat – the forest and the dam projects that too often submerge their villages. Being illiterate, they are often cheated of their land and don't know their rights.

I have nothing but admiration for Adivisis (tribal people) though, and I have loved working with them over many years. Being a witness to the quiet rhythms of their life, their beautiful mud-brick homes filled with bright paintings and sculpture is a privilege. I've also come to realise that we can live close to nature in simplicity. Women in Tribal society hold a much higher position than average Indian women and they even sometimes fist fight with their husbands to sort out arguments (the women mostly win!).

I got in touch with Bodhichitta Foundation in February 2011 when I met my friend Anand. He has deep ties with this Foundation and his Teacher Ayya Yeshe Bodhicitta. I visited Nagpur in February 2011 and met Ayya Yeshe who is founder of the Foundation. I also visited the work area of Foundation and found that Ayya Yeshe did

a great job with social work and teaching Dharma with support of her team that works for people living in slum areas of Nagpur. I was inspired with these efforts of the Foundation and decided to be a part of it. I felt that this organisation was not corrupt and really helping on a grass roots level the people who really needed it. I also saw that I could really invest myself in this organisation in a personal and professional way, that people were open to me sharing in the shaping of the organisation due to my many years of experience.

I left my last job as in United Nation Development Programme (UNDP). I worked there for the last two years as District Support Officer. I have Eight years cross-functional work experience in social & community based urban / rural development sector in program planning, execution, implementation, monitoring & evaluation in prestigious NGOs and Government Organizations (Gos).

Sometimes in these jobs the social work was implemented well, but other times, the social workers just bought themselves big jeeps or houses and the people they were helping remained untouched. I'm quite happy working for Bodhicitta Foundation, although I know we still have a long way to go. I feel that people listen to me here... Although we still debate many things!

It's really different working with Ayya Yeshe, as she is not doing this work to meet professional goals but really from the heart and the people in the foundation are like a family. There are many things we need to do like streamline the paperwork and accounts and apply for various things like tax income exemption, donation tax exemption, regular audits etc. In India there is so much red tape to get through. But I think our charity will grow in a wonderful way and in the future benefit many people on a large scale.

“Those who know the value of giving as I do, would not let one meal pass without having given something.” - The Buddha (Pali Cannon)

Life Saving Operation For a Young Girl



Hi, my name is Rakki and I'm 15 years old. When I was born, my spine started to bend with scholio kyphosis. It's like spinal-a-bifida, but much worse. My spine is 1/3 bent over, like an s shape. It starts on one side of my body and goes over to the other. Many of my organs are functioning at half capacity due to this. My lungs are half the size they should be and I weigh just 16 kg. I can wear my 8 year old sister's clothes – sometimes they are two big for me!

Sometimes people stare at me, feel sorry or tease me. I don't like going to school for that reason. All the girls my age have boyfriends and are at least 1ft higher than me. I prefer to stay at home and help my mum and watch cartoons. If I go out for too long I start to feel tired.

My family is very poor. They can't afford to take me to a good hospital for an operation, and the government hospital didn't have the equipment or expertise to do my kind of operation. Life was very boring until I met Ayya Yeshe and Mahendra her translator and the other social workers in Bodhicitta Foundation. When I met Ayya Yeshe, I owned two dresses. My mother has to work because my father is sick, she hardly makes enough to feed us kids. My sister has a learning dis-ability and was in a really bad school where they beat her for being 'stupid' but Ayya Yeshe got her properly diagnosed and sends her to get special learning classes. But the old school was so angry that my

sister left, that they kicked me out too. That was a shame as I was doing the important 10th class exams. I will take admission next year in another school, but in the mean time, I have a lot of time to kill. I like spending time at the Dharma Centre, helping with things and learning social work. I really like social work, it takes my mind off my problems, but also makes me feel useful. People stare at me and Ayya Yeshe walking down the street and I'm not sure who they're staring at more, but I think it's the giant bald person! At least I'm not alone in being stared at. Ayya Yeshe stands up for me and the social workers always make jokes, they are like my brothers.

Now we found a kind doctor who trained in America to operate on me for free, we just have to pay for the equipment, which is quite expensive. I know it's a big operation to straighten my spine, and I know the risks, but the doctor said if I don't get this operation, I may only live 10 more years anyway. I'm not afraid. I want to become strong to help my mother. My mother is a wonderful person. And I'll do social work and help other poor people. There are so many problems in my community. Ayya Yeshe took me to Bodhgaya where the Buddha got enlightened with my friend. That was really fun. We also saw where Buddha first taught in Deer park and vultures peak, where he taught the Heart Sutra. I'd never travelled anywhere before and I missed my mother's spicy food. Food in other states has much less chilli, and didn't like it, it didn't taste like anything.

I don't worry too much about the future, I just live in the present and enjoy each day of life I have. My father says I should become a nun, I'd like too, but maybe when I'm older. Thanks to our Australian and American friends who have kindly offered food, clothes and blankets to my family. You have made my life a lot better. Please pray for my safe operation and for all beings who suffer. May you be happy, yours sincerely, Rakki. (Translated from Hindi by the Bodhicitta Translation group).

If you would like to donate to the cost of Manisha's operation, clothing or schooling needs or to children like her, please email us...

A Little Boy Able to Hear for the First Time



Ashok is a deaf boy who is twelve years old. He is an identical twin. Ashok lives with distant relatives because his mother is now mentally retarded and bedridden and his father has to work. His mother tried to kill herself by jumping off the top of a 2 storey building.

Severely deaf since birth, Ashok could only hear loud noises. Everything else was indistinguishable. He couldn't talk properly or listen in school and other children teased him. He misbehaved because he couldn't hear the Teachers. They beat him a lot.

One of Bodhicitta Foundation's social workers identified Ashok's possible deafness when the family begged him for help. Although the family is lower middle class and owns a house and car (for work as driving) they were not prepared to hash out a lot of money for a troublesome distant relative.

The hearing tests proved correct and a very kind Australian sponsor provided the hearing aids so that Ashok could cross the bridge between being cut off in his own world, to being able to communicate with others. Watching Ashok hear properly for the first time was amazing. We said his name and he smiled and turned around. His whole face lit up. We could shuffle pages and he could hear it. Now I think Ashok has a much brighter future. His family has agreed to put him in a better school after speech therapy.

Delinquent children often have reasons for the way they behave and now Ashok has support for his deafness.

Thank you to our kind sponsors, as Ashok really has recovered the gift of life.

The Things We Can't Lock Out – A Young Girl's Experience of Domestic Violence

My name is Ayesha (name changed) and I'm 14 years old. I have 3 other sisters and my father is an alcoholic. Right now he's in the hospital, he can't walk and sometimes he can't remember me. He always fights with my mother and beats her. We wish that the bolts on our door were stronger so we could lock him out. He also beats my sister who's 12 – she stands up to him. One night my father hit my mother and she became unconscious and we all had to sleep in the open surrounded by mosquitoes.

My father has always drunk, but he didn't always drink 3 x 100ml bottles of whiskey per day. He used to work as a driver and bring us home lollies and ask us how our day was. But when he drank, all the frustration of his life poured out and he would beat our mother mercilessly. His mother would also beat my mother. I don't know why she stays with him, but if she left, she'd have nowhere to go but the street.

I think my father wanted sons, that's why him and my mother had four kids. They were hoping one would be a son, but now they have to pay for the wedding of four daughters. I feel bad about that, like I'm a burden. I try to help at home. My mum works 10 hours a day in the home of rich Indians who pay her 5000 rupees per month (\$110 Au), that's hardly enough for food.

My older sister did a part time job 8 hours a day 6 days a week for 1200 rupees (\$30) per month in a shop when it was her college holidays. My main income comes from selling my father's empty

alcohol bottles. Me and my sisters get one rupee each from that, one bottle for each of my younger sisters and me. My father doesn't give us anything except his empty bottles. Now my father is in hospital really sick, so my mother works in the day and sleeps there at night cooking for him and cleaning him. It's funny, my father never cleaned the blood from my mother when he beat her or broke her bones, but now she cares for him.

One day we tried to have a birthday party and my father got drunk. We pushed him into the other room as he was quite incoherent. It was really embarrassing. People don't want to visit our house. When my father is not in hospital he just lies in bed and watches TV and demands for me to get him things. Indian women are very loyal to their husbands. They go around the sacred fire seven times with them. It's said that after that, you and your husband will be together for 7 lives. I don't know what bad karma my mother did to get my father for a husband but I think since she got married she's been in the fire, not going around it. She's so thin and tired. She's only 37, she was married at 18.

My mother doesn't have a father or a brother who could intervene and threaten my father. Our life is very hard. Bodhicitta Foundation has offered for us to move away from him, but then who will get the house when he dies? We don't want to move away from our friends and the shame of leaving your husband is very high.

I like to come to the Dharma Centre to escape my parents fighting. Sometimes I have asked if I could sleep there. I am happy that Bodhicitta foundation sponsors me to go to a good school. I like studying. Maybe later I'll go into a girl's hostel. I just wish we had stronger bolts on our doors and that I never had to see my mother 'bump her head' again.

This article is a true account of domestic violence in the slums of India. Sadly it is very common. Violence against women is still found in developed countries also, but in the slums of poor countries poverty and frustration as well as cultural backwardness make it more common. Bodhicitta Foundation sponsors children from these families for school, hostels, counselling, food etc.

Why do Rich Countries have a Duty to Poor Countries?

In this world often some things are cheap for us because there is not an equal distribution of resources.. The people in developing countries are not paid well for their labour in making our clothes and household appliances, but we benefit from their low pay. Much of Developed countries wealth historically came from the illegal seizing or invasion of other sovereign countries and the use of that countries natural resources (oil, gems, gold, iron, labour) at a very low fee. The legacy of colonisation is countries that were divided where there were no divisions, leading to wars and communal tensions. For example – the British never industrialised Indian mills, coal production or electricity on a large scale. They simply took the raw resources of India and sent them to England to be developed and then sold back to Indians (I.e. cotton) at several times the original cost.

They forced Indians to grow opium (which led to mass famine as farmers were not allowed to grow the food they needed). The opium was then sent to China where the English had hooked a large proportion of the population on this commodity for a quick buck themselves. European countries strictly monitored and made rules about the import of opium to their shores and that it should be small quantities for medical use.

The Chinese sovereignty was undermined by the British and other European countries forcing opium on the Chinese and bribing Chinese middle men to spread the opium to the market. This led to the Opium wars. Several wars fought at great cost to the Chinese to ensure they had control of their own ports. The tragic legacy of opium also led to revolutions and much political instability in China.

Indian peasants were largely left to fend for themselves in the time of the British Raj. They did not go to the fine schools the sons of British officers or rich Indian land owners went to – they had no schools at all except perhaps for the odd

missionary school or a traditional Hindu school for the sons of Brahmins. The British Raj supported the zamindar or land owner system that heavily taxed peasants and gave the upper caste land owners control over large areas of land.

Some positive things did come from British rule such as the government systems, the post, the extensive railway etc. But whether those systems were built for the benefit of the Indians or for the swift removal of resources from India to England is questionable.

Our advantages have often come from seizing land from less developed peoples at the point of a gun and then mass exploitation/ / slavery or genocide. Everything in the world is connected and the wealth of developed countries has all too often been connected to the exploitation of poorer countries or people. As developed countries who benefited from the wealth of colonialism, we have a moral duty to repay and repair some of the damage we have done.

There is no doubt that economic progress in some developing countries is hampered by ethnic tensions, corruption and violence and it's also true that many developing countries like China have done just fine on their own to come out of poverty. But when one man's wealth comes from another man's poor labour, there is no doubt that there is an element of immorality or social duty to repay that exploitation.

As some economists now doubt the value or sustainability of capitalism it's very valuable to reflect how we as individuals shape the world economy and political climate with the way we choose to consume, how we spend our money, the products we buy and how they are produced and which leaders we support. Perhaps it is useful to remember a phrase by Mahatma Gandhi -

'Never underestimate the power of a few determined moral individuals to change the course of history.'

Food for Thought

42% of Indians still live below the International poverty line of \$1.25 per day.

35% of Indian women are illiterate.

55% of Dalit people are illiterate.

Women do 65% of the world's work and own 1% of the world's land.

Everyday 30,000 children in poor countries die due to preventable poverty-related illnesses.



Ethical Christmas Presents

We can do good works for your friends and families and give email notification that good works have been done. You simply email us and deposit money in our bank account and we email your loved ones on your behalf with an attached photo...



1) Help a widow and her children extend her hut \$220 (three people currently live in 2x2.5mtrs)

2) Sponsor a computer class for a poor slum girl \$120

3) Buy some warm blankets and clothes for cold families (\$50)

4) Sponsor a child for school for a year (\$40 per month)

5) Buy a whiteboard for our slum tuition school (\$50)

6) Contribute to Rakki's operation equipment (\$100)

7) Buy a washing machine for a single working mother of 4 children. \$220

