

# BODHI TIMES

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*We aim sustainably to improve health, education and the environment in developing countries by providing a hook, not a fish. BODHI was founded in 1989 on the principle of skillful, compassionate action and is neither religious nor political. We have supporters and advisers from many faiths. We encourage your ideas and acts of kindness. Realising the interdependence of all beings is in our enlightened self-interest. Now more than ever, if we don't work together to reduce the world's much-discussed problems, then who will?*

## Chakmas

**T**houghts of the Partition of India in 1947 usually bring to mind the Hindu/Muslim and India/Pakistan rifts, but spare a thought for those who have become refugees in their own land. The Chakmas are classified as a tribal people. They regard themselves as Buddhist and for this reason faced discrimination in both predominantly Muslim Bangladesh. Now in normally tolerant India, they still face discrimination. On April 2, 2005 in Delhi, Colin met with Mr. Susanta Chakma, a law graduate from Delhi University, originally from the North East Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh (AP). Susanta founded SNEHA, a word that, like 'BODHI' can be translated as 'compassion.' We hope SNEHA will be the local partner for a new BODHI project in NE India.

In the 1960s, Chakmas now in AP lived in a river valley in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). They'd been there for millennia, though some Chakmas believe they once lived around Lumbini, where the Buddha was born more than 2500 years ago. At Partition some campaigned, unsuccessfully, to join India.

### India's generosity

In 1964, 30,000 Chakmas were resettled in AP, a remote and sparsely settled state close to a sensitive border with Chinese-occupied Tibet. The Chakmas had been displaced by the Kaptai Hydro-Electric Project, which submerged their arable land. President Nehru offered them resettlement, as he also did around the same time to Tibetans fleeing Chinese persecution. Chakmas were offered about 5 forested acres per family, close to one of the many strongly flowing rivers of this region. Since 1964 the Chakma population in AP has doubled, the forests have been cleared and their land remains fixed in size. Flooding is an increasing problem. Birth rates are high and poverty is increasing. Health care, roads, schools and other infrastructure are rare.

Life in India was more promising at first, but since the 1980s Chakmas in AP have faced increasing hostility. This spilled over from neighbouring Assam, where discord had been triggered in part by the migration of other Bangladeshis. Tensions climaxed in a 'Quit AP' movement in the early 1990s, marked by violence, intimidation and house burnings, directed not only at the Chakmas but also at Tibetans and Hajongs, another minority group.

One discrimination practised by AP state government officials was the consistent failure to forward Chakmas' legitimate applications for Indian citizenship. In 1996 the Indian Supreme Court ruled that this practice was illegal, affirming the right of Chakmas to be full Indian citizens. However, little has changed on the ground, except that overt violence has diminished. Clearly the Chakmas cannot rely on the Indian authorities to escape their poverty



Students at the Chakma school in Arunachal Pradesh Photo: SNEHA

(see p. 2); they must improve their own human resources. Education is vital for this.

### Education

Chakma children in AP have very limited access to state-provided education. State-provided teacher ratios are as low as 1:300. There is little cultural appreciation of the value of literacy in this predominately farming people, who rely mainly on paddy and a few cash crops for a subsistence living. The school dropout rate is as high as 95%. Many Chakmas grow up expecting to be harassed, assaulted and despised. They have been routinely prevented from participating in literary activities, games and sports.

Now, a few educated and dedicated Chakmas (with some prominent supporters, some of whom are Hindu) want to change this position. A grant from the National Foundation for India allowed SNEHA to start a Chakma primary school in 2003. The school hopes to upgrade every year to achieve the Secondary Senior level. Recently, 148 children attended. Students are taught in three languages: their mother tongue, Hindi and English. From Grade III onwards, they are taught only in Hindi and English. The attendance rate in the area served by this school (see photo) is now 98%.

SNEHA aims to provide value-based education based on five core universal values: truthfulness, righteous conduct, peace, love and non-violence. The school stresses the following areas:

- \* Promoting reading habits in children and their parents.
- \* They want their children to be good human beings first. 'Smart' can come later.
- \* Creating environmental awareness

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refugees in their own land

# The silent tsunami

Just after the last issue of *BODHI Times* was distributed, the Asian tsunami killed more than 270,000 people and injured hundreds of thousands more. It also devastated many towns, villages and other forms of coastal infrastructure. Children were unusually vulnerable. From the Indonesian province of Aceh, on the northern tip of Sumatra, Dr. Stuart Collins wrote:

'The tent reminds me of a refugee camp I visited yesterday. Of 1077 total population, only 26 were aged under five. You would expect 150 kids in a population that size. Of those 26, almost all were under 2, perhaps safe in their mother's arms while their older siblings were swept away. There was only one three-year-old and no four-year-olds in the entire camp.'

This natural catastrophe has increased attention on the poverty and vulnerability of many people in poor countries, strengthening the recent shift towards a higher profile for foreign aid, evident for example in the Commission for Africa, chaired by United Kingdom Prime Minister, Tony Blair. Consistent with this higher profile and evident since the Jubilee movement (for debt relief) in the late 1990s has been the fanfare over the Millennium Development Goals. To strengthen the evidence of progress (or otherwise) towards these goals, a team commissioned by the World Health Organisation has just reported its findings into the cause of death in children under the age of five. This figure approaches 11 million children per annum, almost all of whom are in developing countries. Only four infectious diseases—pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria and neonatal pneumonia or sepsis—account for more than half (54%) of these deaths. Undernutrition was found to be a similarly important factor, especially contributing to the infectious diseases. An additional 20% of these deaths were attributed to premature delivery and asphyxia at birth, causes which could be prevented by access to reasonable health care.

While not all of these deaths could be avoided, even if there were excellent medical care, we can assume—very conservatively—that 75% would be. This therefore equates to the deaths of more than 300,000 poor children every fortnight. This death toll represents a silent tsunami whose constant repetition—together with the diffuse and anonymous nature of the victims—defies broader interest and publicity.

Bare statistics do not reveal the human suffering implied by these premature deaths. This suffering is experienced not only by sick children but also by many of their families. Almost 4 million of these deaths

It is undeniable that the suffering of the tsunami warranted and stimulated a massive and urgent response. In contrast, the everyday suffering of the poor goes unnoticed. Perhaps this response is understandable, given that we remain essentially tribal beings. People living in villages in Burundi, Bihar, or Belize are a long way from the experience (even virtual, such as on television or the Internet) of most people who will read this, and the fate of our children is hardly of concern to most villagers.

occur to neonates (babies younger than 28 days). It is sometimes argued that the practice, common in many developing countries, of delayed naming of children signifies parental indifference. If anything, this practice suggests the reverse. If parents really were indifferent to the fate of their children (a biologically implausible argument), then what would it cost to lose a named child? Instead, delayed naming is more likely to represent a socially sanctioned way to try to disengage from and lessen the grief parents feel upon the death of a child.<sup>1</sup> As a medical student I was briefly in Nigeria, where to be childless was a great stigma. WTBP (Wants To Be Pregnant) was a catch-all diagnosis for any childless woman with a vague complaint. It therefore follows that children are likely to be valued.

It is far more likely that it is we who are indifferent to the deaths of children in developing countries. Not only are the children young and not only do they perish from illness: in the slums (favelas) of Rio de Janeiro, an estimated 4,000 teenagers died last year from gunshot wounds, ten times the number of children who died in the much better published Israeli-Palestine conflict.

## Who is indifferent?

I mentioned a radio interview with the economist Jeffrey Sachs (see *BODHI Times* 27) to a medical colleague, who not only expressed indifference about the death of children in Africa but also volunteered that such deaths were desirable 'to keep the numbers down.' This belief, surely more common than is voiced, is misinformed. For a start,

while premature deaths undoubtedly slow population growth, the total population in many parts of the developing world continues to increase. More fundamentally, what good comes from these deaths? Would it not be better to avoid them by better health care, voluntary child spacing, and more economic opportunities? As well, increased child survival is very valuable in societies where social security is best provided by healthy adult children.

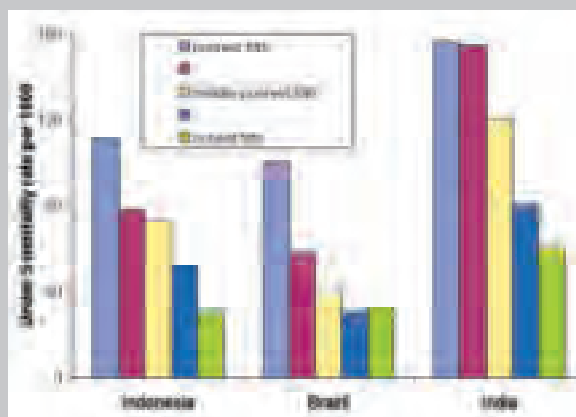
## Indian pride

Two countries affected by the tsunami declined all foreign assistance: India and Burma. India is rapidly becoming a major economic and military power. But it remains a country of high inequality, with an apparently extraordinary cultural capacity to tolerate the deaths of poor children. The figure below, adapted from an article in *The Lancet*<sup>2</sup> shows the under 5 mortality rate by quintile (fifths) for three populous developing countries. The rates in Indonesia—which accepted billions of dollars in tsunami aid—are much lower than in India. The death rate in India for children under 5 in the poorest fifth was about 150 per 1000. Even more astonishingly, the death rate for the second poorest fifth is almost as high. Above, I argued that it is unlikely that individual parents are indifferent to these deaths. But it seems plausible that wider Indian society and culture in fact is largely indifferent.

The cover story about the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh highlights one small example of official Indian indifference and discrimination. The 'new-Buddhist' followers of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (see opposite) are another comparatively poor Indian community whose very existence is a response to cultural discrimination. The graph suggests that other forms of discrimination continue to flourish in India, including, but not limited to scores of millions of lower-caste Hindus.

**References** (full references at [www.bodhi.net.au](http://www.bodhi.net.au))

1. Einarsdóttir J., *Tired of weeping: mother love, child death, and poverty in Guinea-Bissau*, 2nd ed, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.
2. Victora C.G., et al. 2003 'Applying an equity lens to child health and mortality: more of the same is not enough,' *The Lancet* 362: 233-241.



## Refugees in their own land, from p.1

by planting trees, gardening, discouraging the use of plastic, and explaining the consequences of deforestation, which is widespread in AP.

\* Instilling awareness of the importance of hygiene, cleanliness, social service and responsibility through cleaning their own campus and the premises of the local Buddhist temple.

\* Providing students with games and sports.

\* Trying to find funds for cultural activities, such as purchase of musical instruments; teaching children to sing patriotic songs.

BODHI is providing an initial grant to be used to enable a pay increase for the dedicated Chakma teachers of IRs/-300 per month.

### Health

Health will improve not only by reduced poverty but also by the greater knowledge and behavioural changes that education (especially literacy) allows. Health facilities to the Chakmas are very limited but may follow if funds allow. Dysentery, diarrhoea, elephantiasis and typhoid are common. 'The nutritional status of the Chakma children is very pitiable. Pregnant and lactating mother do not get sufficient nutrition ... all ... live in an environment characterised by malnutrition, undernourishment, poor shelter, dearth of safe drinking water and sanitation,' Susanta says. See our website for more details.

For further information about SNEHA, please see [www.sneha.org.in](http://www.sneha.org.in).

### Ways for you to participate

1 teacher's salary for 1 yr	IRs/-	36,000
Teachings aid & equipment		20,000
Games and sports		10,000
Cultural activities		10,000
Books and stationery 750 ea x 240 students		180,000
Library books		100,000
Teachers' training		50,000
Medicines, water, electricity		22,000

100 Indian rupees (IRs/-) = A\$2.97 & US\$2.29 on Apr 15, 2005

## Other news ...

Colin has been commissioned by WHO to assist Prof. Tony McMichael to write a key background paper for the Bangkok Declaration, which will replace the 1986 Ottawa Charter (for Health Promotion). This paper covers emerging health problems, the patchy demographic and health transitions and globalisation, among other topics.

The Revolving Sheep Bank has been used as a model by The Bridge Fund ([www.bridgefund.org](http://www.bridgefund.org)) for its yak and livestock programs in Tibet.

Congratulations to BODHI supporters BR Gurjar and his wife, Anita, on BRG's appointment as Assistant Professor (Environmental Engineering) in the Dept. of Civil Engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Roorkee (<http://www.iitr.ac.in/>). The engineering college in this 'city of intellects' was once the first such school in the British Empire.

**New-Buddhists in central India.** Colin has been invited to attend two conferences and a ceremony in October to mark the 49th anniversary of the conversion to Buddhism of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, India's first attorney-general and principal architect of the Indian constitution. Born an 'untouchable' but educated in India, the U.K. and the U.S., Ambedkar's conversion was prompted by the intractable structural cruelty and rigid discrimination of the Hindu caste system. Well over 20 million Indians have since followed his example and now constitute by far the largest Buddhist community in India today.

### Working with Grameen

**Tsunami Orphans Project, Sri Lanka.** Details are being discussed as this goes to press. We'll let you know more next time.

**Cambodian Orphanage Project.** BODHI has long wanted to work in Cambodia but has been reluctant because of the level of official corruption and lack of a specific connection. However, Grameen Foundation Australia recently assumed management of three orphanages in Siem Reap and we may be able to assist there.

The **Philippines Education Project** (see *BODHI Times* 27) is just getting off the ground and we've sent our initial funds. More as it develops.

## Thank you

Prof. Bob Douglas, ACT, Australia  
Dr. Bryan and Anne Furnass, ACT, Australia  
Ikuko Kurata, Hawaii, USA  
Mamie & Merle McGee, California, USA  
Graham Ranft & Angela Douglas, ACT, Australia  
Drs. Ron and Rennie D'Souza, ACT, Australia  
Dr. Roscoe Taylor, Tasmania, Australia

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Cambodian Orphans Project  
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Philippines Education Project  
Victoria Scott & Tony Misch, California, USA  
Tsunami Orphans Project  
& Audrey Meltzer for Internet research

**Tsunami debate.** BODHI's directors are having an ongoing debate about tsunami relief. Like everyone else, we feel deeply concerned and want to do what we can to help affected peoples. On the other hand, so much cash has been donated that aid agencies are delaying its disbursement. So what do we do? We are accepting donations but will wait until urgent infrastructure needs are met. We hope to become involved in a long-term project, possibly in Sri Lanka.

## We need your help

Thanks to your generosity, BODHI has supported many exciting and innovative projects, such as continuing education for remote health workers, literacy (a key to better health) and micro-credit for Tibetan nomads.

To continue, we need your help. Please send your donation, in U.S. or Australian dollars, to an address below. Contact us for details of direct-debit facilities.

### Donations by U.S. and Australian taxpayers are tax-deductible

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# Revolving Sheep/Goat Bank

Prof. Melvyn C. Goldstein submitted the following interim report.

## Overview

As a result of a longitudinal research project led by Professors Melvyn Goldstein and Cynthia Beall in the nomadic pastoral area called Phala (in Namring district west of Xigatse and Lhaise) from 1986-2000, a cost-effective solution to the problem of the long-term poverty of a segment of the Tibetan nomad population emerged—a revolving sheep/goat bank.

Funds were secured from Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight (BODHI) to create a pilot revolving sheep bank that would lend 50 fertile female sheep to poor families for five years. Recipients kept all the products (offspring, milk, wool, butter and cheese) from these borrowed sheep but were required to repay the same number of fertile female sheep they received in two payments, half (25) after the fourth year, and the remaining half in the fifth year.

The goal of this aid program, therefore, was not only to provide a one-time welfare grant to poor nomad families so that the recipient households can attain economic self-sufficiency, but also to ensure that the local community obtained the capital for a self-perpetuating animal bank that will be able to continue to assist needy families indefinitely in that locality.

## Operationalization: trial program

The pilot project was implemented in adjacent sections of two nomad areas (xiang) for five years. Each year 4 poor nomad households in this area received 50 fertile ewes purchased with project funds at a fair local price from richer nomads with excess animals. Each household in the project signs a formal loan agreement and each is co-signed by a guarantor.

The project was begun in 2000. Since then it has provided funds to enable the local governments (xiang) to purchase 200 ewes in year 01 and in each of the next four years [see our website for table]. Households use the animals for 4 years and then repay ½ of their loan in year 04 (2004) in fertile female sheep (without interest). The remaining half will be paid in year 05 (2005). Thus, in year 04, each of the 4 households who received sheep in year 01 will pay back 25 fertile sheep or a total of 100 sheep to the xiang. The project provides funds for an additional 100-200 sheep, so in year 04, sheep can be once again loaned to new families.

In year 05, each of the households who received a loan of sheep in Year 01, pays back the remaining 25 sheep they owe for a total of 100 sheep to the xiang. At the same time, each of the households who received sheep in year 02, pay back the first half



Nomad in Phala, Tibet

Photo: Yonden

of what they owe, which is 25 sheep per household, for a total of another 100 sheep. Thus, in year 05, the xiang's RSB receives 200 sheep in repayment of its loans and these are given out to 4 new families as new loans. From year 05 on, therefore, the RSB will receive 200 ewes in repayment each year and will be completely self-sufficient. The sheep bank would then continue to lend to needy families. The expectation is that at the end of the loan period, the families who have used the sheep for 5 years will have reached lower middle income subsistence.

This level of payback is possible because sheep reproduce quickly. Newborn sheep/goats get pregnant in their 2nd year and give birth in their 3rd year. Thus, even assuming 10% annual mortality of adult sheep and 30% annual mortality of lambs, at the end of 5 years the revolving bank could be repaid in full and each household would have roughly 100-125 sheep left from the loan (plus having received the income from the wool of their sheep over the 5 year period, as well as the milk and butter). Data from some previous years revealed that mortality of newborns was low and survivorship high.

## Preliminary results reported by nomad xiang

Yonden, our go-between with the nomads, forwarded the following tables that were prepared by the two local governments in the summer 2004 [see website for tables].

## Future work

Dr. Goldstein will try to visit these nomad areas in [northern] summer 2005 and evaluate the impact of the trial program.

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## What people are saying about the Revolving Sheep Bank

*'We are very happy to learn that the project is very successful. It would be a pity to discontinue the Sheep Bank.'*

*Kasur Tenzin Geyche Tethong, private secretary to His Holiness XIV Dalai Lama*

*I wish all success for this wonderful project in Tibet.*

*Tsegyam, Representative, Office of Tibet, Taiwan*

*This is the type of assistance we would like outside agencies to provide in Tibet ... I hope it will become a model for other areas and the benefit can spread.*

*Tashi Wangdi, Representative, Office of Tibet, New Delhi*

*'I want to emphasize that this Revolving Sheep Bank is something every development program seeks but rarely achieves—namely, a project that one does and then is continued by the local people on a self-sustaining basis. It is easy to give welfare money, or even to loan sheep, but not to get repaid. That is why I thought a great deal about how to make this work, and developed the idea of a 5-year program. The reason for this was that unless the recipients were given enough time to use the loan to build up their own herds, they will not be in a position to repay the loans, so the idea of self-sustainability would be lost and it would be just welfare.'*

*'And this has worked. It took time, but by being patient we have created something that is self-sustaining. We have created a fund for these people that they now have and can maintain on their own in the years ahead and use at they see fit to help poor nomads to change their lives. We have given them a way to help poor people in the years ahead without us. That is something truly wonderful.'*

*'Your support for this under very difficult conditions has been fantastic and I want to really thank you and BODHI personally and on behalf of those nomads in Phala.'*

*Professor Melvyn C. Goldstein*