

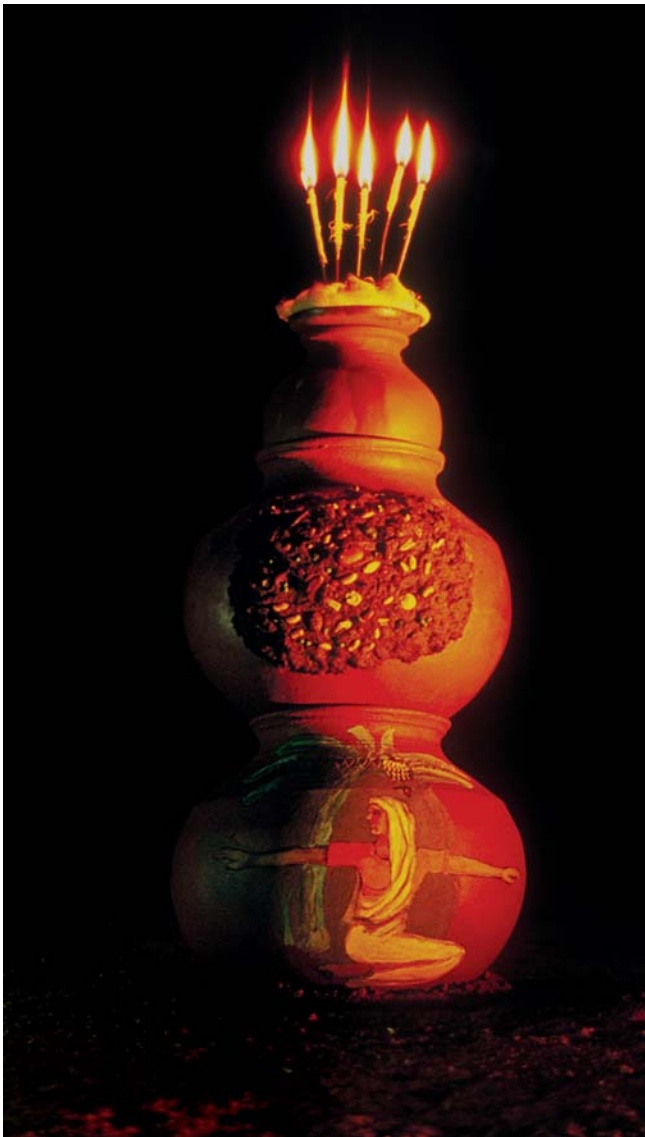
Vistas

A News Letter from Visthar
Issue 2, January 2007

Towards Justpeace

We have had a spate of festivals in the past months, each celebrating memories and hope of the conquest of evil, of an era of prosperity and blessings of the elder for the well being of the community as a whole. Celebrations of Onam and Dusserah were special events at Visthar and fast becoming an annual feature we all look forward to. We have also reached milestones with the Social, Justice, Peace and Development programme completing its tenth year and the Bandhavi programme celebrating its first.

The communal violence that rocked Mangalore City and several parts of South Kanara district was a reminder of the culture of hate and crime that has become integrated to our life in society. If we take seriously the media reports, then we must also acknowledge that the profiling of Muslims and the brutality of the police force are core to the violence and carnage. The culture of fear and hatred spreads across boundaries with the recent attacks on *suspected* Al-Qaeda hideouts in Somalia where, as in most attacks, civilians paid the price. These attacks will now unleash more terror and fear, as new spaces are



invaded. In the midst of political intolerances, we have had to grapple with the gruesome killings of children in Noida, reiterating that children continue to be at varied forms of risk.

We understand our life and work within this framework. How do we keep hope alive in a culture of violence? Not discounting the violence of development, how do we sustain the battles of those waging peace? How can we draw inspiration from the struggles of the people at Plachimada as they continue to stand valiantly and defy ‘the goliath’? We continue to believe in the impossible: that another world is possible. Our organizational goals are modest and we strive to ensure that Justpeace will be a hallmark of our life and work.

Transforming Lives and Pedagogies

A decade ago a friend of Visthar, Dr. Desmond D’Abreo, encouraged David Selvaraj to take up the task of coordinating a single semester inter disciplinary academic programme for university students from the United States. Having accepted the challenge David along with Mercy Kappen and the Visthar team ensured not only continuity of the programme but constant course revision. Today the *Social Justice, Peace and Development* (SJPD) programme is in its tenth year. It is not only our flagship academic programme but considered a stellar study abroad programme by our partner colleges in the USA. This provided us an impetus to accept another challenge: ‘scripting’ a second semester long course in collaboration with the Christian Conference of Asia, Documentation of Activists Groups in Asia, and Asia Pacific Alliance of YMCAs entitled The School of Peace.

You must be the change you wish to see in the world.

— Mahatma Gandhi

Social Justice, Peace and Development

On September 2nd, sixteen American students and their professor, Dr. Per Anderson, arrived at the airport in Bangalore; it seemed only moments later when on December 18th that they boarded the plane to return to the US. In the mean time, the tenth batch of *Social Justice, Peace, and Development: A Semester in India*, brought excitement and insight to the Visthar campus. SJPD is an ongoing partnership between Visthar, Gustavus Adolphus College (Minnesota, USA), and Concordia College (Minnesota, USA). The course has come to encompass four modules, including: Globalization and the Ethics of Development; Identity, Resistance, and Liberation; Religion, Culture and Society in India; Environment, Ecology and Livelihood.

The students took lectures from preeminent scholars and guest lecturers, as well as spending extensive time “in the field”: traveling, visiting partner NGO’s, and interacting with local communities. There was also a strong reading and research component; Lauren Fulner made the following reflection on her reading: “I’m reading the book *Healing a Broken World* and came upon a quote that I realize encompasses my experience in SJPD; it is the concept of ‘Being compelled to redefine your world.’ I have been challenged through a multitude of experiences here to reexamine my role in the global community.”





Professor Parasuraman of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, challenged the students to continue this redefinition during his key note address for the SJPD Valedictory ceremony, held on the 16th of December at the Visthar campus. The Valedictory brought together the students, their lecturers and advisors, their homestay families, as well as distinguished guests for a celebration of ten years of alternative education. The program had a tone appropriate to the course as a whole: a serious approach to contemporary issues, with wisdom offered from excellent minds, capped off with fun and good food.

One of the goals of SJPD is to remain on the brink of new issues, engaging problems as they emerge in the Indian and international context, and is shaped to reflect the challenges and changes taking place in India and the world as a whole. Facilitating SJPD 2006 meant a return to Visthar for Professor Per Anderson, who had previously led a group of students. Professor Anderson

Having led this program in 2000, I am amazed at the changes and dynamics at play in India today and find our questions more engaging and perplexing than ever. As India undergoes change, so too does SJPD.

Prof. Per Anderson, Concordia College,
M.N, USA

David Selvaraj has been actively involved in SJPD since its inception, and has watched the program evolve into its current

form. “I think there is a growing appreciation for this partnership between the two colleges. It may have started as simply a study abroad program, but I think ten years of doing this has established an authentic partnership... I see a seriousness, an intellectual curiosity, a certain sensitivity increasing in the students. I am pleased how the course has gone thus far, and I think it has a great scope for learning, unlearning, and relearning.” The 2006 batch certainly reflected a variety of backgrounds and experiences with students of Biology to History to Dance, and explored a range of interests while here at Visthar. Thus, the tenth year was as explosive and challenging as the first, and ushered in another decade of this special learning partnership.

The thing that I appreciate about Visthar and the curriculum is that Visthar is so committed to transformative politics. This is definitely what I was looking for in coming to study.

Ellen Vessels, KNOX College, M.N. USA

School of Peace moves into second year

“Moving from tolerance to acceptance to engagement” was one of the themes a group of 16 young people from around Asia and representing different faiths, grappled with during the School of Peace 2006 held at Visthar from January 28 to May 15, 2006. The sixteen participants, 7 men and 9 women, took special notice of the great diversity which makes up our individual and community identities and how the present system of globalization is trying to transform that diversity into a uni-cultural community where differences are seen as a problem rather than an asset. By learning how to engage people who are different, rather than just tolerating or accepting them, the participants strove to find ways to use this diversity to transform our very conflicted world into communities of justice and peace.



Enabling Enablers: Perspectives and Skills for Civil Society

Over the years our efforts in capacity building has had a specific thematic focus: gender diversity and development. This in part is due to the expertise of staff in Visthar and secondly the growing awareness among Civil Society Organisations of the need to mainstream gender concerns into the development debate and praxis.

In the last year we have had three major workshops, the first on the theme of Gender, Poverty and Rights, the second on Institutionalizing Gender within Organisations and programs, both facilitated by Mercy Kappen and Ranjani Krishnamurthy. The third was facilitated by Dr. Sundari Ravindran on the theme of Gender Sexuality and Reproductive Rights here at Visthar.

After completing the three and a half month encounter with different faiths, ethnicities, cultures and languages, the participants returned to their home communities to try and incorporate their learnings into their work with the marginalized communities. At the same time they continue to explore ways to strengthen the regional network formed during the course so they can support and encourage each other in the difficult task of working for transformation at the personal as well as societal levels.

In February 2007, the School of Peace will go into its second year and continue to have its base at Visthar with staff from Visthar facilitating the learning experience and ensuring the overall administration of the programme.

We have also collaborated with KROSS in organizing a series of workshops on Gender and Governance. Latha Reddy coordinated these efforts and is currently negotiating the next phase. Hopefully taking the initiative to a campaign phase in which the elected women representatives of the Panchayat would organize themselves to ensure policies and programmes of the State will bring benefit to the community of the poor and ensure women's participation in political decision making.

Besides our own programmes, the campus is made available to a host of individuals and organizations who use the facility for stay and, or study. Several of these invite staff at Visthar to facilitate specific sessions. Different members of the team facilitated several sessions on a range of themes for Teachers Trainees from the Netherlands (a programme organized and facilitated by Edukans in the Netherlands), a team from the Oxford Diocese (UK), students from the Centre for American Studies and UESI, and a team from Holy Cross Sisters (Bangalore).

Peace is a never-ending process, the work of many decisions by many people in many countries. It is an attitude, a way of life, a way of solving problems and resolving conflicts. It cannot be forced on the smallest nation or enforced by the largest. It cannot ignore our differences or overlook our common interests. It requires us to work and live together.

Oscar Arias Sanchez

Three things Cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon and the truth.

Buddha



Journeying with the poor

Bandhavi: Towards dignity, freedom and life

It is one year since we launched Bandhavi – a residential programme for girls at risk of being dedicated as Devadasis. We celebrated the first anniversary at Bandhavi with music, song, dance and reflections. Currently 71 children are part of the programme and owing to the need for such an initiative we are working on increasing the numbers to a 100. The girls continue to receive holistic care and nurture with a focus on spiritual, physical and psychological well being. They attend the *Samagra Shikshana Shaale*, a school for girls on our campus and are forging ahead in their studies. Their creativity and skills are honed while they attend drama classes, prepare for performances and events at Visthar, produce greeting cards and paper products, and work on their kitchen garden. We hope to see our first batch of children sit for the Karnataka Open School examinations in 2008.

The children have had an enriching year with their many interactions with people from different parts of India and the world. Learning about different cultures, people, languages and ways of life has broadened the children's perspectives.

We are grateful to Kindernothilfe (KNH) Germany and Edukans for their support and contribution to the programme. Our thanks go out to all the individual donors who support the children.

More information on Bandhavi is available in *Sambrama* – a Bandhavi newsletter.

Building Team

The annual retreat has become a definite feature in our calendar. Since we plan this every year in January it also provides for a timely opportunity to set our organizational goals and plans for the year in place.

Visthar spent three days at Timbaktu Collective at Pennakonda in Andhra Pradesh in January 2006. Situated amidst hills that have been transformed from an arid brown to a verdant green by the staff and the people from the villages near by, it was the perfect spot for our annual retreat. We spent a day in silence, contemplating and reflecting on ourselves, our work, the world and context we live and work in, and our present environment. After a talk by Mr. Babloo Ganguly on Freedom and Fear, we spent the rest of our time planning for the year ahead, setting goals and laying down what we wanted to achieve. The Bandhavi children accompanied us on the trip and interacted with the children in the local residential school.

The retreat for the year 2007 focused on self, the other, and the organization. Spending a day on campus and then moving for two days to Shanthi Sadhana, the retreat was a time to explore our identities and the



implications these had on our work. We also looked at gender and organization and began a process wherein we work out our own approaches to the issue of gender. Through Augusto Boal's *theatre of the oppressed*, we analyzed situations of oppression in our own lives and society. A yearly review was conducted with plans for the year and a commitment to a sincere follow up.

Staff Matters

Both by way of enhancing our capacities and creatively responding to increasing programme needs we have appointed several staff, since the last time we have communicated with you. We welcome the following and wish them a fruitful time at Visthar.

- Mr. M. Francis takes on the responsibility of Assistant Director, Finance.
- Ms. Christina Mary joins Mr. Francis in the Finance Department as Accounts Assistant.
- Ms. Sailaja Kamal Gopinath has been appointed as Programme Head for the Samagra Shikshana Shaale.
- Mr. Sebastian P.M. is appointed as Programme Head for our community initiatives and agriculture work.
- Ms. Mary Jerusalina joins us as Programme Head for Bandhavi.
- Ms. Rathi Shetty is our new houseparent at Bandhavi.
- Mr. Shankar, Mr. Raju Rathod and Ms. Radha join as teachers at Samagra Shikshana Shaale.
- Ms. Carol Shatananda Richard now joins us as Programme Head for Communications and Fundraising (Visthar – Bandhavi).

The earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth... All things are connected like the blood which unites one family.

Chief Seattle

In the Pipeline

P. G. Diploma Courses

A long dream is being fulfilled. We are negotiating with a premiere Social Science academic institution for accreditation for our course. We hope in the not so distant future. Visthar will offer two courses (P.G. Diploma) in Gender and Diversity Studies and Development and Peace Studies.

People's Forum for Democracy, Peace and Development

Visthar is in the process of expanding our work in North Karnataka with integrated community actions for peace and democracy. Promoting a people's forum of NGOs, academics, journalists and other progressive forces committed to the issues of democracy, peace and development Visthar will focus on issues of migration and migrant labor, child labor and the devadasi system. Interventions will be in the areas of constructive development activities, advocacy and campaigns, and research and development.

Alternatives in Living and Learning

And what's new at RLC?

A new block with twin sharing rooms and attached baths will be opened early this year. The block will have a separate kitchen and dining room and a large meeting space for conferences, seminars and receptions with a capacity for 150 persons.

Another long time dream is the establishment of Poorna Swasthya a centre for wholistic health at Visthar. As an initial step towards this project, the RLC will offer guests herbal treatments and ayurvedic massages. Besides this, we are in the process of offering services in holistic healing and stress management.

The Mandala, Orchard theatre, Mallige, cottage, classrooms, Aala and library continue to be used by our guests.

Our Guests

The Resource and Learning Centre was privileged and happy to serve the following guests in the past year.

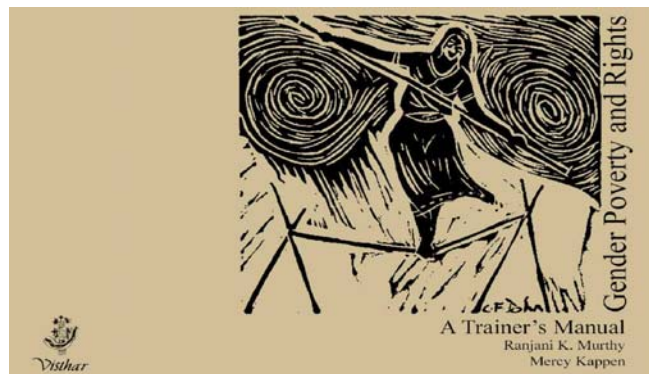
Teachers and students from Sameeksha, Malya Aditi International School, Gordon College, Prakruti Green Wisdom School and Shrishti School of Arts. The pastors and congregation from New life fellowship, St. John's Church, St. Paul's Church, Hebron A.G. Church, Namdiae Seong, Apostolic Church, and Richmond Town Methodist Church.

We were happy to have World Vision, Development Focus, Caritas Bangladesh, Centre for Education and Documentation, Prakriya, Swasti, New LEAD Trust, Rafiki, Rev. Mike Butterworth and team from Oxford Diocese, Rev. John Donso, pastor of United Reform Church in the UK, and Prof. Douglas Huff from Gustavus Adolphus College.

Some of the above have been with us on earlier occasions and we are grateful for their custom. Others who have been with us for the first time, we hope you have enjoyed our services and will return.

Publications and Products

Visthar is proud to present our latest publication *Gender, Poverty and Rights: A Trainers Manual* by Ranjani K. Murthy and



Mercy Kappen, a first in a series of manuals. It has been conceptualized to familiarize facilitators with current debates on gender and poverty issues. The manual is priced at Rs. 200 and is available at Gangarams, Asian Trading Corporation, Books for Change, Streelekha and Visthar.

Besides the above publication, we also stock dossiers, produced by Visthar on the following themes.

- Gender, Poverty and Rights
- Gender, Culture and Social Transformation
- Gender, Sexuality and Reproductive Rights
- Mainstreaming Gender within Organizations and Programmes

Recycled handmade paper and paper products

Currently we have two women apprentices from the village. With time and steady orders we can enlarge our potential to recruit them on a regular basis. The unit is being used by several educational institutions in Bangalore city. Students and staff use the facility and the services for learning the art of making paper and product.

Marketing our products has been the weakest link on our multipronged activities related to the paper unit. We are exploring a niche market overseas and in the process attempting to partner a newly founded "Non Profit" in the United States. More on this, in our next newsletter.

Calendar 2007

Bandhavi presents its first calendar produced by the children. The theme of the calendar chosen by the children is environment to which they have contributed the art work and helped with the making of paper. The Calendar is on sale and the proceeds will go towards the Bandhavi project. Orders can be placed through Visthar.

Alliance building and partnerships

At Visthar we are constantly exploring ways of building authentic partnerships of sharing, learning and growing together. We see the possibility of internships for youth from overseas as an opportunity to build a 'people's globalization'.

We acknowledge with gratitude the partnerships that we have been enriched by over the years especially with Kerkinactie/ GM-PCN (formerly UCN), Edukans and Kinder Not Hilfe (Germany). It is their support and sensitive accompaniment that has made our journey meaningful.

Pakistan – India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy

Visthar is a member of the Pakistan – India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy. The first joint declaration of the forum was announced at Lahore in September 1994 with the objective of facilitating common voices of both countries that are different from the "belligerent voices of the respective Governments". Concerned groups from both countries come together to formulate strategies to promote peace and strengthen democracy in the sub-continent. The groups consist of democratic rights activists, trade unionists, issue-based mass movements, environmentalists, women's movements, artists, writers, social workers, professionals, academicians, students and scientists who have come together in a concerted attempt to persuade their respective governments to enter into meaningful negotiations and adopt policies that will reduce tensions and pave way for lasting peace and friendship.

We announce the launching of our website www.visthar.org. Information on Visthar and ways in which you can get involved are online.



Visthar

Dodda Gubbi Post, Bangalore - 562 149

Ph: +91 80 28465294 / 295, 65349492

email: visthar@vsnl.com, website: www.visthar.org

Editorial Team: Mercy Kappen, David Selvaraj, Biju John, Carol Shatananda

Towards a 'globalization' of young minds

Visthar's ongoing commitment to education, justice and peace brings many flavors of people to its campus; certainly included are the many interns who have spent time here over the years. Two new faces at Visthar last year were Maria de Jong and Lindsay Fox. Maria came to Visthar in conjunction with the London-based "Training in Mission" programme. Training in Mission involves technical training, two one-month field placements, followed by a final paper and reflection. Originally from the Netherlands, Maria has already spent five months in South Africa. While at Visthar, Maria focused primarily on child development, instructing games and recreation at the Samagra Shikshana Shaale, as well as other Visthar programs.

Lindsay arrived at Visthar in August and is here till February. A recent graduate of Gustavus Adolphus College in the US, Lindsay is an alumna of SJPD 2004. Returning to Visthar as an intern, acted as a liaison to the 2006 SJPD program, and taught English by way of social justice Theatre at SSS and Bandhavi.

Both women were happy and excited to be a part of the Visthar team and have learnt much from their many mentors here.

An invitation to journey with us

We value your friendship and support and hence request you to

- Send us your feedback
- Furnish us with your contact details
- Put us on to your mailing list
- Contribute to any one of our projects

Board of Trustees

Dr. K.C. Abraham	Mr. David Selvaraj
Ms. Ammu Joseph	Mr. P.S. Nagarajan
Ms. Mercy Kappen	Dr. Mohan Larbeer
Mr. Thomas Paul	Prof. Muzaffar Assadi
Ms. Ranjani K. Murthy	

Dodda Gubbi Post, Bangalore - 562 149

Ph: +91 80 28465294 / 295, 65349492

email: visthar@vsnl.com, website: www.visthar.org

Editorial Team: Mercy Kappen, David Selvaraj, Biju John, Carol Shatananda