



Editor: Vijai Singhal

Hindu Council of Australia Ltd



17 The Crescent, Homebush, NSW 2140, Australia



Phone: 02 8250 4007

Fax: 02 9746 8944

*Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah* ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः ॐ May Everybody Be Happy

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## NEWS LETTER

Vol.12 Oct - Dec 2007

Dear Friends,

I wish you all a very happy Deepavali. As you know we have been busy in organising the annual Deepavali fair, which was held on 21<sup>st</sup> Oct. at the Fairfield Showground. Hence, there has been a delay in publication of this quarterly issue of the Newsletter for which please accept my apologies.

We have maintained regular contact with other similar Hindu organisations in other parts of the world. This year Mr Vijai Singhal, on a personal visit has managed to attend the early morning (6:00 am) Havan ceremony at the Hindu Monastery at Kauai, He had an audience with Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami and held discussions with Paramacharya Palaniswami and Sannyasin Arumugaswami about the Hindu education publications of the Himalayan Academy.

In New York, Mr Singhal attended the annual fund-raising function of the Hindu American Foundation and met with its President, Dr Mihir Meghani and other members of the executive committee. In London, he also met with Mr Ramesh Kallidai, Secretary General of the Hindu Forum of Britain and discussed with him various projects that representative Hindu organisation has been able to undertake to lift the status of the Hindu community in UK.

In this issue of the Newsletter, we have included the details about the creditable work being done by SEWA International, one of our member organisations. We want to congratulate them for the excellent service being provided to the local community in Australia, in addition to the various projects being undertaken in India for disaster relief etc.

Also included in this issue are the details about a sister organisation called EKAL Vidyalaya. They are running one-teacher schools in the

backward areas of India to provide the very basic numeracy and literacy education to the poor village children. There are no government schools for them. They have been able to obtain Tax deductibility for donations in Australia. My heartiest congratulations to the executive members of this organisation. I strongly urge you to promote amongst your members donation to EKAL Vidyalaya. It is a very worthwhile effort, which needs our fullest support.

Please do circulate this Newsletter amongst your members. It is available in electronic form on our website.

Regards,

Dr. A. Balasubramaniam  
Chairman.

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### **SEWA International (Australia) Inc.**

Established in 1997, SEWA International (Australia) Inc. is a registered non-profit charity run by dedicated volunteers working together to serve humanity. SEWA is involved in several voluntary projects worldwide. Several hostels and projects in India and Sri Lanka are run under SEWA's support. SEWA's contribution across Australia:

**Anantharam (Care):** In moments of grief and distress, people need moral and material support. SEWA has recently initiated a project to visit inmates in correctional and detention centres. It is proposed to provide support to inmates through companionship, sharing religious festivals and offer any assistance that may come up from time to time.

**Blood Donation:** Regularly organizes blood donation camps to commemorate birthday of "Mahatma Gandhi" in association with

"Australian Red Cross" across various blood banks in Sydney.

**Senior Citizens:** Monthly meeting of senior citizens is organized at Liverpool and Parramatta. Informative talks and demonstrations are organized. Recreational activities are also arranged regularly.

**Clean up Australia:** On 1st Sunday of March every year, SEWA actively coordinates the clean-up in Doonside, Glenfield, Holsworthy, Liverpool, Wattlegrove and Woodcraft areas.

**Disaster relief:** During catastrophic times like the calamitous Orissa Cyclone, shattering Gujarat earthquake, tragic Tsunami (2004), disastrous floods in South India people had lost all their homes, belongings, kith and kin and were left without any worldly possessions. SEWA has rehabilitated millions of persons offering immediate food, clean drinking water, building housing colonies, cremating the deceased, providing medical facilities, re-establishing income potential by bestowing boats, sewing machines, tools, taxis and rickshaws. Australian volunteers of SEWA were able to send over \$70,000 for these long time rehabilitation projects and are committed to long term rehabilitation and support.

SEWA has taken up the following projects to rehabilitate rag-picking children, orphans and children from tribal and backward community by providing food, clothing, shelter and education in caring atmosphere. A few to mention are Nele (shelter - Bangalore), SEWAdham (orphanage - New Delhi), Vanavasi (tribal - Madhya Pradesh), Aruna Chetana (mentally/physically retarded - Bangalore), Janakalyan Samithi, Nasik (Students exchange programme from North-east to South-West)

You can help fund SEWA's programs through:  
**Sponsor a Child program:** With about \$1 a day (\$365 a year), you can sponsor a child's educational and living needs. A group of people can join together to sponsor a child/children.

**Mangala Nidhi (Generosity) scheme:** Donors are encouraged to set side a small amount on special occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries, house warming and festivals. SEWA collects these donations and utilizes them for ongoing projects.

**Light up a Child's Deepavali:** For as little as Five dollars (\$5) one can help "Light up a Child's Deepavali. Donors provide an

opportunity for a child to experience the joy and delight that most of us take for granted. Their contribution ensures a child gets decent sweets, boxful of crackers and new clothes this festival, probably be the first time they experience such extravagance in their lives.

**Fundraising activities:** Other fundraising programs such as dance performances, plays, and festival events are organized regularly. Encouraging local talent and participation these programs, besides raising funds bring different communities and cultures together.

This year SEWA is having a stall in Deepavali Mela at Fairfield show ground on 21st Oct 2007. Why not come and lend a hand on the day or the previous day. Volunteers are required for preparation of food, cooking, serving, driving and so on. If you have the inclination and time why not join SEWA team on the day.

You can also help by participating, through sponsorship, marketing, catering and in any other way you can. Do you want to? Why not call SEWA on 1300 00 SEWA (1300 00 7392) or mail [info@sewainternational.org.au](mailto:info@sewainternational.org.au)

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## Tax Deductible Donations

India appears to have made significant progress in many fields. However this progress has failed to improve the living conditions in many remote and isolated areas of the country.

The government machinery is either unable or unwilling to set up schools in these areas. Even if a school is set up in such an area, it is difficult to get and retain dedicated teachers for these schools. Even today over 90% of India's tribal population is illiterate and falls victim to evils like exploitation and frauds.

Ekal Vidyalaya movement offers a unique and cost effective approach to address this important issue and was formally launched in mid nineties. Ekal Vidyalaya literally means a single teacher school.

An Ekal Vidyalaya Class has between 30 and 40 children in the age group of 5 to 14 years, where children are offered 5 years of schooling and primary health care. The class is often conducted under the shade of a big tree or in a hut. The teachers are locally educated youths who are specially trained. The curriculum includes basic language, science and maths

skills. Character building, cultural values, health and hygiene are also integral part of education.

Only Rs 15000 (i.e. less than \$10 per week) a year is required to sponsor a school. To ensure ownership, a similar amount is contributed by the local community. Administrative cost is less than 10%.

EVF movement has spread to a number of countries including USA, UK, Canada, Hongkong, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand. To date over 23000 schools have been established throughout (almost in every state) India. The mission of Ekal Vidyalaya movement is to set up 100,000 Ekal schools by 2011. This will cover nearly all villages in India where no school exists today.

Each sponsor is assigned an internet login name and password so that the sponsor(s) can get any information about, and /or monitor the progress of, the school.

We are indebted to the people of India for our almost free education that enabled us to migrate to Australia and to have our current status. The best way to pay our debt, and our voluntary HECS (from Australian Perspective), is through a gift of education to unprivileged tribal and rural children of India by sponsoring a school and/or joining the EVF movement.

Even the government of Australia has come forward to advance this cause and has granted Tax Exemption status to EVF Australia. Accordingly all donations for sponsoring Ekal Schools are tax deductible in Australia. More than 200 persons of Indian origin living in Australia have joined this movement to sponsor more than 200 Ekal Schools and you can do your bit by joining this movement in any way you can.

For more information, please visit our web site at: [www.ekalvidya.org](http://www.ekalvidya.org) and / or contact:  
Jayendra Shah: 02-9614 4924, 0438621590,  
Anil Yadav: 02-9674 3839, 0402963762  
Nihal Agar: 02-9418 8824, Gopal Verma (Melbourne): 03-9803 1731, 0401 984 610  
Ashok Jain (Canberra) 02 6266 3157  
Dr S V Singh - QLD - (07) 4775 3190(ah)  
Rajeev Saxena - WA - (08) 9332 6786 (ah)  
Dr Rajeev Sharma - NT - (08) 8927 2259 (ah).

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*Learn to be happy alone. If we do not enjoy our own company, why inflict it on others?  
Swami Chinmayananda (1916-1993)*

## **Ganesh Idol Immersed With Great Fanfare Near Sydney**

Sydney, Sep 17: An idol of Hindu God Ganesh, decorated in all finery, sat firm as thousands of devotees followed in a procession chanting 'Ganpati Bappa Morya' to Stanwell Park beach here, as part of colourful celebrations for the Ganesh festival.

The elephant-headed god was immersed in the Pacific Ocean to the sounds of beating drums and chants Sunday as waves on low tide lashed the sandy beach, about 50 km south of Sydney's central business district.

The three-feet-tall idol was made of biodegradable material, like clay and papier mache. Ganesh is universally worshipped by all Hindus. Besides people from the sub-continent, There are Hindus from Bali, Thailand, Nepal, Singapore, Malaysia, Fiji, UK and Africa, who are all part of the growing Hindu population in Australia, According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2006 Census data, Hinduism has been one of the fastest growing religions. The number of Hindus has more than doubled since 1996 and is now 0.7 percent of the population.

Expatriate Indians visit the Sri Venkateswara Temple in Helensburgh, a small town on the outskirts of Sydney, throughout the year. But on Ganesh Visarjan (immersion) day, over 5,000 people participate in the festivities. Dignitaries who attended the ceremony this year included Attorney General Phillip Ruddock and his wife, and the mayor.

Children performed traditional Indian dances including Kathak, Bharatnatyam and folk dances. There were also stalls selling idols of various Hindu gods and goddesses, religious CDs. Volunteers served hot dosas, puris and other delicacies from the community kitchen. Women were in their finery - draped in beautiful Kanjeevarams, Patola and Dhakai saris, with flowers adorning their hair. Many men were dressed in traditional kurtas.

Special bus services were organised from Sydney for many new migrants and students without cars. This year there has been a phenomenal surge in numbers.

Sri Venkateswara Temple complex at Helensburgh is the first Hindu temple of its kind in Australia and has prompted the construction of similar temple complexes in other parts of the country. A landmark in the history of Hindu immigrants in Australia, the temple was built in

1985 in the traditional Dravidian style of architecture.

The Helensburgh Temple is unique because of its location near the sea, surrounded by bush land, its size, its beauty and the large number of shrines it houses. It has been referred to as 'a gem in the bush'.

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### **Celebrating Ramadan & Navratri Together**

Sydney, Sep 28: A group of international students in Australia are celebrating the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the Hindu festival of Navratri together.

Students of Fred Hollows College in Sydney are giving multicultural and religious tolerance a new meaning.

"There are only a few Muslim and Hindu students here in our residence, so we decided to celebrate both Ramadan as well as Navratri together. After all, it is the peak festive season for both the Hindu and Muslim community. We have done it last time too," Suraj Verma, a student told Indian Link, an ethnic Indian newspaper.

"It is difficult for an international student to follow Ramadan, especially during the break (Iftar) as most of them are preoccupied with the college and part time jobs. So, we have decided to help our Muslim brothers in our accommodation to prepare for Iftar and other things related to the holy month," Verma added.

Back in India, the festival of nine nights, dedicated to Goddess Durga is celebrated with fervour. Likewise, during the holy month of Ramadan, devout Muslims fast till dusk and observe strict abstinence.

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### **Traditions of Water Management in India**

NEW DELHI, INDIA, October 10, 2007: India was described as a Hydraulic Civilization by historians. Even when the British came to India about 250 years ago, India was urbanised and there were a number of towns, like Patna, Varanasi, Allahabad, built on riverbanks and other cities with tanks (reservoirs, often several acres) for water supply like Jodhpur, Jaisalmer and Bhopal. In south India, cities had temple tanks. Tens of thousands of water structures with diverse technologies, existed; more importantly, there were also management

structures to share and distribute water equitably. One of the best examples of how ancient and rich is the Indian tradition of water harvesting, is from the recent excavations of the Indus Valley civilization at Dholavira, in the Great Rann of Kutch, dating back to 3000 B.C. In an arid region with very little rainfall, devoid of any water sources from rivers, with poor quality groundwater, the people had created several huge reservoirs to collect rainwater. The design and technology was ingenious that allowed them to harvest all the rainwater and drain off excess water.

A variety of water harvesting techniques were developed, in an attempt to harvest every possible available form of water - from rainwater to groundwater, from stream water to river water and floodwater. In the hill and mountain regions people diverted water into channels or dykes to bring water for irrigation and they called them variously as *kuls*, *guls* or *kuhals*. In the central highlands and western part of the country, people built small dams across small rivers so that the water so captured gets recharged into the soil and provides moisture for the post-monsoon crops, called *pats* and *johads*. In the arid desert of Rajasthan, every kind of structure was built from small ponds (*nadis*) to wells (*kundis*, *baoris*, *jhalaras*) to large tanks or *talabs*.

In the south of India, where there are two monsoon seasons, the rulers built a large number of tanks, these tanks were built in a sequence sometimes of 25-30 tanks, which were fed by a stream. For instance, the ancient Palar dam system supplies water to 317 tanks. In the floodplains of Bihar, a system of canals and reservoirs diverted surplus flood waters to be used later.

The structures are maintained by a complex and interconnected system of community discipline and fiscal responsibility. Water was never considered free, but rather a responsibility of the community. The rulers never constructed these structures for the public, but rather provided fiscal incentives like tax exemptions that would motivate individuals and communities to build water harvesting structures. For instance, in Jodhpur, the Ranisar, situated within the fort was only meant for nobility and the common people used the Padamsar that was fed by runoff from the Ranisar. Rainwater harvesting - the paradigm of the past - has in it as much strength today as it ever did before. It can be used in rural areas to drought-proof the country.

[Newsletter compiled by Anusha Mahalingam](#)