



projects, women's conference, property rights .. more!

BODHI Times 53



Hello from BODHI Australia, and best wishes for 2019, our 30th birthday.

### **Sakyadhita Conference - The voice of Buddhist women in Australia**

In June 2019 the [16th Sakyadhita conference](#) will be held, for the first time in Australia. This is mainly for women, but men are also encouraged to go. Several invited speakers are interested in socially engaged Buddhism. These are large meetings, held every 2 years. The [previous one](#), in Hong Kong, attracted about 800 people from 31 countries. BODHI Australia has had an abstract accepted for a 20 minute presentation at this conference; an expanded version of our draft paper can be read [here](#). Four of us plan to attend. Some of you may also be interested in going - for an international conference registration and accommodation (in the hostel) is modest. It will be held in Leura, in the Blue Mountains, NSW, for 5 days. We are very much hoping that Karunadeepa, leader of the BODHI partner [Bahujan Hitay Women and Child Welfare Society](#), may also attend, during her first visit to Australia. (Tentative schedule [here](#).)

### **Indian projects update**

We have received a report for 2018 from the [Bahujan Hitay Women and Child Welfare Society](#). It can be read [here](#). In January 2019 we sent almost A\$14,000 to support a new intake of 50 students (mainly young women) to attend a 6 month course, provided by the [Aryaloka Education Society](#) in Nagpur, in Maharashtra (as is Pune). Many of these students are from small villages, some have never seen a computer when growing up. The scholarships are each worth 13,600 Indian rupees (about A\$280). Of these students, about 20 are not local. Living expenses for these students are provided by other donors. Colin visited these projects in early 2018, spending 5 days at each. His report about the Aryaloka Education Society is [here](#).

### **Precarious living in Patna, and a valuable research project**

Indian PhD student, [Sujeet Kumar](#) had a recent powerful [article](#) in The Conversation (open access). It contains several moving photographs. It reports on ongoing discrimination against the Indian poor, describing a case study in the ancient city of

Patna, known as [Pataliputra](#) in the Buddha's time, and site of the [Third Buddhist Council](#), in about 250 BCE, during the reign of King Asoka. Today, this is in a [dreadfully air-polluted](#) part of India.

The percentage (and the number) of slum dwellers in India is likely now higher than the 2011 census found (41% in Mumbai, an implausibly low 15% in Delhi). Another message is of insecurity. In Patna, and no doubt many other Indian cities, slum-dwellers have very few property rights. Homes can be bulldozed, with warnings given by loudspeaker (see photo of destroyed dwelling below, republished from the article). Kumar writes that in Patna even slums occupied for generations risk destruction, overseen by riot police. Sometimes, police are reported as using derogatory language, forcing their way into homes, and thrashing men.

India's urban (and total) population is still growing. Sujeet Kumar notes that more than 50% of India's population is forecast to be urban by 2030, and that this rapid population growth is a major challenge (additional strains exceed the growth in the capacity to absorb them, a theme of BODHI since our first newsletter, published in 1991). He also reports that local and mainstream media do not report these demolitions and forced evictions, especially outside the big cities. He laments that little interest is shown by civil society and NGOs, which he suggests is due to threats and other forms of intimidation.



Left: **Demolished homes at Meena Bazar, Patna**; photo Sujeet Kumar (click on picture for source).

Globally, according to UN Habitat's Slum Almanac, [one in eight people live in slums](#) where they face issues such as insecure housing and tenure, with insufficient access to safe drinking water and toilets.

The 2011 India census reported that at least [one in every six urban](#) residents lives in a slum; this figure is today likely to be higher.

In Patna, Mr Kumar found that 93% of slum dwellers are from the “scheduled castes” and “other backward castes” (based on data collected in 42 slums). There is considerable urban migration in India, mostly to slums, including in Pune (see image in footer).

He concludes: "Such demolitions reveal a dark side to making Indian cities smart and cast serious doubt on claimed government commitment to the urban poor. These actions hardly live up to the idea of the rights of the poor. It became more challenging

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when the head of the biggest democracy in the world denounces those who speak up for the poor, oppressed and voiceless as “urban Naxals””. The term Naxal (or Naxalite), well-known in India, is derived from the town of Naxalbari (West Bengal), the [site of an uprising by exploited tea plantation workers, in 1967](#). It is, today, a very disparaging term.

### [Is climate change a risk to civilization?](#)

Several of Colin's recent articles (open access) argue that climate change poses a risk to civilization (also argued by [David Attenborough](#)). These include an [essay](#) (Sydney Morning Herald) and a [paper](#) called "Climate change, health and existential risks to civilization: a comprehensive review (1989–2013)".

### [What is BODHI?](#)

Since 1989 BODHI has supported more than 50 development projects, always with partner NGOs, mainly in India, Bangladesh and the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China. BODHI is (as far as we know) the world's [fourth oldest](#) Buddhist influenced organisation focused on reducing poverty. His Holiness [the Dalai Lama](#) has been BODHI's patron since 1989. BODHI also works for social justice, particularly to encourage self-empowerment by dalits in India. We have also supported [Indigenous people of the Chittagong Hills, Bangladesh](#).

### [Reaching new donors](#)

Although we have funds to meet our existing commitments for several years very few new donors have recently emerged, and none who we have not personally met. If you are reading this but have never made a donation, you may think that \$20 is not worth the trouble. We assure you that it is. If you are already a donor (THANK YOU!), please consider forwarding this letter to someone you know. You may also phone, skype or [email us](#).

A recent [survey](#) found that the average Australian thinks that overseas aid accounts for 14% of the Federal budget (search for the word "aid"). The true figure, according to the Lowy Institute, is about 0.8%. However, the more common comparison is government donations as a percentage of gross national income. In Australia this is about [0.22%](#), or 22 cents in every \$100. Some countries, including [Norway](#) and Britain, give approximately 5 times as much, as a proportion.

### [How to support our work](#)

To help us continue (and expand) our work, please consider making a donation which you can do safely by clicking [here](#). We regret that we no longer accept credit card donations, but bank transfers, cheques and paypal are fine. (Bank transfers are the best for us). Donations are tax deductible if you work in Australia. Also, please consider us in your will.

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View of an "informal" settlement in Pune, from Karunadeepa's office window. The people living on this field (who look even poorer than in the slums in which Karunadeepa and her team work) are mostly migrants from rural areas in Maharashtra. If sick, some will attend the clinic (to see Dr Rajesh Nair and Mrs Shital Shelar, the nurse), in part supported by BODHI Australia.

Photo: Colin Butler, March 2018.

