

The newsletter of **Kamla Foundation**

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SPRING 2018 – ISSUE 06

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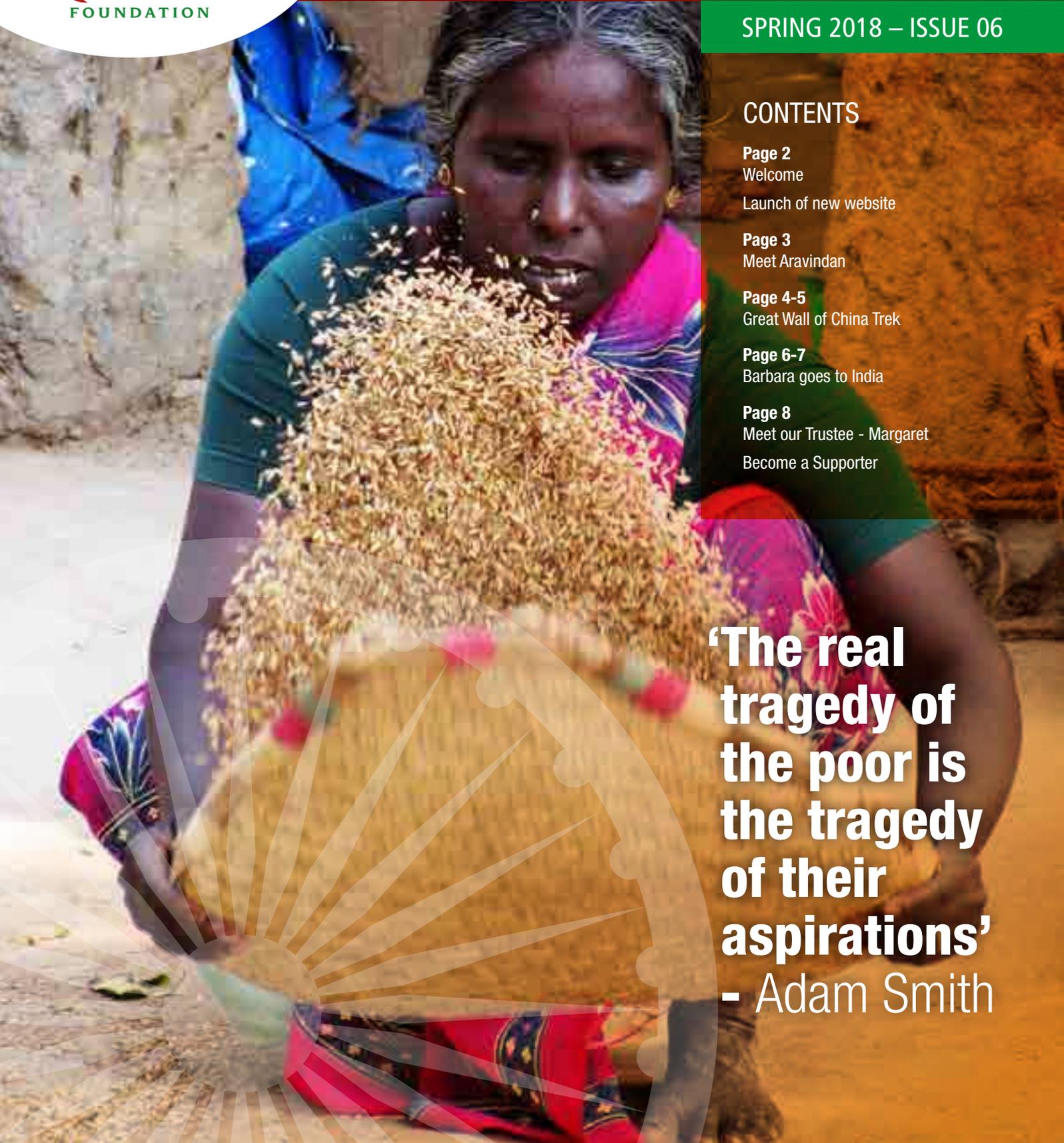
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**'The real
tragedy of
the poor is
the tragedy
of their
aspirations'**
- Adam Smith



Welcome

A very warm welcome to our Newsletter, which brings you closer to the Kamla Foundation familyof volunteers, supporters and communities we work with.

In these times of uncertainty, I believe that the Kamla Foundation family is more important now than ever. When people unite and work together, they become more resilient. they create change!

I often say that I'm very lucky in that I get to see directly the results of our work and the fundamental changes it makes in people's lives – our work is not only life-saving, but in many cases life-transforming, increasing opportunities and access to solutions to fight poverty and injustice.

Last year was an extremely busy year for the Foundation and amongst many achievements, we celebrated an important milestone in the life of the Foundation... marking 10 remarkable years of life changing endeavours.

In addition to this, as part of our drive for continuous improvement, we recently launched our new website and we hope you enjoy the new experience.

Looking forward, we hope that the Foundation can continue to provide you with a small but important window into the change we initiate. Engaging content, innovative approaches and insightful commentary will continue to be the hallmarks of our work.

In a world that sometimes seems full of hate, seeing our work makes me remember that in fact the world is a place of amazing kindness and generosity where people despite the odds, commit to making a huge difference.

Thank you for being one of those people.

Bhupendra

NEW WEBSITE

We recently launched our new website!

The new site features a powerful way to navigate through our portfolio of projects, making it easier for you to better understand our wide range of work and impact, all delivered in a clean and elegant package.

It's not just a re-design. We've stripped things back to make it more readable and accessible and we've produced some new features and lots more specific content.

This is part of our drive to continuously improve and stretch our limits and captures succinctly the work we have embarked upon to date. The new site is also fully responsive with mobile devices, making it easy to use on a wide range of web browsers and portable devices.

We pride ourselves in ensuring our Projects are grounded in evidence, data and need but besides facts and figures, we value people – those that are working tirelessly to further our efforts. Thus the new site brings a new 'Our Stories' section, where you can see at first hand the impact of our work. Furthermore, you can sign up for our e-newsletters and keep up to date with any news.

Going forward, we're really proud of the new website and feel it will create the experience you're looking for and hope that people may feel inspired to get involved.



When you have moment, please do visit our website:

www.kamlafoundation.org



Meet *Aravindan*

Aravindan is one of the beneficiaries of the child sponsorship programme. He lives in a remote hamlet in the state of Tamil Nadu, India. In this region there is very little infrastructure with no roads and only a dirt track leading up to his house.

Aravindan belongs to one of the lowest castes recognised by the Government, the Valaiyars caste. Notable attributes of the hamlet are high levels of illiteracy, child labour and child marriages. Occupation, if extremely fortunate, is seasonal agricultural labour.

Aravindan was very young when his father died of a protracted illness. He lives with his sister Sangeetha and widowed mother, in a very small dilapidated dwelling. His mother Subbu is illiterate and earns a living as an agricultural labourer. His sister Sangeetha, is also a beneficiary of the child sponsorship programme. We supported her schooling through to University. After recently graduating, she now works as a Nurse in a local hospital.

Eleven years ago, both brother and sister were breaking rocks with their bare hands in a local quarry, (to help support their widowed mother) and were destined for a life of

drudgery and bonded labour. Through our intervention, we have helped to turn the siblings' lives around. Aravindan is now in his final year studying for a degree in Mechanical Engineering at a leading University. For over a decade now, we have guided and counselled Aravindan, assigned a Mentor and met all costs related to his living and academic fees. Aravindan, has rigorously applied himself to his studies combining academic life with extra-curricular activities. He has excelled in both and is on course to achieve a first class degree!

Together with the sponsor, we have helped to make Aravindan's dream a reality, moving him from a life of poverty to a future with opportunity. Both siblings are Ambassadors of our work and now act as mentors to inspire other children who find themselves in a similar predicament.

TREKKING ALONG THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

So many people have achieved some staggering feats to raise funds for the Foundation over recent years. So I thought it's about time I stepped up to the plate!

I roped in my childhood friend, Nilesch and we undertook a once in a lifetime challenge for a number of reasons. Firstly to raise funds for the Foundation, secondly to celebrate the very small matter of us reaching 50 and finally to mark the Foundation's 10th anniversary!

Traversing some of the most challenging sections along one of mankind's greatest architectural achievements, the Great Wall of China was a truly magical experience.

As we walked along the wild and unrestored parts of the wall, one felt a real sense of remoteness, speculating how this amazing feat of engineering was constructed, without modern machinery over 2,000 years ago.

The first thing you notice on the wall, apart from the stunning vistas were the steps. Steps up the hill, towards the first watch tower, then steps down the hill and up again towards the next. Through a series of vast undulating stretches of the wall from one watch tower to the next, it is completely made up of steps. As we trekked along both dilapidated and rebuilt stretches of the wall, the scenery was vast and diverse. Walking through cropped fields to distant green river valleys, trying to comprehend having one of the great wonders of the world as our backdrop.

I never envisaged I'd have the opportunity to walk along the Great Wall and appreciate the wildness of China. The Chinese people all smile at you and make you feel so welcome; one can't help but smile back, say "ní hǎo" (hello) and let them take pictures with you. For the most part, we had the section of the wall we were walking that day to ourselves - in a country home to over 1.8 billion people, this surprised us.

This has been a truly formidable undertaking. We felt privileged to have had the opportunity to appreciate the full majestic beauty of this iconic structure at close quarters. We were mesmerised by the enormity of what we were experiencing. The sun rising and setting behind the Great Wall was truly mystical.

Given that we were raising funds for our work in India, I couldn't help but compare the shared similarities between the two great nations. China and India are two of the most populous countries in the world and both are located in Asia. Both are proud of their own individual long civilization that goes back some 5,000 years and both suffered invasions and colonial rules. Both advocated the principles of peaceful co-existence. Both peoples respect family and treasure genuineness but above all both share a deep love for their land and culture.

On the very last day, as our long trek was coming to an end, many of us were saddened as it dawned on us that we will never be able to appreciate (at close quarters), the full splendour of the Great Wall again. I felt as if a bond had been created between the wall and myself. I managed to find an isolated area on the wall to take in the enormity of what we had achieved over the two weeks and capture a treasured moment to reflect on my hopes and aspirations.

I can honestly say this it was one of the greatest experiences of my life. The bonus was to do this adventure with a group of like-minded trekkers, each having an inspirational tale to tell. It was a joy to share the moments of each day with them.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to Nilesch for agreeing to undertake this challenge with me. Who would have thought when we left secondary school some 35 years ago that one day we would come back together to travel across the globe and experience one of the great wonders of the world! **At the same time raise over £13,000 for a charity I set up in memory of my Mother!**

In so many ways Nilesch has been an inspiration, for doing something way out of his comfort zone, not giving up and demonstrating sheer grit and determination to succeed.

To all of you, thank you for sharing this journey with me.

Barbara goes to India

I have been actively supporting the work of Kamla Foundation for many years and the catalyst for what soon unfolded was two-fold. Firstly when I attended their event, celebrating 10 amazing years. I was truly astounded by their life changing work and secondly the sudden death of a close friend of mine.

I then made up my mind that life is too short and I wanted to go to India and see at first hand the difference their work makes on the lives of the poorest and hopefully in a very small way, make my own contribution to their work.

So within a month of making my mind up, there I was at Manchester Airport with two huge suitcases full of craft ideas, you name it, I had it! I was determined to use creative arts as a means to bring a smile and a ray of comfort to these people.

Driving to the village which would be my home for the next month, was a truly surreal experience. Clearly no such thing as traffic control . . . it was a free for all . . . Cars, buses, lorries, bullocks, rickshaws, bikes all fighting for space and none showing any patience. The heat was overwhelming, coupled with the noise of the horns hooting and the thronging crowds made the journey a white knuckle ride, the kind never to forget.

Settling into my new home, (Paul - Director of the FORD Trust and his wife Marylila kindly insisted I stay with them) I came to fully understand how poverty plays a central role in the lives of the villagers. The local people didn't have much, but what they did have was a sense of real warmth and kindness, colourful clothes and big smiles.

The ensuing days and weeks were a blur as I threw myself into all that India had to offer, the food, the language, the people, the smells, the culture. Above all else I learnt to admire the sheer grit and resilience that people showed. Those that have nothing but are prepared to share whatever they have with you.

The visits were very emotional; seeing at close hand what the Foundation does, why it does it and the difference this is making to the lives of some of the poorest in society. I visited a home for Widows, the children that were being supported through schooling, Orphanage for boys, and a range of Projects that the Foundation runs in partnership with the FORD Trust.

Visiting the bore wells programme which now gives clean drinking water to over 30,000 villagers was unbelievable. This project alone is remarkable, as it's changed the lives of so many people. As is the norm, it is the women who manage the household water and it is they that have to walk for miles to fetch clean drinking water for their families on a daily basis. I used to regularly watch in awe as the women carried huge pots of water weighing over 20lbs each, usually with a baby strapped to their backs!

I met many groups of women (Self Help Groups). These groups were set up to help manage household finances, save and borrow money and to campaign and lobby for issues they felt strongly about. Many of the women wanted to know my own life story. As my tales unfolded of my 'easy life' compared to theirs, they were fascinated to hear of my life as a woman back in the UK. I sat with the ladies listening to their plight, about their struggles on a daily basis, the fact that all their lives they had only known discrimination because they were seen as low caste people, battling with life issues in general, children, health and for many the regular abuse they received from their husbands. The Self Help Groups were set up to help address many of these issues and to give these women, hope, strength and knowing that together they can help and support each other.

I visited the Training Centres which runs courses for women on all aspects of sewing and jute bag making. Seeing some of the women that have benefitted from the Micro Enterprise Project was just amazing. The little tea shop was an example of a typical micro enterprise. During my visit, I can honestly say that the way the lady made the coffee was so different and indeed the best I had ever tasted. This tea shop enabled the lady to send her children to school, pay for all the household bills and save a small amount for emergencies.

Indira Gandhi School, named after the ex- Premier sits in a very rural location, a philanthropic initiative set up by a local

Solicitor. The children are some of the poorest yet when looking at how smart they looked in their lovely uniforms you would not have guessed their predicament. This School, has been receiving support from the Foundation for a few years. Some friends of mine from the UK and I have started to sponsor a gifted young girl called Nivetha from this school whose plight is tragic.

There is so much to write but little space, from the Widows waiting to die in one part of the Home to the Orphanage for Boys and the Home for girls that had been trafficked, each resident had a sad tale to tell and left a durable impact on me. However the defining moment of the trip was the visit to the home for Widows. Many were the same age as me and some were just waiting to die. I couldn't but hold comparison with my own predicament as my husband was in a home at the same time back in the UK with a debilitating Alzheimer's condition.

The two homes were poles apart and he had all the luxuries and comfort of a modern Day Centre. Yet the similarities were there from the loving care and support that they received. Sadly since my return to the UK my husband has passed away but in his enduring memory I have fundraised for a bore well to be built in a rural village. It's heartening to know that there is a small light in my Len's memory shining in a remote part of India, making a difference to the lives of some of the poorest people.

Having seen the life changing work of the Foundation at close hand, I now feel a part of the 'Kamla Foundation family'. On reflection, I met the most fantastic people and have a bucket full of memories to treasure and even at my age (I am almost 80!) they are life changing! A heartfelt thanks to the FORD Trust and Kamla Foundation for all that you do and long may it continue.

Barbara Marriott

"I used to regularly watch in awe as the women carried huge pots of water weighing over 20lbs each, usually with a baby strapped to their backs!"





Meet our Trustee *Margaret*

It is almost 14 years since I first met Bhups and heard about Kamla Foundation. His passion and enthusiasm for the Foundation was so powerful that it was impossible not to want to be involved and support it. I was honoured to be asked to be a Trustee and over the years have encouraged others to be involved by contributing financially or by giving their skills.

The concept of directing support to people who needed it without going through a third party or an established Charity was not a new concept. However, I was impressed at the work Bhups had put into finding a local Charity in India – the FORD Trust – who understood the principles of Kamla and would be the engine for delivering projects and identifying needs.

The early projects to fund sewing machines, card making and provide school books laid a learning foundation for the bigger projects that then came along. The target of providing 12 new wells was soon surpassed, and the work with the Medlife Foundation goes from strength to strength. The Widow's

Home provides dignity for the residents when they most need it. The Foundation is driven by the desire to support the most vulnerable in society and every day is driven by this ideal.

So many talented people have given of their skills. The website is a professional piece of work provided and updated by volunteers. The support of influential people in the UK who can channel resources to Kamla and encourage others to be involved has grown and developed during the past few years.

Young people, business people, older people have gone out to India at their own expense to either visit the work being done or to actively work for a period of time. It is testament to the work of the Foundation that these people return to the UK even more committed to the Foundation and filled with enthusiasm to continue to support the work of Kamla.

Bhups mother would be so proud of her son and no doubt humbled to know that so much community work is being done in her name long after her death. Her passion for involvement in community work made an impression on Bhups and in turn Bhups' passion has affected us all and been a force for change and improvement in India.

Special thanks to all our Donors, Supporters and Corporate Sponsors.

This invaluable support has enabled us to increase our reach and impact, helping to create further lasting change.

If you are interested in becoming a Supporter, you can do so in the following ways:

Online | By cheque | Standing Order

If you would like to make regular monthly donations, please make contact using the details below

Finally, our sincere gratitude to our two corporate partners;

