

ACT and SVN in India

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Come over and help us!

The Samaritan School nestles in a beautiful hanging valley, 4,000 feet up in the forested hills of Southern India, surrounded by huge rounded glacial boulders. In September 2004, four of us, all retired Christian teachers from England, spent 18 days at the school, sharing some of the experience and skills we gained during our combined 140 years in teaching. It was a great experience and we believe we were able to make a real contribution to the development of the school.

In November 2003 a letter had arrived at the ACT Office from the founders of the Samaritan School, thanking ACT for faithfully keeping them in touch by sending *ACT Now* every term. The letter also asked if volunteer teachers from the UK could come to visit and help their school. ACT forwarded the request to its members in the Senior Volunteer Network.

A big vision

The request was from an Indian couple, George and Helen Moses, visionaries and entrepreneurs,

Anne, John and Dian (left to right, draped in gold) with Samaritan School teachers



John Hallett (right) talks with secondary staff at Samaritan School

who have set up several schools and educational ventures, over the past twenty years. But the Samaritan School is part of a bigger vision. George and Helen had bought a 32 acre plot of land, planted it with trees and flowering shrubs from all over India and set the school buildings (which included an Ecological Centre) discretely amongst them.

Samaritan is a mixed school for 4–18 year olds. Although it is largely residential it also caters for local farmers' children. The standard state syllabus is taught and children are prepared for public exams.

Working together

As volunteers, we were welcomed warmly by the school community. Teaching staff were open and friendly, and demonstrated a readiness to receive. We spent time with them watching and contributing to lessons, discussing teaching, and getting to know them and their resources and the constraints under which they worked.

We spent off-duty time with the teachers, pupils and all the community members, but were accom-

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modated at a Research Centre about 4km away and brought in by jeep every day. We worshipped together.

After several days we ran a series of seminars and workshops in aspects of learning and teaching, and on the distinctiveness of being a Christian teacher. The final phase of our stay was spent with small groups of teachers and with individuals, discussing strategies for implementing the approaches we had set before them.

Heavenly purposes

Of course, challenging and changing long-held approaches to teaching cannot be done in one short visit! In India traditional teaching is for memorisation rather than understanding and has been so for generations. Pupils at Samaritan could remember what they had read, and been taught, far better than their UK counterparts. But they seemed less able to relate their learning to real life applications.

Certainly, the Samaritan School has the potential to be a beacon school for the rest of India. It is our prayer that the seeds we were able to sow will bear fruit in the years to come.

ACT, through its members in SVN, was able to respond to this request from India. It all goes to show that God is able to use our earthly contacts and networks for His heavenly purposes. It also reminds us that, as Christians, we may be retired in the eyes of the world but, in God's Kingdom, we are never past our use-by date!

■ John Hallett

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