

FRIENDS OF SERAMPORE

Serampore College (and University), India

Founded by Carey, Marshman and Ward, 1818

www.seramporecollege.org

Secretaries Edward & Rosemary Williams

12 Penny Lane, Guarlford, Malvern, WR13 6PG

Tel: 01684 569291 E-mail: EandRWilliams@btinternet.com

Website: www.friendsofserampore.org.uk

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Dear Friends,

Thank you for all your support of the College in prayerful concern and interest, and in your giving. These thanks are not only from us but also from the Principal, very gratefully.

We were able in November to send the same amount as the previous year, £3000, as well as providing a number of journals for the Library. As before, £2000 covers the full cost of supporting one Theology lecturer and family, and the remaining £1000 has been allocated for staff and students' emergency health care - the Principal instanced that "the daughter of one needy student was bitten by a stray dog and he had no money for the anti-rabies vaccine; we had to help him from the Theology Dept fund, for which there was no budget provision". In addition, we forwarded as usual a gift of £500 plus Gift Aid from one of our members, for the Scholarship Fund.

When the Principal was in this country last summer, The Baptist Times ran this article on him:

DR LALCHUNGNUNGA wants to 'rediscover, recapture and revitalise the original vision and mission of William Carey', who sought to bring about 'education, social reform and Bible translation'. The college is recognised as an institution of academic excellence and it achieved the highest grades possible when assessed by government invigilators recently. It is both theological and secular as it was established with the vision that students of 'any caste or creed' could study there. This inclusive policy still remains and Christian, atheist and agnostic staff and pupils all live, teach and study alongside one another. Serampore College has come a long way in terms of its integration. Dr Lalchungnunga sees that this can - and should be - extended and wants continued communal harmony to be brought through Christ to the college.

Eighty percent of students from the theological college will become church leaders and Dr Lalchungnunga wants to make sure that his students are 'not ivory tower theologians, but effective ministers of the word of God, who properly address people's needs and concerns ... there should be a balance between academic, spiritual and ministerial formation'. His students are sent out all over India to work with local churches on children's and youth projects, social work or HIV-positive patients. The next plan is for the students to reach commercial sex workers. He knows that change and social reform will only happen when 'Christians demonstrate Christ, whatever the situation, be it persecution or harmony ... If Hindus see Christ in our lives they will be attracted. 'No matter how much we preach, if they do not see Christ they will never come to Christ.'

Dr Lalchungnunga wants to revive Bible translation at Serampore College. 'The need for Bible translation, especially in India, is very great,' he says, 'There are 18 major official languages and about 1,600 mother tongues and dialects. Not even half of these have a Bible translation. 'Carey and his team set us an example and translated the Bible into nearly 40 different languages, so we want to do justice to this original vision.'

Please pray for:

- Increased harmony among all students and staff at Serampore College.
- Protection over the students and graduates of Serampore theological college as they are faced with real situations of spiritual warfare when they begin their ministries, especially in rural parts of India,
- For the successful completion of the Carey Communication Centre, where new courses for integrated learning can be developed.
- For the visions of 'education, social reform and Bible translation' to be realised at Serampore College.
- For clarity and direction for Dr Lalchungnunga and all his family as they seek to know God's will for their future.

A letter sent on 20 August after Dr Lalchungnunga's return to India describes one of the annual highlights:

Things are going on well here. Carey Day Celebration functions went very well, in spite of rain pouring at certain times, but not really disrupting our functions. As usual, we started the day with a special morning chapel service, then took out a procession from the campus to Carey cemetery. One new thing this year was that the National Cadet Corps contingent of the college accompanied the procession with their uniforms, parade formation and small band, which added to the grandeur of the whole "show". Another encouraging thing is that ASC [Arts-Science-Commerce] staff and students gave enthusiastic support and quite a good number of them participated. We had tree planting, and Carey Day meeting where the new Vice-Chancellor of Rabindra Bharati University was our Chief Guest, and the former Vice-Chancellor of the same University was Speaker for Carey Day Special Lecture. They both spoke highly of Carey and narrated his immense contribution to the development of Indian Languages.

In the cultural programme, the secular staff and students presented a very meaningful skit on the life and work of Carey. The theology students presented songs and dances. One special feature which was much appreciated was the Mizo Cheraw Dance, popularly known as bamboo dance, where men at both ends of four pairs of bamboos play them and women/girls in colourful traditional Mizo dress deftly put their feet in and out and dance around while the tap-tap of the played bamboos continues. The day ended with a friendly Carey Day football match between the Bish-nupur High School team and Serampore College team. The ground was wet and puddles of water still remained. They played well but no side could make any score.

One significant thing which I broke to the gathering was the featuring of a newsman's interview with Sunil Chatterjee, published in Universal Education, a Higher Education magazine, where his picture and his replies to queries about Carey were well made. The journalist tried to make a case that Carey was, like many other missionaries, the agent of Imperial Colonialists and a Christian Proselytiser. Sunil refuted all these in a convincing manner with his ample load of factual information.

A letter during the month-long Puja holidays spoke of witnessing the Pujas being celebrated "in great exuberance with lights and sounds. 3rd and 4th Year Theology students are out on Practical Field Education, 1st and 2nd Year students remaining on the campus doing cleaning work." At the end of the holidays there was doubt whether the ASC department would reopen on time or not, as the opposition parties had called a bundh (strike/close-down) - this appears to have passed, but reminds us of some of the tensions: "pray for peace and harmony in West Bengal".



It has been a delight to meet Rev Kailash Chatry, who has recently come for doctoral studies at Birmingham University after 7 years teaching in Serampore, latterly as Secretary of the Theology Department. The subject of his thesis is Religious Terrorism in India: Case Studies in Four Traditions. The four traditions are Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism and - yes! - Christianity. When we asked, he instantly named one organisation prepared even to kill in order to establish Christianity in its part of India.

Another member of staff emailed us a month ago about the violence against Christians in a tribal area of Orissa, which was in the national news here. He is from that area, and greatly distressed. The causes are complex, but it is ordinary simple Christian folk who suffer.

In all that we have written about there is plenty for your prayers. We would add one other matter of which we become aware from time to time. The cost of the Theology department is met in the main, and rightly so, by the churches of India - but this results in salaries substantially lower than in the rest of the College, where University Grants Commission of India rates apply. The contrast can make great demands on the Christian grace of those concerned, and can be a source of tension.

If you wish to make a donation, please send cheques payable to "Friends of Serampore" to the Secretaries, 12 Penny Lane; Guarlford; Malvern; WR13 6PG. If sending £40 or more, please contact us first - if you pay tax we can recover this using gift aid.

With our warmest good wishes,
Edward and Rosemary Williams (Secretaries)