

## REFLECTIONS ON THE MUMBAI CONFERENCE

*Judith Ann*

*Personal positive features of attending the WEF International Conference in Mumbai from 3-9 January 2004 included: Renewing Relationships, Revisiting real riches, Reaffirming reasons, and Relaxed routines*

One of the important outcomes for me of attending the WEF conference in Mumbai was that of Renewing Relationships with those I met at the 1988 Adelaide International WEF conference, and again in Bombay in 1990, further while *enroute* to attend the subsequent London International conference and at the international meeting of WEF that followed.

One of the joys of the conference was renewing my friendship with Mrs Shakuntala Kilpady whom I met on the occasions mentioned. We had corresponded for a time after the London conference but the correspondence eventually decreased and finally ceased partly due to the slow Indian postal service. On the Tuesday at the Mumbai conference I noticed Mrs Kilpady talking to a group of Indians but by the time I weaved my way through the large crowd to find her she was gone. I was extremely disappointed because I had been so excited at seeing her again but I believed I could contact the conference secretariat and locate her later.

Wednesday came and went and I neglected to contact the secretariat but at the classical dance display Mrs Kilpady was standing alone in the foyer of the theatre. This time I was not hindered by crowds and walked straight up to her.

"Mrs Kilpady? I asked. I'm Judy from Adelaide. Do you remember me?"

"Judy how wonderful to see you," was her response. We hugged and shared some personal news and promised to meet at the conference on Thursday. This led to a most exciting visit on the Monday following the conference to the Shree Mumbadevi's Vidya Mandir school where she is Principal. The formal school visits arranged through the conference were appreciated but this was special as it was just for me.

On the Monday morning Mrs Kilpady and a staff member called for me and we drove into the street where her school was located. I heard a brass band playing and as she turned into a driveway the playing became louder. I stepped out of the car and realised it was playing right at that very spot. And it was playing as a welcome to me!

The car door was opened by student in a school uniform one of whom was carrying a garland of flowers placed around my neck. I was beckoned to follow up a red-carpeted flight, escorted to a seat on a dais and invited to sit down. The music stopped and I was presented with a basket of flowers. I had brought a basket of flowers for the school but they were insignificant compared to the one they gave to me. The senior student gave a warm welcome speech, which was very humbling.

Mrs Kilpady then presented two of the trustees of the school to me and they made further welcoming speeches, both very heart-warming. They wished that I as an Australian could foster relationships between our countries so that students or teachers from that school could visit Australia. That is a task I am working on with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

After the welcome we had morning tea together and chatted, followed by a tour of the school where children as young as two years of age worked on school tasks. Following morning tea I met the senior and junior school staff, had photographs taken with them, photographed a blackboard at the front of the school where I was named as a special guest and finally went out for a delicious Indian meal.

At the conference new friendships were formed with other Indians with whom I am in contact so that this interaction might in a small way bring about some tolerance and work toward establishing a world community through education.

*Revisiting real riches* refers to The Treasure Within the Delores Report and emphasised by a member of the committee Dr Karan Singh a keynote speaker. Dr Singh reiterated the significance and importance of the four pillars of learning.

- **Learning to know:** encouraged noble thoughts with wisdom and the knowledge to pose questions was preferable to ideas and technology.
- **Learning to do:** referred to learning to put education into action especially life- long learning, open schools and universities.
- **Learning to live together:** in a world becoming a family because science/technology is driving us into a global world. Religion needs to encourage tolerance and values are important in this – especially family values like solidarity, problem of elderly, security and relationships. Spiritual values can develop ‘a light from within and the possibility of accessing higher states of consciousness.’
- **Learning to be:** links to learning to live together and ‘diving to find the pearl lying within the corners of our hearts so that human consciousness is raised and a new kind of civilisation evolves – a light of life, developing human mind to reach new heights, new vistas.’
- **Reaffirming reasons for education:** throughout the conference the importance of education as a necessary feature of lifelong learning was asserted and yet values, tolerance and humility were very important too.

*Relaxed routines:* although the timetable was extremely tight a relaxed, calm atmosphere prevailed where hospitality reigned supreme, a further contributing factor to the conference being one of the most memorable I’ve experienced.

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