



**OzGREEN Australia
and
Sankat Mochan Foundation 1992-2007**

Sue and Colin Lennox

Our first memories of River Ganga are of a late winters evening in January 1992. The River seemed to stretch away forever into the last twinges of light. Magical. Mystical. Majestic. Magnificent.

We had just arrived at Tulsi Ghat on our first ever visit to India. We were there to participate in the first River Ganga Teachers Forum - at the invitation of Fran Peavey. Little did we know that we were about to change our lives forever and were at the beginning of dear friendships that would span the rest of our lives and thousands of miles between India, Australia and USA.

Many things stand out from that first visit the significance of which continue to be embedded in our beings:

Sankat Mochan Foundation and Friends of the Ganges Meeting the SMF and FoG team was just like meeting old friends. For us both there was a sense of inner rightness. We could see a group of people who lived and worked from their core values science and spirit joined in action. We felt at home, that we had something to contribute and that we could belong.

Gangaji Seeing the relationship between people and the river and feeling our own connections with Her during early morning meditations and quiet boat trips at dawn and dusk touched us deeply. How is it that school teachers from Sydney can develop such a deep and abiding love? She haunts our hearts, reaching out to us all the way to Australia so that even at this distance we can visit Her in meditations and feel our connection with Her and our Tulsi Ghat family.

We saw terrible pollution on that first trip and for the first time measured the actual levels of Faecal coliform. It took us three days to get the dilutions right. We had to travel out to BHU labs by rickshaw to put the plates into an incubator. When we finally got our first results we all had tears in our eyes as we realised just how bad the pollution levels were.

Feeling an inner call to do something it was like our worst fears and our deepest caring came together in one experience. We struggled for months to find what it was we could do to help and this search continues to this day. But on this

first visit we resolved to do what we could.

We could see that in our own society we had lost the deep connection to our environment that we saw in the relationship between the people of Varanasi and Gangaji. This loss of connection meant that people could view caring for the environment as an option, not connected to major life decisions. On the other hand we witnessed how a connection deeply rooted in faith could blind people to the every day reality of the impacts of polluted water. We felt that we could contribute to a world view that incorporated a deep connection with the Earth, a clear understanding of scientific realities and a commitment to work together for change.

If this sounds like an intense experience it was. It was a turning point in our lives when we realised just how serious the global water crisis was and that we needed to and could play a small part in doing something positive. During the remainder of 1992 we questioned ourselves deeply. We asked ourselves what we could do and how could we support ourselves to do it. After months of struggle we decided that we needed to be prepared to support ourselves to follow our hearts. In the following months we moved our young family in with Col's Mum, sold our home and quit our jobs. We began setting up OzGREEN as two volunteers working in a borrowed garage.

Today OzGREEN is working nationally in Australia. And since that first trip we have travelled to Varanasi more than 20 times.

So what have been the highlights and achievements of the last sixteen years? For us the most important has been the sharing of a deep and challenging journey. Together we have struggled and together we have come up with some great ideas (and some not so great ones too!) The important thing is we have sought to keep to three guiding principles:

- ◆ Scientific evidence
- ◆ Spirit of caring
- ◆ Engaged community action

Sankat Mochan Foundation OzGREEN Australia
Achievements 1992-2007

Silver Jubilee Year - 2007



- ◆ 1992: Sue and Colin Lennox travel to Benares with Fran Peavey for the first Teachers Conference. They bring water quality testing equipment and train SMF staff and volunteers. Faecal coliform testing for sewage pollution of River Ganga is undertaken by the SMF for the first time.
- ◆ 1993: Sue and Colin travel to Benares for the second time, bringing their children Jodi, Rowan and Wade. Set up SMF with a laptop computer, email and training to use the internet. Work with newly established lab to develop protocols and processes for Faecal coliform testing.
- ◆ 1994: Film the Swatcha Ganga video (winner of United Nations Media Peace Prize) and The first sewage tour with Tiwari's Varuna Confluence, Konia Sewage Pumping Station and bypass; Dinapur Sewage Treatment Plant, Kamauli Village. Vipul Mishra and Ashok Pandey travel to Australia to participate in OzGREEN's Youth River Congresses and to launch Friends of the Ganges Australia. SK Mishra travels to Australia for Australian Conservation Training Initiative six-week program in Project Management for NGOs.
- ◆ 95-96 Ongoing support and dialogue between SMF and OzGREEN about problems associated with sewage contamination of the river and groundwater and setting up an environment education centre.
- ◆ 1997: 60 Minutes (Australia) film story about Swatcha Ganga campaign; mega meeting with Friends of the Ganges USA and Sweden.
- ◆ 1998: Launch of the Swatcha Ganga Environmental Education Centre at Tulsi Ghat. Develop design for the mini-tube wells to alleviate the suffering of villages worst affected by sewage contamination of ground water. OzGREEN raises funds for first tube well.
- ◆ 1999: Work begins on installation of the first mini-tube well at Kamauli Village.
- ◆ 2000: Launch of the first mini-tube well at Kamauli Village by Australian MP Richard Jones MLC. Mahantji travels to Australia and speaks at a special luncheon at NSW Parliament hosted by Richard Jones MLC.
- ◆ 2001: Mini tube wells installed in Dinapur and Sarai Mohana.
- ◆ 2002: First Youth River Congress (Swatcha Ganga Chattra Sangam) at Tulsi Ghat involves hundreds of Benares school children. Following the success of this program, the Ghat Purohit Sangam is organised and brings 120 River Priests together for the first time, enrolling them as key allies of the Swatcha Ganga Campaign.
- ◆ 2003: Inaugural International Youth River

Congress attended by students from Varanasi, Australia, Bangladesh, Allahabad, Mirzapur Patna, Kolkata & Mathura. It is inaugurated by Australian High Commissioner. Later that year Mahantji travels to Australia and visits the Murrumbidgee River. Launch of second Sarai Mohana Mini Tube Well. Launch of Sehua Mini Tube Well (making a total of eight village water supplies installed).

- ◆ 2004: SK Mishraji travels to Australia to speak at the International River Symposium.
- ◆ 2005: Second group of young Australians from the Darling River travel to Benares to participate in the third International Youth River Congress.
- ◆ 2006: Ongoing support of the environmental education centre, research lab, World Water Day program, River Priest, school and boatmen programs and core SMF functions.
- ◆ 2007: Testing of water quality of religious bathing areas during Kumbh Mela in Allahabad January 2007. Fifth International Youth River Congress.

I had wanted to go to India for years but wanted to combine a holiday with an activity that would benefit the community. I hadn't found anything until October 2006 when I first attended a program of OzGREEN. When I found out about the Student Congress jointly organised by the Sankat Mochan Foundation and OzGREEN I immediately began preparations to attend.

Attending the Student Congress allowed me to experience India as more than just a tourist. It gave the journey much more substance and it enabled me to be there for something that is really important for me: Global Sustainability.

Being 27, I perhaps had a different experience of the Student Congress than most others. I saw it through the eyes of someone who has been working as an environmental educator for most of my career (although at times I felt this experience wasn't fully utilised). It was incredibly inspiring to see people who were working so hard to tackle the problem of pollution in Ganga through a multitude of ways: science, education, community engagement and, unfortunately, through the courts. It was amazing to witness the deep spiritual connection that so many people had with Ganga but also confronting to see people throw garbage into the river after worshipping Ganga. At times it was difficult to come to terms with the apparent contradictions that occurred. But the SMF persists in the education and community engagement to help change this behaviour.

Creating change can occur frustratingly slowly, and the Sankat Mochan Foundation has many obstacles. They haven't given up and I will forever be inspired by the passion and commitment that I saw in my time with them.