

August 2021 #1

Dear Friends,

First of all, I would like to give a big thank you to those of you who have sent special donations for the family of our beloved Saroj Sir. A week ago, I, along with five other teachers, made the two-hour journey (one way) to his homeplace (in our neighboring state: Bihar) to attend the ceremony that is typically held thirteen days after someone's death here. It was good to be there with his family and to have the chance to talk to both his children as well as his widow. His children seem to be doing well, considering their loss. His wife burst into tears on our arrival, a normal outpouring of grief.



After some time, his mother approached us in the manner of a beggar, nearly crying with hands cupped in front of her, beseeching us to help continue her grandchildren's education. "We don't have anywhere else to turn," she said. By that time, several of you had written to inform me of your gifts. I was very happy to be able to immediately put her mind and heart at rest by saying that we had already collected some money and that we would cover all their educational costs for 9th and 10th grade. Above that, we already have enough money to cover half of their costs in 11th and 12th grade and I am confident that we will eventually be able to cover all necessary expenses through 12th grade. The generosity that you have shown with regard to this family has been phenomenal! I am so pleased to be able to reward the long and good years of service that Saroj Sir gave. When I told his mother that we had already collected a good sum, I heard a collective sigh of relief in the room where most of the female relatives (including his wife) were listening closely. Thank you for allowing us to offer meaningful support to that family and those children.

The rest of the news is not good. This past month has been full of reports of one after another colleague/student/friend falling seriously ill. In the entire time I've been in Varanasi, I've never seen the monsoon illnesses hit as hard as they have this year. Almost half my staff continues to be ill. Many of our students are also sick; some of them have even been admitted into the hospital. Whereas a body may have the strength to fight one of the monsoon illnesses, this year they seem to be coming one on top of the other. Two of my teachers have had dengue fever and typhoid at the same time. One of my students (who has now returned home after a hospital stay) had jaundice and malaria together. I have heard of several cases like this, and again, just a couple months after the terrible corona wave, people are dying suddenly.

And now, on top of the diseases, we are faced with a Ganges River flood. My house is on particularly low ground (I knew this was a risk when I moved in), and on Friday I got the call from my landlords that I should start moving my belongings to higher ground. Two days earlier I had packed most of the things that I would not need for a month or so. So I called some of my students to help and, with the river levels steadily rising, we moved all the trunks and furniture up. The rest of everything, including most of my kitchen stuff, I kept on shelves that are about 3-4 feet high. I am lucky because my landlords have provided another, higher, room for me to stay in until the waters recede. So I carried the basics there and moved in.

Yesterday morning when I went to assess the situation, I realized that I would also have to move my remaining belongings (those I had left on shelves) since the water level inside the house was about 2.5 feet. So I again called some students to help and we finished clearing out my house completely. By this evening, the water has risen another 2 feet.



*This photo was taken in April. There is a small seasonal pond just next to the house. The Ganges River, a fair distance away, is marked with an arrow.*



*Close to the same view, taken yesterday morning. My floor level is lower than the lawn. Now, the water has reached the top of the barbed wire fence.*

I normally don't write much about my personal situation, but today I'm writing about it, not to tell you about me, but to tell you about the situation in the city. My heart is breaking because, although the river has not yet technically overflowed into the city, we do have several students who live in low-lying areas and, if the water continues to rise (it is predicted to rise until Wednesday night), many, many of my families will be affected. As of now, the water has entered the school playground but has not yet entered the building. The corona wave, the monsoon diseases, and now a flood!

love,  
Connie