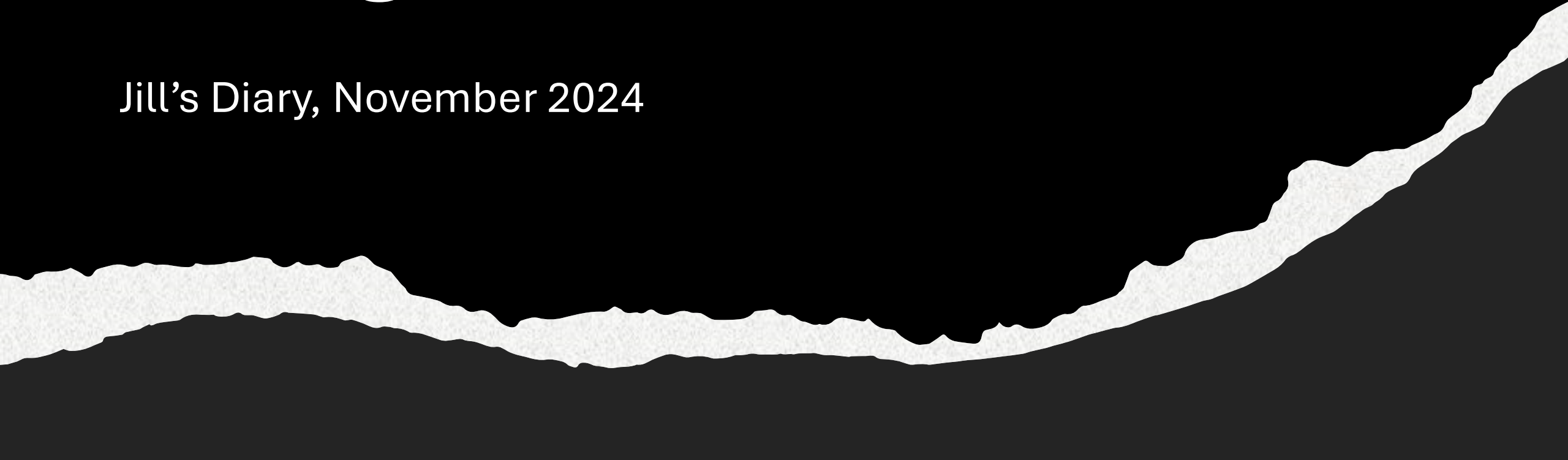


# A Visit to the Malagiri School

Jill's Diary, November 2024



What a privilege to return to Nepal and to visit once again our friends at the Porong Monastery and the JangChup Pre school. Did you know that JangChup means 'compassion'? What a perfect name for this school.

At the airport we were met by Gonpo from the monastery guest house, and by Carin our fellow supporter of the school, from Sweden. Having spoken to Carin many times on Zoom it was a great pleasure to meet her face to face. Carin has been involved in the school since its inception and has supported it and the village ever since. Her most recent purchase has been 130 gas stoves - one for each family in the village - in order to ensure they no longer have to cook over an open fire. Such a great lady.

After a short taxi drive, we arrived at the Monastery Guest House where we stayed for a few nights before travelling to the school. Our welcome was traditionally warm and we were greeted as old friends having stayed there a few years ago on a previous visit. The guest house is adjacent to the Monastery school and each morning we were woken early with the sounds of drums and young monks chanting their prayers.



Here is Louise (a friend and supporter of the Malagiri School) outside the Guest House, and also the young monks at work in the school opposite. Later that day we went to see them at their studies - many were creating Christmas cards to send to their sponsors world-wide (largely US, Scandinavia and Switzerland).



The wife of the Headteacher at Malagiri, Saraswati, stayed at the Guest House with us and she was the perfect guide for our activities over the next couple of days. Her English was excellent, and she guided us through all the intricacies of making purchases for the school, finding places to eat and keeping safe in a large city!

Nearby is the wonderful Boudha stupa surrounded by many small shops where we loved to walk each day.



The next day we went to an area of Kathmandu where we could shop in educational stores for items to take up to the school - it is cheaper to buy in Nepal than to bring from England! We had a list from the school of things they needed and we went back to the Guest House with a full taxi boot - a laminator and plastic rolls to use with it, a desk top printer plus toner, paper, exercise books, paint, glue, wall charts, puzzles and games for the younger children, a set of small magnetic and washable whiteboards for classroom use, a football, crayons and felt pens...so the list goes on! Kathmandu is a bustling, colourful and fairly chaotic city... Here you see Louise and Saraswati negotiating over a purchase, and an example of the colourful shops in the area.



That evening we had a wonderful walk to the Boudha Stupa nearby - there was a special festival and the candles were lit up everywhere, the monastery was shrouded in light, candles were lit in abundance, and everyone was out on the streets. There was such a special atmosphere around the area.





That evening and the next day were spent at the British Embassy in Kathmandu where we were attending an International Conference. We met many people working with charities and NGOs in Nepal. We hope these contacts will be helpful to us in further developing the school and supporting the village. It was also good that we were joined at the conference by Binod (see opposite) who is Treasurer for the JangChup School Board in Kathmandu. They manage the day-to-day issues relating to the running of the school, including the finances which are provided from the UK and Sweden. He was encouraged to find Nepalese attendees at the conference who were already known to him - establishing such links and networks is so important.





The following day we travelled up to Malagiri - about a 5 hour journey through the outskirts of Kathmandu and up into the hills. Some of the roads had been recently damaged by flooding, but our driver was expert at avoiding the bumps and holes! We stopped on the way to buy fruit to take to the children. Such wonderful views... and a sense of excitement!





Then suddenly we rounded a corner on the road and we were there and being greeted by some of the children placing scarves and flower garlands around our necks. It was like being transported back into the world we had left seven years ago on our last visit. The school was just as we remembered - but now surrounded by flowers and plants being grown in large pots - an interest of some of the teachers.



Soon it's lunchtime, and the children queue patiently to wash their hands whilst the cooks prepare the meal. Grace is said before the meal and the children chant this in strong voices, with a respect for the food they are about to eat. The children eat at the school 3 times a day - breakfast before lessons start, lunch, and then a snack before they leave for home. It's a long day, (8am until 4pm) , especially for the youngest who are only 3, but the time is well paced and lessons are interspersed with time for rest, reflection, and activity.



As you can see in the photo the children are rinsing their dinner plates, the weather was a little chilly and the children are all wearing their uniform, including for some of them, woolly hats. They take their shoes off when they enter each building and we noticed some of them were not wearing socks - maybe that's something to send or take another time.





For the next 24 hours we experienced the routine of the school and it was such a pleasure to see the children enjoying themselves and being so happy and enthusiastic about their learning. We saw no incidence of poor behaviour - these children come from a culture where respect for others is a key element and this was so evident in their behaviour and communication when in school.

They are taught English, and were so polite to us - even when we casually entered a room where a few children might be gathered without a teacher, they stood and turned to us saying 'good morning ma'am, how are you today'. All this was done spontaneously with smiles, joy and courtesy. Relationships in the school are excellent. The new Headteacher, Gautam Tamang, and the young teachers are enthusiastic about their work, but manage the children in a calm and positive way.

Each day begins with washing and teeth cleaning, followed by assembly and a circle time singing all together. Then lessons begin, with time later for meditation - it was amazing to see such young children focusing so calmly on this task.





Meditation time is a routine part of the day at the end of each morning. How impressive it was to observe a session. Without any adult present the children settled to a quiet reflective time which they sustained for at least 15 minutes.



I was interested to see a reading lesson with a focus on phonics. The style of teaching was perhaps a little more focussed on repetition and rote learning than we might find in an English school, but this fits with their culture and was in no way restrictive or over-controlled. The children all responded well, and it was clear that they were learning new concepts and retaining them.



All the classrooms were colourful, with the wall displays reflecting the learning that was taking place.



Dancing is another great skill that all the children have; they love music and show a wonderful sense of rhythm

Their singing is also wonderful to hear – this image is a great example of how to keep a queue in order! These young teachers were so skilled at judging the mood of the children and keeping them occupied and interested in positive ways.

Whilst in Malagiri we were privileged to accompany Carin on a visit to the oldest lady (86 years) in the village in her home; here you can see her gas cooker on the table at the right hand side of the picture. This lady has never left the village, has lived in the same house all her life and had no electricity or running water. She has a happiness and resilience that is a lesson to us all, accepting her life, and being happy within it; supported by her family and wishing for little else.





All too soon it was time for us to leave - with due celebration! But we did so in the knowledge that the school is a happy place, where children are learning and where we are privileged to be able to make a difference to the community. These people have so little compared with us, and yet they are content and a joy to be with. They are grateful for all our support and are certainly benefiting from our involvement.