



Mary Retallack's trip to Agra to visit the Taj Mahal was a stark reminder of the extremes in social class in India.

At the time the September/October 2009 issue of *Australian Viticulture* was published, featuring an interview with managing director of Adelaide Hills-based Retallack Viticulture, Mary Retallack, she jetted off to India with her colleagues from Course 15 of the Australian Rural Leadership Program to learn about the challenges facing the country's rural communities.

The trip involved spending a week in Delhi, a day in Agra to visit the Taj Mahal and the final week in Hyderabad further to the south of India.

This is Mary's account of her time in India, learning about other agricultural sectors and the resilience of the Indian people to succeed in the face of adversity.



Women in Indian villages are often responsible for much of the work and increasingly the family finances through micro-credit initiatives.

By Mary Retallack

India is an amazing mix of contrasts with different cultures, castes, customs, foods, aromas, sounds and landscapes. There is a large gap between the wealthy and the very poor, whose life is a constant struggle to survive. Somehow people seem to get along in this diverse and interesting country, which I visited from 30 August to 12 September 2009.

### Delhi – Austrade at the Australian High Commission

The group comprising Course 15 of the Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP)

met with Mike Carter, Austrade's New Delhi-based trade commissioner. Carter provided the group with an overview of India and the importance of the Australian-Indian relationship including the role of Austrade in advancing Australia's interests. Austrade is an important resource for anyone who is interested in doing business in India. *Utsav Australia* (Celebrate Australia) is an Australian Government initiative to accelerate Australia's commercial engagement with India ([www.utsavaustralia.in](http://www.utsavaustralia.in)).

### A snapshot of India

Some interesting facts and figures about India include:

- India has a population of 1.124 billion people. Each year the population increases by about 20 million (about the population of Australia).
- India is an emerging powerhouse of a nation with the second fastest growing economy in the world (GDP growth for 2008 was 7.3%) behind China.
- India will be the second largest economy by 2025.
- India has the youngest population in the world (65% is under 35 years old).
- Sixty percent of people live in rural areas with an average farm size 1.25ha.
- About half the population live below the poverty line subsisting on \$1-2/day.



**Mary Retallack graduated from Course 15 of the Australian Rural Leadership Program on 20 November 2009. Major General Michael Jeffrey, former Governor General of Australia, presented the course participants with their Fellow's Certificates.**

- The Commonwealth Games are scheduled to be held in Delhi in 2010.

### Navjyoti Foundation Centre

The ARLP group met with Dr Kiran Bedi at the Navjyoti Foundation Centre ([www.navjyoti.org.in](http://www.navjyoti.org.in)). The Foundation offers a wide range of developmental services ranging from formal and non-formal education for children, women and youth, vocational training, micro-credit, health care, environment, family counselling and self-help groups.

Dr Bedi is revered throughout India as a role model, particularly for providing a pathway for women, championing social justice and fighting corruption. She was India's first woman police officer and went on to receive an Asia Nobel Prize for her contributions which included revolutionary reforms at Tihar jail. A movie has recently been released about Kiran's life called 'Yes Madam, Sir' ([www.yesmadamsir.com](http://www.yesmadamsir.com)) by award-winning Australian filmmaker Megan Doneman. She is a formidable woman who continues to champion the rights of the poor and fight for positive changes in India.

Some of the Foundation's projects include a weir to restrict passage of water and prevent the flooding of the village during monsoon season and the construction of permanent water tanks at the village school. Prior to this there was no assured supply of fresh running water. This has resulted in school attendance increasing dramatically.

We met with approximately 12 village women in the school grounds on a rug under a tree and spoke via an interpreter. These women had very little access to the world beyond their village and were surprised to learn that people in rural



**Dr Kiran Bedi, pictured at right with Mary Retallack, is considered a role model for Indian women, having won an Asia Nobel Prize for her contributions to the country which included revolutionary reforms at Tihar jail.**

Australia had similar problems to them, but at a different level. One woman wanted to know how many goats we owned! We were able to share stories of women that ran successful businesses and this was an encouraging insight for them.

We discussed how micro-credit loans were making a big difference in the women's lives and discussed common challenges, such as water security being a big issue (the monsoon rains were more than a month late).

Many of the poor were involved in farming small areas of land, but were illiterate. It would seem that they might benefit from the basic agricultural knowledge and the skills many Australian farmers take for granted. Much of the work and responsibility for family finances was carried by the women.

Indian people have a system of determining the level of poverty (social and economic deprivation) for individuals based on a four-tier system which includes:

- Poorest of the poor
- Poor
- Not so poor
- Not poor at all.

We heard how the introduction of a simple device – a solar lantern – enabled people to study or do their book-keeping at night, allowing them to progress and get an education.

There were many examples of initiatives to empower communities and allow them to become self-sustaining, from growing bio-fuel, to creating their own electricity supply in remote villages.

No matter how poor the women were they always looked beautiful in their colourful saris (even if that was the only piece of clothing they owned).

### Bakers Circle

We met Dev Lall, chief executive of Bakers Circle, who is working with Flinders Ranges Premium Grain in South Australia ([www.flindersgrain.com.au](http://www.flindersgrain.com.au)) to produce 'The best frozen dough in India'. Bakers Circle is one of the key companies supplying India's new chain of submarine style sandwich shops. The local Indian flour is used for flat bread and is not suited for frozen dough production. They sought out partners who were able to supply the specialist flour required. This is an impressive success story, linking farmers with the mid-north of South Australia with new and emerging markets overseas.

### International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT)

We visited ICRISAT ([www.icrisat.org](http://www.icrisat.org)) which works closely with research organisations in Australia. The semi-arid and dry tropics are home to 1.4 billion people in 55 developing countries. ICRISAT prides itself on providing research and specialised grain crops to help feed the world's poor.

### Delhi Metro Rail System

We met Dr E. Sreedharan, as he is known, the man who is credited with changing the face of public transport in Delhi. He came out of retirement at 70 years of age to head the construction of the Delhi Metro Rail system. The first phases were completed within budget and ahead of schedule. We travelled on the Delhi Metro which was spotless, on time and a world-class facility.

### Agra

The trip to Agra to visit the Taj Mahal was a highlight and provided a stark reminder of the extremes witnessed in India from the beggars and Leprosy mission located nearby, to the breathtaking beauty of the Taj Mahal and its intricate workmanship.

### Hyderabad

Hyderabad is located in the state of Andhra Pradesh which has a population of about 82 million people (about four times the population of Australia). It is known as a business and information technology hub and also for its pearl

trade. Indians are particularly business savvy and well-educated. Some of the top IT specialists in the world come from universities located in Hyderabad and it is not uncommon for graduates to have two degrees. Our visit to Chowmahalla Palace on the final evening was a highlight.

### India's wine industry

Most bottled wine sales occur in four and five star hotels (up to 70% of all sales) and are dominated by Old World producers, with France commanding 45% of sales. However, there is strong interest in New World wines with imports from Australia (16%) making up the largest share of imported wines after France. Indian wine drinkers find Australian wine labels clear and easy to understand. The profile of wine is slowly increasing, with wine being associated with sophistication and health benefits. Conservatively, 10-15 million Indians (around 1-1.5% of the population) could be potential wine drinkers.

Current challenges include high duties, complex state laws, infrastructure/logistics challenges and a strong interest in developing the domestic wine industry.

India has three major wine-producing regions which are located in:

- State of Himachal Pradesh to the north
- State of Maharashtra in the central west
- State of Karnataka to the south (near Bangalore).

Maharashtra is the biggest wine producing state in India and in recent years, there has been a general shift from farmers growing table grapes to winegrapes. The total production of grape wine in India in 2008 was 22.25 million litres.

There are good business opportunities in India, however, it may take several visits and perseverance to build a trusting relationship and see real results.

### Observations for the Indian rural sector

At a particular visit to a rural village, we were asked about our observations of the site. Some of our comments included:

- Land was not being utilised as completely or effectively as it could be and rubbish could be collected (recycled and disposed of) in a central location. Some of this waste could be reused as compost, etc.



Indian students are benefitting from the introduction of solar lanterns to allow them to study at night and further their education.

- The annual rainfall was high but the villagers' capacity to harvest and store this water for the dry periods was lacking.
- Some technical knowledge about pest and disease control and crop nutrient requirements was needed.
- It was better to take the animals to the pasture rather than collecting feed for the animals manually.
- There were many people in the village but few were doing the work. The men were playing cards while the women ran the household and worked in the fields.
- The sharing of knowledge and expertise needs to be invested with the locals for their long-term benefit and to be self-sustaining in the absence of ongoing support.

### Insights for the Australian rural sector

Travelling within India, I was struck by the following observations:

- The 'can do' attitude of the people I met; no problem was too big to be tackled.
- The fabric of the community and the importance of working collectively.
- Resilience in the face of adversity and a determination to survive.
- The role women are starting to play in a patriarchal society by developing new business opportunities and managing the finances (micro-credit) and what can be achieved with a small amount of seed funding.
- Their interest in renewable energies, bio-fuel, solar power, etc.
- The capacity for India to be a significant player on the world stage

with formidable growth (in a country lacking infrastructure and with a high level of poverty).

- How poverty reduces people's opportunity to prosper and how simple capacity-building initiatives and information transfer can make a big difference in breaking this cycle.
- The fact that if we become bankrupt we lose money, but if people in India go broke, they starve.
- The importance of seeing the bigger picture. While there are many issues on the ground in India, they have a vision (and the entrepreneurial will) to be a significant player on the world stage in the future.

### Graduation

Participants in Course 15 of the Australian Rural Leadership Program recently graduated in Canberra. Participants were presented with their Fellow's Certificates by Major General Michael Jeffery. The graduation was the culmination of an 18-month course where participants were challenged to think about the current and emerging challenges in rural, regional and remote Australia. While this is the end of one chapter, as a graduate of this course it is also the beginning of a new journey to make the most of the skills learned and contribute back to industry. Thanks to the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation which sponsored my position in the course. I commend the ARLP course to anyone wishing to further develop their leadership potential ([www.rural-leaders.com.au](http://www.rural-leaders.com.au)).

For further information, visit Retallack Viticulture's website at [www.viti.com.au](http://www.viti.com.au)