

For the Proclaimer April 2016

## SARDHANA

India's economy is booming! As I write the Duke & Duchess of Cambridge are visiting this vast country. There is much glitz and talk of Bollywood but their Highnesses have also seen the darker side of India. Amidst the up and coming wealth there is still extreme poverty and discrimination on grounds of caste and religion.

Sardhana is situated 85 Kilometres north east of New Delhi in the Diocese of Meerut. It owes its fame to a former prostitute, a ruthless and fearless ruler who inherited her title and wealth from an Austrian mercenary. She was known as the Begum Samru. In 1781 at the age of 40 Farzana -as was her name then -became a Catholic and took the name Joanna. This lady played a crucial role in the politics and power struggle in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century India. She ruled her estate with an iron hand. Sometime in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century she decided to build a Church in Sardhana and enlisted the services of an Italian architect called Antonio Reghelini. This church was finished in 1822 with top quality furnishings and sculptures of Italian marble. On December 13<sup>th</sup> 1961 Pope St. John XXIII upgraded the church to the status of Minor Basilica.



One can Google Sardhana on the Internet and obtain a wealth of information and pictures about the Basilica of Our Lady of Graces. It is a place of Pilgrimage for all religions especially in November each year.

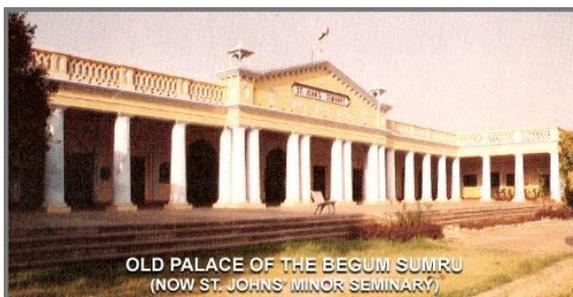
However the situation for those Catholics who live there now is very different. Sardhana itself has a population of about 45 thousand and is a centre for the wool trade. Out of this there are about 400 hundred Catholics, many of whom are unemployed and those who are lucky earn a pittance. There is no unemployment benefit, no social services or free medicine. The fortunate ones live in a special colony set up some years ago by the Diocese of Meerut. In an area of extreme Hinduism there is much discrimination against Christians. Some years ago a priest was murdered, the perpetrators were caught but released as it was not considered a crime to kill a Catholic priest. It is a real test of faith to persevere in the Christian religion in this part of India. Christians make up 2.3% of India's population and mainly come from the lowest caste and it is not possible to improve one's status.

A proportion of the money we send goes to help these poor parishioners who also have to maintain the Basilica.

We also support several schools, orphanages, a seminary and a small hospital. These are run by sisters and brothers. The children are from broken homes, children of lepers and the very very poor mainly orphans.

There is no discrimination on the basis of caste or creed.

The Seminary covers 3 Dioceses. The building is the Begum's old Palace (early 18<sup>th</sup> Century) the roof leaks and the basement is uninhabitable as it floods during the monsoons. All students come from poor families, they have to be fed, clothed and their academic expenses covered.



Since 1999 Arundel parishioners have supported this charity which was started by Nick Shreeve who visited Sardhana many times and thanks to your generosity over that period we have sent £27,450. Please continue with your help and prayers.

Letters of thanks from Sardhana:-

From the Convent of Jesus and Mary:- *I take this opportunity to thank each of you dear benefactors for being so generous and kind towards our boarders here.----- We assure you of our prayers. May the Lord bless you and keep you in his loving care* Sister Superior

From the Parish Priest *I thank you very the financial help we receive from you parish. We spend the money buying poor children during the Christmas give them good refreshment during the tree celebration. Our children pray for the donors. They send their wishes to you dear well wishers. Fr Mendonca*



*sincerely for for our gifts for the season and Christmas constantly prayerful*  
John

From Bishop Francis Kalist ( onetime of Sardhana)---*I gratefully acknowledge your generosity in a spirit of prayer and thanksgiving to the Lord who provides all good things-----I humbly request you to kindly convey my prayerful greetings and blessings to the people of Arundel*

Parish priest

From St John's Seminary-- *On behalf of St. John's Seminary, Sardhana and on my own personal behalf may I extend our sincere gratitude to you for your generosity and for all the sacrifices you make for our sake. The donation you sent was indeed very helpful and it meant a lot to us. We have 24 seminarians this year. Majority hail from Orissa- especially Khandamal, where Christians had to undergo a lot of hardships not so long ago. The boys seem to be a happy bunch. I did tell them about your sacrifices and they do appreciate your love and concern for us. We all pray for you that the Lord may bless you and your dear ones abundantly. Fr George Kolleril Rector*

