Travel report India 5-22 February 2010.

Introduction

Again we visited our projects in India. Our activities are split over the States Orissa and Andhra Pradesh and are concentrated on evangelism, child care and helping the poor and needy. The areas are not connected, and are some 200 miles apart. The time it takes to travel from one place to the other is 6-7 hours. In India they call this region the Remote Area because of the isolated and tribal nature. Modern achievements hardly tickle through, and poverty all around is rampant. This is heightened by high inflation. In 2009 it reached 11,49% - the highest level in 14 years. Even worse is the high price rises in staple goods (18%) which hit the poor most of all. Especially high price increases are seen in potatoes (+58%) and onions (+30%). An interesting article - though two years old - about the food crisis and poverty can be read at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7327858.stm.

During previous visits we often had an evangelist travelling with us, who conducted seminars for pastors and mass campaigns at night for those living in town. This time was different. We invited Dr. Peter Reis, GP in The Hague (http://www.preisministries.nl/), his wife and two nurses to join us and to conduct ***medical camps*** in both of the Remote Areas of Orissa (RAO) and Andhra Pradesh (RAAP). This resulted in quite a large group of seven people, divided over two cars. Medical care is poor in India, especially in the Remote Areas as it does often not exist at all in those regions. Not always the Indian government is to blame for that: the interior is dotted with many very small villages, and roads hardly exist. It is easy to understand that no adequate medical care can be given in these circumstances. Moreover, the psychological distance between patient and doctor is quite large, and often one has to pay for acceptable care which is impossible if half of the population in these states earns less than one dollar a day. In Orissa we organised a two days session in the church building in the beggar's concentration camp Indravati Colony, near the town of Nabarangpur. Looking back it seemed most necessary in this region, not only given the poverty of the inhabitants, but also because of the geographical distance to the town. Around 225 people were treated, almost all from the aforesaid camp and our neighbouring leper's colony with the same name. Of course no all encompassing health care could be given, and the team focussed on the ten most common diseases like skin disease, constipation, worms and foot diseases. Recommendations could be given regarding the simple treatment of wounds, caused by walking bare footed which can cause leprosy, or better food habits. Both nights were concluded by an open air evangelisation message at the platform, next to the church building, and given by Peter. We rented a generator and light, for there is no electricity around.

In Andhra Pradesh (Chintapalli) we had an identical program, and in this town some 200 people were treated. All necessary medicines were bought locally in advance, and it appeared they were sufficient. A two months old baby was totally dehydrated, and was on the verge of death. We took mother and child to a hospital in Narsipatnam, at 1½ hours distance. The doctor spoke to a woman who complained about pain in her stomach for already a long period of time. It appeared she was pregnant already for eight months without knowing it, and she cried: "it is impossible1". After she cooled down for a while, she seemed happy with the result.

While having the medical camp, we had a baptism celebration, and 24 people took baptism. They all were from our camps and a nearby church that belongs to our group of pastors. We had time to visit a nearby village called Sanmashi Gam. Some 500 people live here, and five years ago the first church was started. Now, it has over 50 believers, and a church will be built on a plot donated by a heavily handicapped man who passes his days sitting on the floor. The inside dimensions will be around 450 feet^2 and the expenses are around $ 1400.

Leper's camp Indravati Colony.

The leper's camp has been started in 2006. At that time there were 26 lepers, dwelling in 16 almost collapsing huts and houses. They were literally starving and there was no hope for them. Since that time we took care of them and the other lepers, strolling around in Nabarangpur. The number is 71 people in total (inclusive 7 children). Now they get food three times a day, medicines, kerosene, detergents, soap and once a year new clothes. We have dug a well to provide drinkable water, and have built ***12 new homes*** and restored another 14. The number of homes is sufficient now, and they are technically in good shape. We counted fifteen lepers who are able to work, and we think of creating some horticultural project for them. Normally a well with a treadle pump would be sufficient to irrigate the plot, but for the camp is on a relatively elevated place, we need a bore well with an electric pump. We spoke with the Town Chief of Nabarangpur (who is the owner of the hotel) who pledged to supply a bore well (300 - 400 feet; $ 2000 - $ 2500), but we do not count on this promise. Of course more things are needed: seeds, plants, tools, fertilizers et cetera. We found a farmer with land next to the camp, who is willing to instruct the lepers. We got contact with Nrusingh Charan Pradhan, the branch manager of International Development Enterprises (India). This NGO is supported by several large international NGO's (among others Bill Gates foundation); may be he can be of any help. We will try to find out if the project is viable. All in all we are very happy with the leper's project. Not very often so little money has changed the lives of 70 people as drastically as in this case.

Expenses made in 2009: $ 24,700 or $ 350 per person*

Beggar's camp Indravati Colony.

Although we already visit this camp since 2001 on an almost annual basis, we have not been able to help the beggars in a fundamental way. The beggars are - like the lepers - outcasts, and they are shunned by society. Though the cast system has officially been discarded sixty years ago, it still is part of society, and everyone is aware of his - and others - position. For this reason lepers are not offered any work, and they stuck in their poor position. On the premises of the camp we tore down the church building, and have built a new one, among others from the used bricks. This work was done by the pastor himself, who hired the camp people to build it. The result was

a very nice ***church building*** with iron roof support bearers and corrugated roofing. The church building is 650feet2, and the expense was around $ 1000. This proves the beggars can and want to work, but do not get a chance.

The colony was built ten years ago in order to dispose of the beggars, who were living in the streets of Nabarangpur. Corruption has resulted in very bad dwellings in the camp. A rule of thumb is, only 40% of designated government money arrives at the place of destination. More than half of the houses collapsed by now and part of the people left. Some three hundred remained, and they can not go anywhere. Going back to town is not possible, for they do not have a place to stay, and living on the streets is not allowed. They rebuild their shack-like houses, and make them water proof by using sheets of plastic, or just build huts in between. There are really a lot of children (149 under 13 years of age), mostly at a very young age. Some of them are ***full orphans (7); we supply food and clothing***. However, this is not enough, and we plan to rent or buy a house in town, and have them there with a care taker family. Inside the camp is a government school and around 30 of all children visit the school. The school hours are from 10 - 16h, but they are not taught anything. They just are there, and the teacher is supposed to be there, so he is – or not -, but does not teach. At noon a meal is served; just plain rice with water. One would wonder why the children go to school anyway, but the only reason is the handful of rice.

We have in mind helping the children on a fundamental basis by sending them to a school in Nabarangpur where they get a really good education. We plan to send those aged 6-8 to an English Medium School, and the older children to a traditional school where they are taught in Orya, their mother tongue. Before and after school they could gather in a community building which we are planning to build on the premises of the church. There we will serve them a breakfast and a combined lunch / dinner. It is obvious the start up expenditure is considerable, but especially the daily expenses on the long run would be too much for us to bear. We are working on a long lasting solution. Expenses 2009: not meaningful.

Remote Area of Orissa (RAO)

The Remote Area is much bigger than the State of Orissa, and covers large parts of Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgargh as well. The number of people living in those states is around 132 million. It is in this region that insurgents belonging to the Maoist Naxalites movement regularly commit terrorist attacks, resulting in a death toll of 1134 people in 2009. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naxalite; http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/may/09/india.randeepramesh). Moreover, especially in Orissa sympathisers of the Bharatiya Janata Party are combative, especially towards the growing group of Christians. The BJP is one of India's largest national parties, and strongly nationalistic-Hinduistic biased. During this trip to the Remote Area of Orissa (RAO) we stayed in Nabarangpur, one of the two core towns from which our managing pastor Saroj Takri organizes his work for the poor and needy. The main projects in and around Nabarangpur are the Lepers Camp Indravati Colony, and the beggars concentration camp with the same name at 300 metres distance. Furthermore the pastor pays attention to five little villages in the plain area around Nabarangpur, where he preaches the Gospel, and tries to help the people on a social level. The second core town is Koraput, at 1 ½ hours distance. It is in this mountainous region where Saroj trains pastors for their role in local society, and where we build churches. We run a

Bible School for our 26 pastors and 6 guest students. There does not seem to be an urgency of continuing the Bible school in Koraput, so we plan to close it down by next year. Like in Andhra Pradesh we give the pastors a small salary, gave them a bicycle and have started a church building program. It does not progress as speedily as we would like, but the building contractor is reliable, and builds at very low prices. A church costs about $ 1400 (500 feet2)
Expenses 2009: $ 23,600 inclusive $ 6,100 for the pastors school ($ 190 per student).*

Remote Area Andhra Pradesh (RAAP)

RAAP is part of the same area as RAO, but definitely more dangerous. The Naxalites govern the area, do not hesitate to kill and murder, and the national government has little say. The Indian government considers the Naxallas as the largest domestic thread. It is the area of the tribes, and we visited several villages where people speak languages that cannot be understood by our managing pastors, Samuel Nalli and Vijay Kumar Arava. Our basis was the town of Narsipatnam, some 60 miles from Visakhapatnam, the largest harbour on the east coast of India. Narsipatnam is a very poor town (35000 people) at the verge of the remote area, and we made our trips out of this town; there are no hotels in our part of the remote area. Our ministry stretches 90 miles into the interior. The roads are really bad, and mostly not wider that 1½ lane. The town we consider our centre is Chintapalli, some 35 miles or 1½ hours driving distance from Narsipatnam. Near Chintapalli bauxite was discovered, and the Indian government made a deal with a Russian contractor to open up the area by reconstructing the road by employing 3000 Russian road workers. They started the project, but the Naxalites were furious, and committed assaults, bomb blasts and killings. The result is, everyone left and the government does not know what to do. We tried to visit a congregation and a church building in Rolangi, but had to dispose of the plan: it was too dangerous. Recently three village chiefs were killed, and the chief of Rolangi was told not to allow any strangers in his village. You will understand, we did not want to be the reason for another killing, so we skipped the visit.

Samuel Nalli has been chosen for the second year as the honorary president of the Narsipatnam Pastors Fellowship, an umbrella organization with 700 registered pastors. They live in and around this town, in a circumference of some 10 miles. He oversees some 300 pastors who live in the RAAP, often times in very small villages (60 – 400 people). In our organization we have 21 pastors, and in the last three years we have built a church for each of them. The pastors go to completely isolated villages, and the only reason the villagers accept them is because they are one of them, and speak the same tribal language. They ask if the villagers allow them to explain the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and soon a new church pops up. All the pastors started their own church this way. We donated bicycles to them, and give them a minimal salary ($ 30/month). For most pastors have a poor education and have only basic knowledge of the Bible, we started a ***Bible Training School*** two years ago. The pastors come together three days a week, but we also have 25 guest students. They do not belong to our group of pastors, and do not get a salary or a church. We all gave them a bicycle under the condition they also would use it to spread the gospel in other villages. We also pay for their stay and travel expenses, for often they cannot afford to pay the bus ticket. All of them are young men – as young as 18 years. Most of them already preach, and

some of them have astonishing results. We visited one student who started to preach in his village one year ago, and now has 260 converts. We made a short visit to this village, and were surprised by the liveliness of this congregation, which has no church building. There is a strong request from our managing pastors to prolong the Bible training. We envisioned doing it only for one three years period, for the expenses are a burden to our budget. If we indeed decide to continue the school for the long run, an official Bible Institute in India would be willing to take the responsibility for the quality of the teachings. The work of our ministry also includes the support of 15 pastors in the Gajuwaka region, situated between Visakhapatnam and Narsipatnam. So, all in all we support 36 pastors in this region.

We visited several very small and isolated villages, and some of them could only be visited by turning to ***a solid jeep***, for there was no recognizable road anymore, like to the village of Korukonda or to Varnatapalli. This village has 800 people, and the pastor started his church three years ago. Now, his church has over a hundred believers. We have built a church building, but the final five miles the building materials had to be brought to the village by hand, for there was no road. Our managing pastors state, that never in history any white man has visited those places. We could not reach the villages by car, and had to move over to a jeep which brought us at a speed of 15 miles per hour across rocky paths and through small rivers to our places of destination. We saw a group of 20 military men, patrolling at a mutual distance of some 300 feet. We asked if the region was considered dangerous. "Very dangerous", they answered, but we were not really convinced. This changed the next morning when we read in the newspaper the Naxallites had overthrown a police station, and killed 24 police men.

Expenses in 2009: $ 41,400 inclusive $ 8,550 for the pastors school ($ 185 per student).*

** Amounts paid in Euros. Calculated exchange rate: € 1 = $ 1.40.*

Summary and conclusion

Our impression is that our managing pastors do a good job, and are very much dedicated to their ministry. Their priority is proclaiming the Gospel to the unreached people of India, and to help the poor and needy. Even the most unreachable village is visited several times a month (by motor bike) to encourage the villagers and the pastor, to preach during weddings, funerals, campaigns and other special occasions. If the season allows, a three days mini campaign is organized somewhere in a village. Of course we have to care for the projects that are running already; we do not have plans to expand our work, except the already mentioned horticultural project, and the beggar's children project.

Stills and videos can be seen on www.devasteburcht.nl (perfect quality), or www.YouTube.com. Search for: **atijman**

Composition:
Stichting "De Vaste Burcht
Adri J Tijman, secretary
Otterloseweg 251
NL-7351 TB H O E N D E R L O O
The Netherlands
w: www.devasteburcht.com
www.devasteburcht.nl
e: info@devasteburcht.nl
t: 055 – 378 1851
f: 055 - 378 1854

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