

Travel report India 2009

We have been in India for the 12th time in January / February 2009 to visit our projects, and to be informed about further developments.

Our projects are:

- Children's Home "The Mighty Fortress" plus the connecting social work in the village of Kannurupalem;
- Pastor's Project Remote Area Andhra Pradesh (RAAP);
- Pastor's Project Remote Area Orissa (RAO);
- Leprosy Camp Indravati Colony, Nabarangpur.

A potential project is:

- Beggar's Camp Indravati Colony, Nabarangpur.

In the following report we want to inform you about our impression. From the ministry in RAAP and RAO we made a combined video report. We also made videos from our visit to the Beggar's Camp Indravati Colony and the Lepers Camp Indravati Colony. You can find them on www.devasteburcht.nl plus a large number of stills. This time we made no video report from our visit to the Children's Home "The Mighty Fortress", but photos are available on our web site. The reason for this has been explained in our report. If you want to watch a video report from our children's home anyway, please go to "Video Archive 2008" on our web site.

Remote Area Andhra Pradesh (RAAP)

Samuel Nalli and his brother in law Vijay Kumar Arava are the managers of our mission project in the remote area of Andhra Pradesh. This remote and tribal area borders an equally remote region in Orissa. The remote area spreads over several states, and is at least the size of France. The area can be considered as hostile towards Christianity. The hostility does not stem from the villagers; on the contrary, they are rather positive towards Christianity. The hostility has two sources. The first one is the opposition from the Naxalls (or: Naxlite) terrorists. They oppose everything that is not as it was in the past, and they fight the government. The day we returned to our base in Visakhapatnam 15 police men were killed in attacks. The national and regional government has a very bad reputation, for they do not come up for the interest of the local people. The government is hardly - or not at all able to fight the terrorists, for the mountainous and forested area is vast, and hardly accessible. The second opposition group stems from the BJP party, being the previously governing party. BJP is defending India as an exclusive Hindu country; people should be proud of their Hindu culture, and this attitude obviously finds especially ground in Orissa. The unrests, demolitions and killings in the last two years caused international opposition. As us was told, the national government has become angry, and has threatened the local governing BJP party to stop these practises, otherwise the national government will remove them from power. I think there is a fair chance the unrests will not return again - for the time being.

The area we are working encompasses approximately 5000 km², and is not adjacent to our work in a similar remote area in Orissa. Apart from the managing pastors, we take care of 21 local junior pastors, all of them working in small villages. We give them a salary: \$ 90 per quarter which is equal to the poverty line. We would rather give a higher salary, but for more reasons it is not possible or advisable. We have a school for our pastors, where they are taught Bible knowledge during three days a week, and three years in total. The training will be concluded by an exam for Bachelor of Theological Education (BTE). We rent the school, pay for the food, and give additional access to 30 other pastors who are invited to join the course, but are not part of our ministry. To make it possible for them to come, we pay their travel expenses. They sometimes live as far as 50 miles away.

We visited our Bible Training Centre in Chintapalli, at 1 1/2 hours drive through the mountains of Andhra Pradesh. This is a midsize mountainous area that goes up as far as 1600 metres / 5200 feet. Our students sit on the floor during lessons, and we rented a house to accommodate a place to sleep. It was quite shocking for me to see the place. The house was hardly more than a little shack, and our pastors sleep on the floor. There is not enough room to let all the 21 pastors plus our guest students sleep inside, so a few sleep

outside under the shed. The managing pastors - seeing my disbelief about the accommodation - assured me that this is better than the pastors are used to at home. We discussed about driving down to Rolangi but Samuel and Vijay Kumar considered it too late and therefore too dangerous with regards to the Naxlite terrorists.

We visited the village of **Vipplapalem**, at some 15 miles distance from Narsipatnam. The pastor started his **church** a few years ago, being the first pastor in the village, where never ever in history a church had been built before. At the moment he started, one Christian



lived in Vipplapalem. Now - some three years later - his church has 50 members, and is still growing. As we visited the church, around 40 women were there, and a few men (it was a week day). We noticed that there were no - or hardly old people in the church and village, which does not mean they didn't look old. After the opening ceremony we addressed to the people, and after the benediction we were asked to pray for the sick. Almost all of them had bad knees, hips or necks, and many suffered from head ache. As we left the church we saw a small wallow, and it appeared that the villagers drunk this water. We went

down to have a look, and saw that the water was no good to anything. People washed in the water, and while we were there we saw some water buffalos bathing in the water. Not just with their legs; they just bade! They shit and piss in the water, and it does not come up to the villager's mind that the water is absolutely not fit for any use. It was just astonishing to us. We prayed for sound and healthy drinking water, and we anointed the water.

Would that make any difference? Two days later we told this story to Bob Bernard, the Bible school professor who performed the pastor's schools. He was very much moved, for one and a half century ago his ancestors lived in a tiny village in Ohio, USA, where all people - including his great-grandparents - died at a young age. It appeared that the cess pool was built on a slope, lying on a higher level than the village. The unclean water trickled through the soil, and polluted the drinking water. He decided to donate \$ 500 for digging a well, the first one ever dug in the village history. We ordered already to dig the well. It will be 70 feet deep, and the builders guarantee drinking water.

It is not easy to communicate with our junior pastors, for no one speaks any English. I asked them to come together, and I spoke to them. Ensuing I asked some of the a few questions in order to understand the impact of their work. In RAAP I interviewed five of our own pastors, and four of the guest students. Eight out of them started their own church, and seven did that in a village without Christians, and where never had been a church before. One man told he started a church in 2006 in a village with 275 people; none of them were Christians. Now he has 80 believers in his church. Almost all stories were identical. We donated bicycles to our pastors two years ago to go out and preach in the surrounding villages. I asked if the guest pastors had a bicycle. No one out of the 30 people raised their hands. I did not promise them a bicycle - money is scarce nowadays - but promised them to try raising money for buying bicycles. Expenses: 60 each.

Reading the international press, you would easily come to the conclusion India is an emerging economic behemoth. It might be true if you visit the big cities, but in the country side the poverty is striking. Being in a country that lives in peace and has not a national natural disaster to face, you normally would not ask if people are still dying of starvation. This time I did however, and the answer was shocking: still people die out of hunger in the Remote Area. I tried to make clear that I indeed meant "hunger", and no diseases derived from hunger. Still the answer was positive: people in the Remote Area die of hunger! There is hardly any other work than being a day labourer. You can do road reconstruction work, and hammer granite rocks with - indeed - a hammer in small pieces. Hundreds of women are sitting for ten hours in the burning sun to earn INR 40 of INR 50)¹ a day. Little children (5 - 9 years) who are supposed to go to school are cleaning tables in road side restaurants,

sweeping the floor or work in the houses of the people who are a little bit more well to do: INR 10 - 20 is their daily income, plus a hand full of rice as a meal. Being a labourer in the fields - which is most common - generates roughly the same income if there is anything that grows. However, in the past three years there have been regional draughts which means: no income. The death toll is high anyway (no medical facility around whatsoever), and out of misery men sometimes forsake their families, and go somewhere else leaving their wife and children alone. Occasionally they die of starvation. Others are not able to help, poor as they are themselves. This has been confirmed by several pastors, working in the Remote Area.

In 2008 we bought a car for our mission in the RAAP: a Bolero 7 seater (□ 12000), for reaching the area you need some more transport capacity than just that of a motor cycle. Beyond that, we have had two serious accidents with a bike, and it twice cost us a new one. Vijay Kumar had an accident last year, and it took him several months to recover completely. He still has no bike yet, and travels mostly by bus. We will buy a new bike for him (\$ 1100). Samuel is full time in our ministry; Vijay Kumar has next to his work for us an own ministry in the slums of Visakhapatnam.



Finally we have to mention that we organised a **pastor's training in Narsipatnam**. We invited all pastors in a wide surrounding, and the response was overwhelming. We counted 280 - 300 participants, all pastors working in the most remote parts of Andhra Pradesh. The number was so high, that the Baptist Church in Narsipatnam was too small, **and a number of pastors had to follow the seminar outdoor**.



We interviewed the pastors, and we were again encouraged by their testimonies regarding church planting, miracles and conversions. In the evening we had a public crusade, but most people who attended were Christians already, so no many decisions for Jesus were made. We counted around 500 attendees. Expenses for the pastor's seminar and the crusade: \$ 2000.

Pastors Project Remote Area Orissa (RAO)

Situated roughly in the triangle Nabarangpur - Jeypore - Koraput is the part of the remote area where Saroj is managing the work of 26 associated pastors. Estimated size of the area: 5.000km². As in RAAP we run a **Bible training centre** for the **pastors**, and we have six other pastors who are "guest students". Here we provide the same facilities as in AP, and after three years of training the course is concluded with a Bachelor of Theological Education. They will be examined by an acknowledged Bible institute. The program is like this:

08:00 - 10:15 first session

10:15 - 11:15 second session, followed by group discussions. 13:00 -

14:00 meals 14:00 - 15:00 rest

15:00 - 16:00 final teaching

Evening program: prayer sessions; meetings in one of the 20 churches in Koraput (not compulsory). The first of the three days teaching starts later, for pastors have to come by (mini)bus from places far away. They stay at the school for two nights, and sleep on the floor. We got a donation to buy bicycles for the guest students (6; \$ 400). Communication

with the pastors is rather difficult, for none of them speaks English. I gathered all of them in a room, and interviewed them via Saroj.



One of them pastors a village of several hundreds of people, with only 30 believers. Another pastor lives in a village of 60, and among them 15 believers. He started the church himself, and the moment he began his work, there were no believers at all. A third person had the same story, and told that out of 15 believers last year 8 were baptised. There are no stories about villagers who are hostile towards the work of the pastors. Sometimes the pastors have a small vegetable garden to cultivate themselves; for the rest they go around to preach and to help. I noticed that some of them did not - or hardly - go outside their

own village. I encouraged them to do that, for we donated to all of them a bicycle in the past, mainly for this purpose. In the regional city of Koraput (40.000 inhabitants; 65 km from Nabarangpur; 1 1/2 hours ride) we conducted a pastor's seminar by day and a village campaign in the evening. The two days cost us \$ 2000 for renting, transport and food. We counted 150 participants who had to pay \$ 0,45 admission fee. During the evening campaign we counted around 100 people who repented from sin. We did not notice any hostility against us. The speaker was - like last year - pastor Bob Bernard, professor at North Central University in Minneapolis, USA.

During our field trip we visited **Kulab**, 40 km from Koraput. Here our first church was built in a remote and tribal village. People speak a different dialect, and the Orya speaking people of Orissa (33mio.) cannot understand them. The villagers understand Orya somewhat, for the children are taught in that language. The village has a few hundred inhabitants, and until three years ago there was no single Christian to be found. Now there is a flourishing parish of over one hundred souls. They have strange habits here. Meat is not from animals that are killed in order to feed them, but they eat meat from animals that have died naturally. This means that meat is mostly all but tender, and often from sick animals. Normal items on the menu are snakes, ants, cats and rats. We have not had lunch here; we were not hungry.

The churches we build here are cheaper than in RAAP, and cost around \$ 1200 - 1500 a piece, a.o. depending on the transportation expenses. We dedicated the church, and **the people were ecstatic and overjoyed**. In the afternoon we went by car to Dokribeda, a village 71 km from Koraput to dedicate another church. Travel time by car: 2 1/2 hours. Pastor Saroj went there last



October by motor cycle, but while he was there it started to rain. It took him 15 days before he was able to return home, and in the meantime he was inflicted with malaria.

Indravati Colony: Beggar's Camp.

In fact, Indravati Colony comprises of two camps: the beggar's concentration camp, and the adjoining leprosy camp. Although we have not taken up any work in the beggar's camp we always visit them, for they are almost in the same miserable situation as the lepers before we started to help them. We are always welcomed with music and dance, and we are sure we are the only foreigners who have ever visited the camp in the ten years of history. We

tend to give them a present: this year we bought 175 aluminium baskets (\$ 3.00 each). Our managing pastor in that area is pastor Saroj Takri, who lives with wife and four children in the town of Nabarangpur, way back in the interior and at 8 hours travelling distance to the nearest big city, Visakhapatnam. He visits the beggars and the lepers three to four times a week.

Inside the a little church, that has service, but there are the morning and days a week. One of lives inside the camp, asked Saroj if in his of starvation. He told that even inside camp people die of I have been six times in last few years, and I this! Saroj told that a an old lady died of shortly before an old recognized the dire



beggars camp is a Sunday also services in evening, seven our pastors who is taking care. I area people die confirmed, and the beggar's hunger. Imagine: the camp in the was not aware of few months ago hunger, and man. He situation of this

man, and gave him extra food: the leftovers from the palm leaves of our lepers. However it was too late: the man died a few days later.

Saroj will find out which possibilities are at hand to organize a medical camp for one day to perform cataracts surgery. \$ 150 will make it possible for around ten people a day to have sight in their eyes again.

Two years ago Saroj told a Hindu man who has a heart for children offered him a piece of land to build a children's home for the children of the beggar's camp and the offer still stands. I asked him if there was any need for an orphanage, and he confirmed that. Inside the beggars camp **six children live together, who are full orphans**, and are non-related. Their age is five (4x), six and seven years; one is a girl. No one takes care of them, no one



helps them and no one protects them. If they die, so be it! They live in one of the houses, and I visited the house. They sleep on a brick floor, and only one of them has a cloth that was a blanket a very long time ago. The others have nothing at all, and sleep in the cold on a brick floor without any protection. To get anything to eat, they go to the garbage dump, and collect recyclable waste paper and plastic or tins, and at the end of the day their harvest is collected by a merchant who gives them some food or a few Rupees. I have watched them working there. Remember their

age: 5-7 years. No Bob the Builder, Lego or Playstation around, or a nice bedroom with a toy in bed; just misery all around. Saroj visits them 3 - 4 times a week, and brings them small things to eat, like biscuits. The children trust him completely, and they call him "uncle", an expression of respect and trust.

There are more alarming situations: a woman (30) with five children is left behind by her husband as he found out she is suffering from HIV/AIDS. There is no food, and no means of income. Their children can also be found on the municipal garbage dump, being in competition with all the others who try to get a slice of the garbage harvest. More of these examples can be told.

There is no way "De Vaste Burcht" can build a third orphanage again. Not only would the expenses be too high, but the running cost is a burden that is in competition with the other work we are doing worldwide already. We asked pastor Saroj if any other orphanage can be found in the vicinity. There is none in a circumference of at least 100km. We asked Saroj if he would be able to find foster parents, or even parents who would be willing to adopt one of the orphans mentioned before, and we would pay for their monthly expenses. He is trying to find them. For the statistics it does not make a difference, but for the children, it does. We will make it a prayer burden to find an opening to help these children.

Indravati Colony: Leprosy Camp.

The **leprosy camp** encompasses all together 52 adults and their 8 children (uncounted till now), being all the lepers in the town of Nabarangpur.



Mostly they are not able to work (hands and feet are rotten away), sometimes they would be able to, but no one wants to have a connection to them, afraid as they are for their disease. We have built houses for those who came from a different camp in the past, and they now even have toilets. Never the less some patients returned to the old camp, because most of the already existing houses are made of mud, and some of them are starting to collapse, for they have thatched roofing that need to be restored. The number of houses that need restoration is about 20.

The expenses are to be estimated at ₹ 8.000. We will start working on this in the current year. All in all, the project runs fine, and everyone is happy. The lepers asked me to get breakfast in the morning, for they get only two meals a day. I granted this. Expenses per breakfast: ₹ 0,08, or around ₹ 1800 per year in total.

Children's home "The Mighty Fortress", Kannurupalem.

Contrary to our previous visits we did not stay there for three days, but took only half a day to visit the children's home. Reason for the short stay was that we had to solve some managerial problems, and we were not sure we would succeed in solving them. Assuming we would not succeed it would have been painful to everyone, including us, to be welcomed by much ado and festivity.

Before talking about the problems, we want to express our happiness with the progress we have made under the management of Koti Paradeshi during the past ten years. We started just with a small children's home for eight kids, and many more things have been achieved. We expanded the home to forty children, were able to give them a decent education, fed the poor, paid pensions to the needy and paid attention to 150 neglected children living around in remote villages. During our visit we opened the new **dining hall**. It took a lot of time to complete it (cost overruns), and it is still not completed: doors and window frames are still lacking. The building has **one very big room**, and two smaller rooms that can be used as store rooms or class rooms.



Like in any partnership problems can arise, and they have to be solved, otherwise it is not possible to continue in mutual satisfaction. Therefore we wanted to have a meeting with

Koti, an interpreter, his wife Elizabeth and their daughter Victoria Rani. Both ladies play a key role in the management of the home, and we think Victoria Rani (28) could play an even more important role in the future.

We describe in short the problems which arose during the past year.

A few years ago Koti asked me twice to buy a bus to bring the children to his school. I declined, because it is not our mission to take everyone who wants to our school. Our mission is to offer shelter to the most neglected children, and pay attention to social needs in the village. Never the less Koti bought a bus, and made a down payment out of the pension plan of his wife Elizabeth. However, he was not able to pay for the instalments, and took a loan to cover these, hoping that I would later come up with payments to solve the debts. I told him this was not going to work, and I demanded he should sell the bus, which he refused to do. Furthermore, I had serious complaints about his way of communication. Items I would consider as important were not mentioned in the mails, and had to be found



out during a visit. We tried to improve the communication, but Koti is - as far as we see it - not able to change this. We arranged an extraordinary board meeting in The Netherlands, and the board tried to change Kotis' mind regarding the bus in vain. As a final option the board delegated Johan Evenblij, chairman of the board to visit Koti together with me. The visit took place on Sunday 8 February.

We gave an introduction in which we gave a review about the development and experiences thus far. It culminated in a repeated demand to get rid of the

bus. Koti explained that the bus was necessary to maintain the official status of the school. We said an official recognition would not be necessary. The children can be taught in a non-recognized school, and go for examination to a public government school. We discussed the plan to lift up the school, and send the children to a government school. These schools have a bad reputation, but we could maintain the high level of teaching by keeping some teachers in our home, especially a good teacher for English. Although we had low expectations of the outcome of the discussion, some important decisions have been made.

- Koti will sell the bus after April 2009 (the end of the school year);
- The school will be closed, and the children will go to a public school;
- Important teachers will remain in function to give extra educational support in order to maintain our high standard of education;
- Victoria Rani will be the one who will take responsibility of the communication;
- Periodically Koti has to sign a statement that no debt have been taken.

We have full confidence in the work and the management in Kannurupalem. If it will be as fruitful in the next decade as it was in the past, everyone will be happy. The results of the meeting will be submitted to the annual board meeting of our foundation, which will be held early March, 2009. However, it is likely the board will approve with the outcome of the meeting.

)¹ INR. 1 = \$ 0,02, or: \$ 1,00 = INR. 50.

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