

SLUM MILLIONAIRES

NEWS FROM BILL YATES WORKING WITH THE POOR IN INDIA

Some of you may have heard of or seen the film "*Slum dog Millionaire*" in which a poor young man from a Mumbai slum wins a big prize in a TV quiz show. Due to the huge increase in population and migration from the countryside the big Indian cities are full of slums, and New Delhi the capital with about 14 million population is no exception. I have been visiting one in a place called Sangam Vihar in south Delhi for the past 20 years, and watched the population grow, the roads gradually improve and the traffic increase on its narrow streets. I have also seen the growth in the church I visit there, called the Praise Centre, run by Pastor Thomas Daniel from Kerala state in south India and started in 1998. With just his family of 3 children plus a handful of helpers he set up home there and started a junior school, a church and a home for unwanted or abandoned children. The work grew slowly but accelerated after the formation of a bible training college in 2006. Another piece of land was bought in 1990 and others from Malaysia bought adjacent houses so that more people could be accommodated. The piece of land could be used to build a separate bible training facility but no funds are available.

I visit almost every year and this time spent 3 weekends in the colony and spoke at 3 Sunday am services. These were very well attended and quite a few local people became Christians and several were healed. During the week I spoke on most days for 4 hours to the bible school students and children from the children's home, teaching them from the bible and answering questions. All

messages were translated into the Hindi language and I believe the time spent was useful and helpful, despite the cold weather and the illnesses that it produced. Here are some details to show how your prayers were truly answered.

4 November. For economic and medical reasons I caught a flight from Singapore to Bangalore before catching a train to Delhi, and the mission started on the plane, where I sat next to a former captain of India's men's hockey team. He saw me reading the Bible and asked if I was a priest. I replied "sort of" and as we spoke it transpired that he had a real family need and was very happy for me to pray about it.

5 November. After some fellowship with friends from the Village Reach India group in Bangalore and giving a sample for a blood test I caught the afternoon train to Delhi and enjoyed a pleasant trip through the Indian countryside with use of a sleeper berth at night. Unlike on most journeys, my compartment was almost empty most of the time.

6 November. Still travelling slowly through the countryside!

7 November. Arrived Delhi 10 am and was met by pastor Daniel and Rajveer, one of the bible college graduates, now married and running the library at the college. To Sangam Vihar for lunch and spent the rest of the day chatting, resting and preparing for tomorrow's service. Chocolates and other gifts supplied by a friend in Kuala Lumpur were gratefully received by the children.

8 November - Sunday. The morning service lasted about 3 hours and lunch was served afterwards. I spoke for about 1 hour and about 30 people came out for prayer after hearing the message for a variety of pains or problems. One lady wore a Liverpool football club shirt...but I still prayed for her. Met Rebecca, one of the Praise Centre trustees, and her mother, a very tough Nepali lady of

80 plus. I also met the latest addition to the children's home, Jasmit, a boy of 3 who could not speak or eat properly when he came. After a few weeks and prayer these problems went and his mother was thrilled when he started to speak to her over the telephone.

9 to 13 November. These weekdays were spent teaching the bible to about 15 students in the bible college, plus 17 from the children's home, including Jasmit who sat quietly for 2 hours in the afternoon and another 2 at night. Most of the teaching was from the parables in Matthew 13, but a lot of other subjects were taught too. I felt quite tired towards the end of the week and the weather got a lot colder. This change in the weather produced quite a lot of sickness from which I was not immune.

14 November. Today was planned as a day off and 3 of us visited a British friend Simon prince and his young family. Simon is serving God in nearby Vasant Kunj and knew more about India than I did! In the evening a meeting had been arranged by Johnson George, the director of the bible college, in his home at nearby Kalkaji, and I spoke for 1 hour on the second coming.

15 November - Sunday. Although I was not feeling too good the anointing came when giving the message at the morning service to over 100 souls and I appealed at the close to people who wanted to become Christians. Some responded and others came out for prayer afterwards.

16 to 20 November. Winter arrived on 16th and the weather was much colder thereafter. Some heavy rain came too, which was much needed as the wells in Sangam Vihar had run dry. Continued teaching afternoon and evening and discovered that 2 young bible college students from Nepal had only been Christians for 3 months after conversion from Maoism so some basic teaching was needed. Had some fasting days this week for greater energy and effectiveness. Visited a nearby charity hospital one morning for a skin

complaint and their remedy worked well.

21 November. Had a day off and went into the city centre, quite an adventure as it takes ages to get out of the colony due to narrow crowded roads that are often under repair. Visited Connaught circus in the heart of the city and rode the new metro being built for the Commonwealth games late this year. I only lasted 3 stops as the carriages were packed.

22 November - Sunday. On this my last Sunday service the church was full and I preached a shorter message emphasizing salvation and prayed for many afterwards for all sorts of needs until 2pm. At least 2 ladies and 2 children prayed to receive Christ, and Pastor Daniel told me later that 7 adults had become new Christians, and 21 new visitors had also prayed for salvation but he was not sure if this was genuine so would wait to see if they continued to come and to grow. I learned later that one lady got complete healing from kidney stone pain, and she could not even sit down at the first Sunday service. One young girl had holes in her ear and was waiting to have an operation. I asked people to put their hands on places where they wanted healing and she did so. When she went later on for a checkup the doctors were astonished to see the holes completely filled. One family was always poor and struggling despite a good income and when I touched on this subject they responded in faith. Pastor Daniel later told me their situation was completely reversed and they invited one of the bible college students into their home to see their stocks of wheat and rice and their new kitchen utensils.

During the week I had developed a heavy cold but this did not affect the ministry. Unlike on earlier visits, there were many adults attending the church, and this is due mainly to house visitation, home groups and street evangelism, mostly carried out by the bible college students.

23 November. Rested am and in the afternoon dedicated 5 sewing machines donated by a friend from Malaysia for use by women in the colony. The cold

was severe and I wore 3 vests plus plus! Caught the night fast train to Bangalore and was seen off by Pastor Daniel, his son Blesson and Luke from the children's home. Usually John comes but as he is now 16 he has to go to a higher school so no longer lives in Sangam Vihar. He stays with his mother who lives in a tent by the roadside, but it is much nearer his new school. As other children get to 16 they can no longer get free education at Pastor Daniel's school and have to pay somehow to get higher education elsewhere in Delhi. This is going to be quite a problem, but it is one of many in this colony where hundreds of thousands of souls live.

24 November. Today was spent in relative comfort on the rajdhani train, one of the best in India. My compartment and the one next door were filled with excited Hindus returning from a camp in Rishikesh on the Ganges River in the Himalaya Mountains. They had been listening to talks given by a swami from Chennai, and were playing the tapes of them in English... possibly for my benefit. They were clearly hooked on his teachings. They were also singing songs that sounded just like Christian ones, using Hindi words like mahima (glory), but they were directed to their god Krishna and not to Christ.

25 to 27 November. After getting to Bangalore early I spent 3 days with the Village Reach India folk, relaxed a bit, did some shopping and visited the specialist at the hospital where I had heart treatment about 5 years ago. He did not require any tests and gave me a support letter for working in Jerusalem with Bridges for Peace, where I am currently acting as a receptionist (!) as I type this report. I appreciated the much warmer weather in south India. My blood test was ok. Had some trouble at check in at the new airport and was asked for 1700 rupees extra for my luggage, but this was cancelled after some discussion. After the flight to Kuala Lumpur via Singapore my cold and cough was so bad I spent 3 days in bed but gradually recovered, hence the delay in sending out this report for thanksgiving.

Conclusions. Church planting in India's slums is not for the faint-hearted, especially in Delhi with its extremes of heat and cold. It gets to 50 C in the summer. Pastor Daniel's little community consists of about 150 day school mostly fee-paying children, plus 17 in his children's home, who sleep in a hut on the roof, and a similar number in the bible college, plus the church attendees. The 5 ladies at the bible college also sleep in a hut on the roof. About 36 people in total sleep in the house, which had an extra floor put in about 3 years ago. They are poor but happy and see many answers to prayer. He does not charge fees for studying at the college...unlike others... but is consequently limited as to how many he can take. 60 Burmese alone applied when the college started, so the demand is there. He has had to turn many away. But after 5 years in operation 13 students have graduated, 6 of whom are working in churches elsewhere in India and 3 in Sangam Vihar. One Burmese graduate works with Burmese refugees and runs a church in Delhi. There are about 50,000 Burmese refugees in Delhi I was told, plus many Nepalis. In December they had 3 days of prayer and fasting for the smooth running of the Bible College and its survival in the coming days.

Some months ago during the long hot summer the wells ran dry and the entire colony was desperate for water. Pastor Daniel sent an appeal for help and people from Malaysia financed a pipeline to a more distant government borehole which hopefully will give a consistent supply. The water table has gone down a lot due to use by so many people plus industrial needs. Another slight nuisance comes from the loud noise from a nearby Hindu temple at 4.00 am daily, and the nearby mosque gives a noisy prayer call at about 5.30 am. The prices of food, bus fares etc have shot up recently partly because the Indian government is trying to drive out beggars and the poorer people from the city to make a better impression for the Commonwealth Games.

I hope this has given you some idea of the challenges, opportunities, needs, problems and rewards of church planting in Delhi. Less than 1% of its

population is Christian according to official figures. When I saw the progress of the church despite all the obstacles and the poverty I was reminded of the words in 2 Corinthians 4.vv 7-18, but especially of some words in chapter 6.v.10 of the same book...**"poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything."**

These people are true millionaires....and the prayers and gifts of interested Christians have helped to make them so.