

Christmas greeting

by Fr. Koshy

This Christmas I have a story on home integration for you, one of the many we have here. More than 13,000 children have by now been returned back to their homes. I am sure that everyone who reads this will find it interesting.

Venkatesh Sreenappa is a 13 year old boy who was taken home to his mother a couple of months back. Dire poverty made the parents place the kid 5 years ago, he was just 8 years then, as a domestic help in a family in Bangalore. His native village, Kuppam, is not far from Bangalore. Maltreatment at his place of work, this family, finally made him run away from there. He boarded a train that took him to Hyderabad. He lived in and around the railway station for nearly 3 years, begging, cleaning train carriages and getting a hand out from the passengers etc.

One day, 2 years ago, he came as far as Vijayawada and found himself being greeted and welcomed at the train station by a street educator from Navajeevan. "A most unexpected experience", he later recalled. The street educator invited him to the shelter and he somehow felt the impulse to 'oblige' him. At the shelter his experience was even more impressive. He loved the happy, friendly atmosphere prevailing there.

He decided to stay on, once he had a chat with Jones-akka ('akka' means 'elder sister'). Jones-akka counseled him and was able to offer emotional support to the boy. This was followed by placing him in the re-orientation camp Prerana and there after he remained for three years in the 'streetchildren's village' Chiguru, with the other children in one of the family-like homes.

In the meanwhile, constant reminder about home and family made him get interested in going back home to his parents, but unfortunately, he had by now forgotten a lot of details about his village and the surrounding areas. All what he could recollect was that he was from near a place called Kuppam in Andhra Pradesh.

Noticing his growing interest to go home, his caremother at Chiguru brought this to the notice of Jones-akka once again and she arranged that Mr. Shankar, one of the senior team members in the home integration service, took him to Kuppam. On reaching Kuppam the kid was able to recollect that the name of his village sounded something like 'Kna....palle'. On enquiry, Mr. Shankar found out that there was a village about ten kilometers away from there with the name 'Kanamanapalle'. One of the persons Mr. Shankar interacted with was a certain Mr. Raju, a local TV channel reporter. He volunteered to take them both to the village on his motor bike. On reaching the village, Venkatesh said that his house was near the temple and the school.

They were very much there now and there was a woman standing in front of a hut close to the school. She didn't realize that her lost son was standing almost in front of her because she had given up all hope of ever seeing

him alive again. She was now sure that her beloved son Venkatesh was dead. In fact the family had framed a photograph of the kid and kept it in their poor hut, as it is customary to keep photographs of dear departed ones.

It was Venkatesh who recognized his mother and ran to her crying "amma, amma!" (mother, mother!). The woman was aghast, hearing some kid calling her mother. But it was not long before she recognized her lost, rather believed to be dead son running towards her. In moments both mother and son were locked in a warm and loving embrace, tears of joy streaming down their cheeks! The next moment Venkatesh' mother falls at the feet of Mr. Shankar, who accompanied the child, and cried aloud saying "you are God come alive, you have brought my dead son back to life..."

One of the most beautiful and touching happenings in Navajeevan are these; bringing back life to the child and to the family. Incidents like this and similar things are taking place in Navajeevan nearly every day.

As we celebrate Christmas, which is considered all over the world, as a family festival, thoughts of these children who have lost their families and roots come very crowding into our minds. For every one kid that is home integrated, there are two others who cannot find their way home. My prayer this Christmas and every Christmas is that all those who have lost their homes, find their way back home, and that there be people of 'good will' who will help these children 'get home' safe!

Merry Christmas to you all!



Mark Bos in India

by Ilona Seure

On 19 November, Mark left again for India, for Bangalore. He is going to do his Humanities graduate research there on the influence of Bollywood films on young people. How do Indian youngsters respond to the norms and values of Bollywood films? Do they adopt them in their daily lives? Are newly acquired freedoms taking the place of traditional restrictions? Or are fiction and reality remote from each other? You can take a look at his website: <http://bollymark.blogspot.com> On this site, Mark describes his research (in English) and writes about developments. He has also contributed his column as usual.

Understanding India

by Mark Bos

This is now my fourth visit to 'Incredible India' as the slogan of the Indian Tourist Office puts it. I am in the metropolis of Bangalore to write my dissertation on Bollywood films and for a traineeship at the university. Of course I am getting to know the country better, but each time, it takes a lot of getting used to.

For example, I still don't know what to do with all the beggars I meet every day. Especially when you are waiting in a rickshaw at traffic lights. Very young mothers with babies, or severely handicapped tap your arm for minutes on end and say 'panch rupai please, abbai panch rupai..' ('brother, please give me five rupees'). If the rickshaw driver doesn't shoo them away, you sit there awkwardly. Hoping the lights will turn green quickly. Or that they will realize that you are really not going to give them anything. But that is the hard part.

When do you give something? I know for a fact that not every beggar is genuine. It seems that some of them deliberately mutilate themselves so as to be able to stir people's pity. You can also wonder whether you are really helping people by giving them money for a meal. I'd like to be able to send them all to projects like Navajeevan, but some of them don't want to leave the street. And I don't speak the language so I can't refer them to projects like that. What should I do?

I met a tourist who had decided not to give any of the beggars he met anything and to find a project and give money to that. I thought that was a good solution. But when I am waiting in a rickshaw and a child on a mother's arm looks at me, then I can't always help myself. I just hope the money will be well used.

Each time, I rediscover how varied this country is, and how diverse its inhabitants are. As an outsider, you are inclined to want to describe India. For example by saying 'it is a developing country', 'the people are hospitable' or 'they are proud of their country'. The more people I meet, the less certain I feel about statements like these. The endless riches, the rudeness of some people on the street, the way some Indians hate their fellow countrymen, it is all there. How could it be otherwise in a country in which 20% of the world population lives. It is a bit like what Bollywood super star Shah Rukh Khan sings in the film Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani, 'hum logon ko samajh sako to samjho dilbarjani, jitna bhi tum

samjo ge utni hogi hairani'. That means something like 'If you want to understand us, just go ahead. But the harder you try, the more surprised you'll be.'

Probably that is exactly the reason why this country continues to fascinate me and why I am gradually becoming a little bit addicted to it. It is not possible to understand it all. It keeps you thinking. The experiences at Navajeevan 8 years ago, set a lot in motion in my life. That is why I am soon going back to visit that part of India again in Vijayawada, where it all began with Fr. Koshy.

Changes in the Board

by Ilona Seure

On Sunday 18 November the Board met once more for a 'reflective' session. Ilona had indicated that she wanted to stop being Chairperson of the Friends of Navajeevan. From now on, she would like to have fewer tasks related to the Board, and more time for other things. She wants to continue to be involved. The following was decided: Heidi Timmerman will take over as Chairperson of the Board with immediate effect. She now has a double function: she is both Chairperson and Secretary. Eric Bontenbal remains as Treasurer and Ilona Seure is now an ordinary Member of the Board in addition to Chrisje van Rens and Hanneke van de Vranden.

It was also decided that Eric and Heidi would jointly form the Executive Board of the Foundation. Because our Foundation is now running well and few major decisions need to be taken, everyday business can be dealt with quickly and efficiently by the Executive Board. Important decisions in relation to the Foundation will be taken by the Board as a whole. We believe that in this way it will be easier for all Members of the Board to work for the Friends of Navajeevan.



Thank you for your contribution!

We would like to say a heartfelt 'thank you' to everyone who contributed this year, whether by raising funds, making donations or in any other way.

The Board of the Friends of Navajeevan wishes you an enjoyable festive season and a happy New Year!

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