

Newsletter from Reaching the Unreached

Br James Kimpton

Sangeetha is a nine year old girl who came to us as an AIDS orphan. She does not have HIV. She has been in our care for two years, and has kept good health.

Suddenly three weeks ago she collapsed. She became paralysed, unable to talk, etc.. After scans she was found to have acute encephalo myelitis, and the hospitals and doctors told us she would be little more than a vegetable if she survived. After intensive care in a large private hospital in Madurai when she showed no improvement and was totally paralysed and in a coma we brought her back to Leonard Hospital in nearby Batlagundu run by the Holy Cross Sisters. We gave instructions to discontinue any life-saving processes since she showed no signs of recovery. To survive like a vegetable in India, especially as a girl would be a life of hell.

The day she was admitted to the paediatric ward she herself suddenly removed the various tubes into her body, sat up and said: "I am hungry, give me something to eat." Immediately she became normal and 3 or 4 days later was discharged from the hospital as totally cured. She is back in our Children's Village and back in school as a little happy, busy girl, like all the others, with her huge smile.

The children and child-care staff had been praying constantly to Bd. Mother Teresa and I had fixed Sangeetha's photo to the portrait of Blessed Mother Teresa in the prayer hall of one of our Children's Villages. We nagged Mother Teresa for her recovery.

Sangeetha is now fully recovered after two weeks of being so seriously ill that we had all given up hope of her survival.

At the other end of the human scale is an old lady about whom we know nothing. As I was visiting one of our schools I noticed a movement on the roadside. I thought it was just one of the many stray dogs so common in the villages, but I went back, not sure, to find it was a woman in a condition as bad as it could possibly be. She was just lying there in the dirt, in a mess of filthy clothes, semi-conscious, her long matted hair full of vermin. How long she had been wandering no-one could tell me. "She is from an outside village," was all the information I could get. She was not going to live long in such extreme conditions of poverty. No-one should ever have to end a life of hard work, no matter how harsh, in such extreme poverty and abandonment.

She was picked up by our good staff, brought in our jeep to the main centre, bathed, hair cut and she was put into clean cloths. She was then fed - when was her last meal? Now she is in one of our little rooms for the very old who have nowhere to go and she will be cared for as best we can.

These two stories which are typical of the kind of outreach and caring that are common to the work of [Reaching the Unreached](#). They tell of individuals in great need who without the intervention of our staff would almost certainly not survive. This is all far removed from the glamour pictures being presented by the media about India. The remote interior villages are hardly touched by the growing technology in the big cities. The villages in which we work over an area of 25 kms radius from our campus are still very primitive in every way; scarce water, no sewage systems at all, little electricity, wretched housing, tenth rate schools if they exist, etc., etc.. Medical care will be many miles away and transport to and fro rare.

In addition to our own busy clinic we also have a mobile clinic that goes out every evening to these remoter villages. This mobile clinic contains all that is necessary for the ordinary needs of villages, even a small laboratory than can do the usual tests including for the HIV virus.

We also have a mobile school-science lab. which visits the many poorly equipped schools every day. These schools, which are mostly government schools, do not have even a test tube but depend entirely on the illustrations in the standard text books. These children can now see and participate in all the experiments needed for their final exams. So great is the demand from the Government that we are now investing in another mobile science lab in order to reach still more schools.

We also have another mobile unit for tailoring. This is for grown up girls and housewives. We move the sewing machines and other equipment from interior village to village every six months and two teachers travel there each day. The village must provide a suitable room for this. With our help these women can learn dress-making and other similar crafts for their own family use and also for sale as an income generating programme.

