



## Kolkata 2008

Arriving at Kolkata airport on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2008 was like going home – nothing had really changed. The streets outside the BMS Guest House are still full of homeless people living under temporary shelters. It was monsoon season, and we saw many heavy deluges of rain together with thunderstorms. We wondered how the people on the streets coped – some of them were elderly, and some families had small children. The Good News Children's Education Mission with whom we work, do much to help and support these families, by providing education for the children, along with clothes and meals each day.

We were working at the Day-care Centre at Daspara, a suburb of Kolkata. The bus would drop the older children off at the first school, and then take the children aged between 18 months and 5 years out to Daspara. On arrival the children would be washed, have their teeth cleaned and put in clean clothes. During the day their old 'street' clothes would be washed and mended. After a short time of devotions including singing, a Bible Story and prayer, the children would be given breakfast. This was followed by playtime – many of the children were not familiar with playing with toys and sharing, as out on the street it is everyone for themselves, and the only 'toys' are rubbish, sticks and that sort of thing. A lot of the toys were educational, and the children were really learning how to play with each other, which was lovely to see. At 11.00 I took the 3 to 5 year olds upstairs to their class where we sang nursery rhymes, had stories, alphabet and counting. At 12.00 lunch was served, and the little ones were helped to feed – all with spoons rather than hands as they were used to. Every bowl was scraped clean! The children then had a sleep – this was much needed particularly during monsoon time when they wouldn't have had much sleep. After this, more play, tea, teeth cleaning, back in their old clothes, and on the bus and home.

We got to know quite a few families living on the street up and down from the guest house, and used to give them gifts of food, medicine and other necessities. We even purchased plastic sheeting for two families, to give them some protection on the street. One family in particular lived outside the guest house in a polythene tent – Mum, Dad and 3 year old Andrew, who came to the day care centre. They also had a little girl called Naomi who was 1, but lived somewhere else as they couldn't afford to look after her. Theirs was a sad story – Ivan the father had lost his job, and couldn't get another one. He was a musician and could have taught music, but had to sell his guitar to pay for the family to live. Rhian his wife worked a couple of hours a day as a cook and earned around £6 a week.

We also visited the elderly gentleman in the Salvation Army Home for the Aged, and with some of the money that was donated, we purchased a new television for them. The donations also made it possible to purchase a washing machine and all the kitchen equipment needed for the new boys hostel. Thank you for all your prayers and support.

Barbara Rainbow



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