

## “FEED ORISSA”

*An Update by Dr. Berty Chandran, M.V.Sc.*

I consider myself privileged to have been to Diptipur, Orissa, to help in the relief work there among the drought-affected poor. Mr. Rajendran, M.A., a sub postmaster, Miss Hannah, B.Com., working in a Bank, Mr. Suseelan, M.A., a retired professor and I started from Chennai on the 7th of October alongwith Dr. Lilian Stanley. We arrived at Bargarh on the 9th at 2 am. Missionaries received us joyfully.

Though we could not speak the language we helped in sorting out medicines and old clothes, collecting parcels from Bargarh, getting the TB patients from villages for treatment and other odd jobs. I was glad to drive the van for the team. Everything was new to me. We could buy vegetables only once a week. Being a mutton lover I had to bicycle to the next village to buy mutton available there once a week. Lot of time was wasted in the nights due to frequent power cut. The roads, especially to the villages, were rugged and bumpy. Once our van got stuck in the middle of a flowing river and it was a priceless experience.

As a veterinarian I found it amusing that the noses of bulls were not pierced for a rope. We lived nearly half a century behind! Veterinary hospitals are few and their shelves are bare. So cattle and poultry die in batches. The absence of street lights made the sky utterly black and the stars sparkling. I was enthralled at the night sky.

Having heard about the Saturday meetings we eagerly waited for the day to arrive. The van had to make two trips to Padampur, 20 km away, to bring the required rice. Saturday dawned bright and blue. By the time we finished our devotions people were streaming in from all directions. It was a stunning sight. They sat jampacked, 1100 in all from 45 villages. Some testified that they had been experiencing an unusual peace ever since they started listening to the Good News. We closed the gate at 10. But some who came a little late pushed past the gatekeeper saying, “We don’t want rice. We want to listen to the stories.” Some sat in the hot sun. They listened with utmost reverence, answered questions, clapped and waved hands as they sang. Missionary couple Mr. & Mrs. Samal ministered the Word. After sharing, when the question, “When did Jesus come

to this earth?” was asked, a lady promptly replied, “Two months ago!” Though we laughed, truly Jesus came “to her” two months ago only. They all went away joyously with 2 kg rice. If you cannot believe it you can buy the video cassette or CD “*Drought and Relief*” by sending Rs.100/-. Then you will also know how your money is being used.

A few days later the Samals and Sister Lilian were called to the police station and warned to stop the gospel proclamation and rice distribution. There was no choice for us but to stop this program. So we turned our attention in other directions. Now 90 TB patients are being treated to whom rice, dhal, eggs and oil are given every week. We won’t be able to write much about the evangelistic work openly but alongside relief that will also go on. A doctor is urgently needed as Dr. Malik will be leaving shortly.

As per Galatians 6:10 we decided to nurture poverty-stricken Christians. There are believers who beg, whose houses have crumbled down, and Christian students who are unable to pay school/college fees and even without bus fare. We distribute old clothes. The need is for cotton sarees, dhotis, towels and warm clothing. The poverty is appalling. I have not seen such misery in my life.

We arranged a meeting for people to come and learn about Self Help Groups. I explained to them how they could start such a group, get bank loan and start a business. 40 turned up and returned with much enthusiasm and hope. As a first step we have hired a man to teach bamboo basket weaving. A dozen girls come regularly to learn.

It is a sad sight to see church buildings broken, leaking and collapsing. The Christians are so poor and don’t even have mats to sit on during worship. We have now repaired one CNI Church. We have promised prizes for recitation of Matthew 5,6,7. Congregations are waking up with enthusiasm.

I returned home after two months. Hopefully I will be back there in February to help out for a month. There are too many of you to be thanked in person. We thank every one of you for your financial help, medicines, clothes, prayers and encouraging letters. We need your continued support. God bless every one of you!