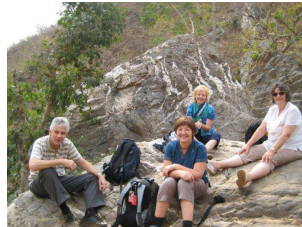


## Incredible India



In February, Pauline Jones travelled to minister in India - she tells her story

As it says in Ecc.3:1, there are times and seasons in God's plans, I believe that until now, India hadn't been 'on my map' - other calls and other places, but not India.

Two years ago my friend Tineke went as part of a Missions Support Team and I faithfully followed her journey with prayer, not knowing that India would soon 'light-up' for me too! Sure enough, two years on, I too was invited; Neville and Deidre l'Anson, representing a generous financial mission support base visited India annually, personally encouraging and taking gifts to Pastors in difficult and often isolated regions of Northern India. Yes, this was now my season, I began to prepare and to get informed about this nation, to now largely unknown to me. The itinerary was set, names I had never heard seemed mysterious and exciting - I was actually going to India! How blessed I am that Leicester stands with me, releases and supports me and faithfully prays me through - 'Thank-you Leicester, thank-you family and thank-you church.'

We flew into Mumbai; multitudes of people [17 million]; chaos of traffic, noise of horns and construction, animals, busses, rickshaws, motor-bikes; smells, good and bad!

Ps Samuel and his wife Banu were inspirational as they ministered with love and grace at their two churches in the slums of Chembur. What an experience to see such passion and commitment. These precious people of the slums had found hope in Jesus- mostly 'caste-less' and 'untouchables' - but not so in Jesus. How special it was for each of us to share simple messages of encouragement, suitably interpreted by Ps Samuel.

We too were greatly encouraged by these brothers and sisters in Christ who received us so graciously. Our first meeting was in a small, hired room, deep in the network of slum-hovels built up the face of a hill. There were 60 people, packed in, sitting, cross-legged and bare-footed, together praising God to a simple drum beat. We had four meetings in different slum areas; all very special, many new people being added. 'Hope' travels quickly where there is no hope.

We then flew from Mumbai to Udaipur, an amazing walled city of great contrasts and history. Our first assignment was the next morning after our evening arrival - a four am start! We left quietly in the dark, drove quite a distance outside the city and the began a torch-light trek, up hills, through gullies for more than an hour.

As light dawned we were able to see the steep and barren slopes and sparsely scattered mud huts along the valley. In one of these simple dwellings about 40 people gathered - men, women and children. As the sun rose higher we sang and praised the Lord together. The people were so eager for prayer and were blessed that we would come so far to visit them. And we were equally blessed to be there!

Ps Samuel [No.2] and his precious wife Shiny, over-see many small villages and train-up pastors to teach and care for people in these isolated areas. We had other day and night treks to places that our maps didn't even show. There were long drives out of the city, then up and down dale to meet gatherings of believers. Some of these we shared in were over-night praise and prayer meetings, in single candle-lit mud huts. It was often too dark to see all those present. Ps Samuel is a much loved, youngish man. He and Shiny had left the more Christian-friendly region of Southern India to evangelise the northern Ragasthan. They have also started a large school, Shiny being the administrator as Samuel travels hundreds of kilometres on his old motor-bike, visiting remote villages and encouraging and teaching pastors under his leadership.

Shiny is an apt name for this lovely wife and mother. They have eleven orphans as well as their two daughters. The school teaches Christian Education and has gained much favour. We went into all the classes and were impressed with their work and their English language skills. Again we were touched and impressed by Ps Samuel and Shiny's commitment and sacrifice - the next generation will have much fruit!

We left Udaipur and travelled by over-night train to Jaipur. This was delayed for two hours and we had a giggle as we three ladies sat in "the high class ladies waiting room". Neville had to wait on the platform! Jaipur was different and amazing, but a stepping-stone to Agra, our next ministry call.

The road journey was at times hair-raising. I closed my eyes frequently and prayed for safety. The scenes of life-style of India along the way were very intriguing - the agriculture, brick kilns, quarrying of the pink rock blocks and slabs which were cut and carved for all purposes. The villages were full of markets, bazaars and street kitchens - incredible India.

Our stay in Agra was again very special. We were blessed to have time with Ps Harry and his son Ps Joseph and their families, who also supported an extended family of ten orphans. They all lived in the slums where they have a vibrant church and a school of several hundred children. Their lives are simple and sacrificial. They have found great favour because of their 'oneness' with the people.

On the Sunday morning we arrived in their district to see two lines of white lime-powder like pathway leading people through the twists and turns of the alley-ways in the slums, arriving triumphantly at the church door - how creative.

They invited us to Sunday lunch, after we shared with them, and also enjoyed beautiful praise and worship together in a tiny, tiny room with minimum furniture and beautiful Indian food - all so very memorable. We left them all with pleas to return.

It was so hard to say good-bye but it was time to leave for Delhi, an overnight stop before our departure for home via Singapore.

"Hats off" to Neville and Dee and their generous 'gift-givers' of hundreds of dollars to wonderful ministries. Thanks too to the Burnie Christian Centre family for generous gifts too that were distributed along the way. What a honour to have a tiny, tiny part in the Church that God is building in incredible India. Thank you Lord.

Pauline Jones