
Linnea's India Blog X: The Slum School Bus

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Slum Kids become School Kids



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Sandeep is a soft-spoken, thoughtful 23-year-old man.

When Sandeep was a little boy, Brother Rob came to the slum where he was living and invited the children to the new school in the church. Sandeep's new buddy, Ajay, went to the school. Every day, he would say to Sandeep: "Come to school." But, Sandeep says he had it in his head that the teachers hit the students with a stick. So, he said no. This continued for a long time. One day, Ajay took his hand and, under the guise of showing him his village, pulled him down the road, over the tracks, toward the school. Now, at the time, Sandeep

had a fear of dogs (which are everywhere here). Ajay pulled him to the centre of the village and then dropped his hand. Mischievously, he said, "Now: You can walk home by yourself - or you can come to school." Sandeep came to school.

He loved it from the first moment. Brother Robert began to tell the story of Zacchaeus (who was trying to see Jesus and had to climb a tree) and then he said, "I'll tell you the rest tomorrow." Sandeep was hooked. Ever since that day, he walked all over the slum, telling children: "Come to school! You must come to school!"

Sandeep is not a morning person. When he arrives at Emmanuel School at 8am, he has a bleary look. But he is a man on a mission: He leaves his "cycle" at the school and walks the 2 kilometres to the slum to pick up the children whose parents have said yes to their attending Emmanuel. Down a village road, over the tracks, through the small town railway station, he walks down into the tent city that was his own home not long ago.

The slum is a series of neighbourhoods based on geography and clustered along family lines. There is a little Rajasthan and a little Maharashtra, little Bihar (states that lie south and fairly far away), and others. The road from the rail station runs along the slum - and the tents that sit along that line of asphalt are all one extended family from a single area down south. The families have come in search of jobs or opportunities. Some are trying to save money to buy a place back home, some are sending money back home, others are stuck.

Sandeep walks along two edges of the slum, greeting adults who have been up for a while, brushing their teeth by the streetside or sitting on their haunches around a fire and breakfast pot, and calling inside the tents to children still squirreled away in the family bed. A dishevelled dad will greet us from the bed, a baby poke her head out from under the covers, two brothers will emerge and give in to their mother's and Sandeep's urgings to get up and put on school clothes. Cousin comes in and picks up the baby, who will be glued to her hip seemingly all day long. Brother picks through a pile of clothing, smoothing down the crinkles and tucking both shirts into dress pants. Mother doesn't let them go until she has oiled their hair and combed it smartly.

Other children come in the exact same clothing every single day, caked with dirt of the ages. It takes 30-45 minutes for the little students to congregate - and often there is the report that they are not well enough to go. Tuberculosis is

continually recurring here - and right now that viral respiratory infection has cornered us all. Somebody hands Sandeep a plate of rice and chicken curry for breakfast, which he sits and eats as he waits for little ones to meet him at the tent on the corner. But really, he wishes that the children would simply be ready on time and just come to school.

About 2/3 of the children at Emmanuel School live in the school (or in the old school, which is the church, as the older boys are required by law to live separately from the girls), but virtually everyone comes from the slum. This new little batch of about 15 children is the newest intake group of 5-9-year-olds. They are spirited and squirrely, all little bosses. Absolutely dying to learn and play and have fun and show you what they know - and as soon as they learn something, they want to lead it themselves. They run like there is no tomorrow, screaming all the way to the end of the outdoor game court. They grab by the collar and righteously yank a friend into the place in the circle they think the teacher wants them to be. They repeat everything the teacher says with a voracious certitude. And their smiles beam as wide as the sun.

By eleven am, Sandeep and I are cooked.

We are using games and songs to teach letters, numbers, commands, Up/Down, In/Out, Go/Stop, taking turns, colours, Simon Says. I am learning Punjabi words like Dekho (Look!), Suno (Listen!), Gao (Sing!), Bolo (Say!). Other highly important single words have proven to be: WAIT! CIRCLE! and BACKBACKBACK!

There is no going back for Sandeep, though. He knows that his life belongs to Jesus in service, and he has a heart for these little ones whose lives he understands from the inside-out. How he will manage to stay on top of his 15 little bosses is the challenge before him.

But -
I'll tell you the rest of the story tomorrow.

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Linnea Good

"Enlivening Faith through Story and Song"





Chay Chay Kofisa!



Sandeep teaching



Walking the children back home



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