A Village in Madras

by Sister M. Andie
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KULUMUR is a small village of 2,000 inhabitants in the very north of the district of Trichy, 13 miles from Ayyallur. It is a village exclusively agricultural, no shop, no market. For any purchase, salt or any food, we must go 4½ miles to Sundureli, where we can find a small railway station on the line between Madras and Trichy, and the terminus of a bus line. But to reach Sundureli is very often a big problem as there is no road, not even track—during the dry season the bullock carts and people follow the dry bed of the river, but during the rainy season the river becomes a torrent, dangerous to use.

Perhaps this is the reason why the people of Kullumur remain a little backward and seem agreed to remain so! Some fifteen years ago when the railway line was to be built, it was proposed that it should pass Kullumur but the inhabitants refused! With a railway station the village would become more important and some strangers would come. How then could the grain be put out to dry in front of the house, where the passing people would walk? “So Kullumur remains exactly what it was in the time of their grand, grand forefathers.”

Ten years ago the Panayur Board paid the expenses for two wells in the street of the Harijans; these wells are well-built and cemented, but the people do not know well water; they prefer the water of the ponds where people and cattle bathe together...so the children filled up well with the refuse of the street. Last year, as the dryness of the season was very acute, the 14 feet wells were cleaned, deepened again, and allowed to be a “well”.

In the street of the caste people, each family possesses one or several portions of land which produces paragon—groundnut etc. The soil is poor, sandy, and the black soil is not deep. Water is very scarce—only with the rains do we have sufficient water—one big man-made pond, a well—keeps the rain water a little longer, but it is dry 3/4 of the year. So cultivation can be made only during the rainy season. As the needs of the people are modest, we cannot say that they are very miserable. But it is not the same case in the Harijan quarters. Their streets are well segregated from those of the shoemakers, and the Harijans are very dissatisfied of the others, and believe they are superior to them...Anyhow both are very poor and even miserable. Most of them do not possess anything even the hut where they live, not the fields where they work but is the property of their masters: Panai. They are not paid in cash but in grain and that only at certain times when the crops are harvested. In between they must live on what they have earned during the harvesting. Our poor people are not thrifty at all: the men found some “cooie” work but they are paid only 75 p., per day. To support wife and children, this is very hard!

To uplift them a little, a school was opened for the Harijans 10 years ago; there are more than 250 pupils attending the 8 classes today but very few Harijans...Why should the children go to study when the father did not?...And if the children go to school, who will look after younger brother or sister?...And who will keep an eye on the goats or the swine which are living in full liberty as the children themselves?...Some children from the caste streets are coming, but the biggest contingent comes from the orphanage, where 160 boys and 40 girls of all castes and creeds are happy to receive instruction, food, shelter, clothing, etc. A Tracks is functioning for the smaller children who are not able to go to school, but need to be cared for, and so the older brothers or sisters are free, but even this is no inducement to the Harijans.

One dispensary is 16 years old, and 8 years ago we put up a paddu building with a small ward for nine beds. Soon it was overcrowded and we have now completed a bigger ward for maternity cases with 35 beds. People from the neighbouring villages, and even from far as 15 and 20 miles, are coming in. We have a big crowd daily in the dispensary. The Harijan people come when they have sores or infected eye, do not come when they have a serious illness! The native doctor is much better...

Anyhow, slowly, very slowly, we can find some improvements. Some pregnant women have consented, after several abortions, to have treatment from the hospital; one after 5 abortions, another after 7...abortion is very proud to have, at least, now, a nice, chubby baby in their arms—many others now are under treatment, but for they must repute the fear that if a pregnant woman received one hypodermic injection, certainly the child will die in the womb.

Daily our nurses are visiting the neighbouring villages and slowly teaching the people the principles of hygiene. They encourage them to come to the hospital to undergo treatment before an ailment has become incurable. Some women have told us “We did not know it was so easy to give birth to a child in a hospital!” and this was our best reward.

"Take heed to the limits of your capacity and you will arrive at a knowledge of the truth."

—Avicenna

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. . . on the March . . .

. . . in every latitude

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