

## Bandipur, Nepal

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Villagers had asked up to open an elementary school, so in March of 1985 S. Miriam and I were sent to Bandipur village in Nepal. Six hours out of Kathmandu the bus stopped along the road and we walked up the mountain path about three hours to reach our new home. Bandipur was a ghost town and the remaining villagers hoped that by having a good school the village might stay alive.

Villagers offered up a typical Nepali style house with mud floors to serve as our home and school and Notre Dame School of Bandipur began with 55 children. In one of the poorest countries in the world our aim was to offer quality education for the poorest of these poor children.

How we existed in those first years was truly a grace of God. There was no electricity or telephone in the village and we could not get enough water or substantial food. The government was afraid we had come to preach Christianity and would not give us visas so every month or two we had to leave the country and reenter on tourist visas.

Though we were living without even the necessities of life, I felt rich in my heart. We were living as daughters of Mother Theresa and I was deeply alive as SSND. The two of us lived alone in this village far from our home in Japan, but we knew that we had the support and prayers of our sisters in Japan and around the world.

Some years later in reflecting about our mission we noted the following things happening.

- Even the poorest children had the chance to study at our school as scholarship students
- Seeing us running the school, villagers realized that an education for girls was needed and began to send their daughters to school
- Discrimination toward lower castes was strong here, but in our Notre Dame School children from upper caste and lower castes mingled together.
- We were forbidden to preach Christianity, and yet the people of the village seemed to recognize God's love through our presence.

From our Nepal Mission I also learned that I should put my trust fully in God, for whenever we came to a dead end we could always find a new alley in which to continue. I pray I may always stay so deeply in God and have the energy to continue in mission.

Two years after the Maoists forced the school to close (in 2000) we returned to Bandipur. Now there are five of our own graduates teaching here and though

some of them were very poor in studies when they were students, they are very good teachers and so eager to convey to the children what they learned at Notre Dame School. As I watch them I am challenged again, never to prejudge a child's ability to teach so that all can "reach the fullness of their potential as individuals".

As of October 2004 there is still civil war in Nepal and each day many are killed. Our educational task is to search with the children for the way to a lasting peace that it will spread beyond us to the whole country.