

Day 12 - Girl without eyes, rickshaw accident, 150 sisters gained!

Notes for today's blog are being typed up on the back of a cycle rickshaw, today has been scorching hot and the sky is in stark contrast to how it has been of late, it is calm, dark and quiet as opposed to loud and angry. Today's soundtrack comes from the soothing and some-how magical sound of the tinkling of bicycle rickshaw bells.

After a roadside breakfast of tea, spicy omelette and paratha, the day began with a rickshaw journey. Rickshaw journeys are very different to your average journey in England and rarely dull! Whilst at a junction a man with one leg asked me for money, I gave him a samosa from my supply bought with money donated from 2 people in London. As I handed him the snack the rickshaw moved away and rode over his crutch snapping it in two. He was gutted, broken, startled and angry. A fight of sorts broke out, the man stepped in front of the rickshaw forcing him to stop, he then let down the rickshaw's back right tyre, I guessed the conversation was surrounding compensation and I guessed the outcome was probably no as the man began hitting the rickshaw driver with his spare crutch which he was using as a leg. I moved to the side of the road (we were in the middle of a 5 lane road). The man gestured to me in a praying motion as if to say his beef was not with me, he wouldn't harm me. I looked round again and they were gone. The driver had made a run for it pulling a U turn and heading in the opposite direction, they were now together on the opposite side. I'm guessing he hopped and caught the rickshaw as the traffic was so bad. The guy was immobile but his strength was admirable as the rickshaw now on the opposite side of the road was now fully upside down (I was long out of it by then).

Orphantrust

the poorest countries in the world with over half the population living on less than \$1 a day
<http://orphantrust.co.uk>

A massive crowd gathered, the driver offered 20 taka (17p) which was rejected. Once the commotion had died down the man and I took a rickshaw a mile up the road to the hospital area where we had visited 2 days before (see previous blog) and opposite was a whole row of shacks selling every kind of medical assistance of the equipment variety you can imagine. After the initial introductions, I sat down, made myself comfortable and waited for the price of a new set of crutches to drop and drop to a reasonable level. During the journey, the man was gesturing to me that he had lost his leg in an accident. Later in the day I was walking through the underpass at the notorious Kawran Bazaar area and what I saw left a feeling of sadness that enveloped me and was truly haunting. A girl between the age of 10 and 14 was standing in the underpass, a white stick in one hand a small plastic bowl in the other.

She had no eyes.

I gave her a snack. When I returned half an hour later, she was still standing in the same spot. This is her life, this is her future.

This is a research/planning trip in truth and one of the areas that has struck me is the fragility of life and existence here. It's a beautiful country, with the kindest, most generous people but it seem like these people are perched on a wobbly branch and at any moment that branch could snap and for most the inevitability is a life on the street, survival. During our research visit to the Dhaka Children's Hospital we were kindly shown around the departments by Dr Monowar Parveen, the Lead Senior Psychologist. She heads a home in her spare time for people with disabilities like the man and girl I met today. The Orphan Trust has the details of this home, this will be highlighted in our post-trip feedback meeting with the aim of looking into the feasibility of the Orphan Trust supporting this and other such groups.

Another topic of conversation that invariably pops up on visits to 'so called' developing countries is happiness. I had a very interesting conversation with Josh my roommate (Masters - international development, dissertation - street kids, see post #1) who had apparently also had the same conversation earlier today with Menna (Masters - play therapy). Adults and children seem happy here, very happy. We in the 'developed' world could learn a lot. Josh pointed me towards Amartya Sen's work, ironically a Bangladeshi-born Indian, professor of economics and philosophy at Harvard University in the U.S, recipient of a Nobel prize who helped to create the Human Development Index (HDI), a United Nations statistic ranking countries' level of development based on health, knowledge and standard of living. He also considers such indices as happiness and includes human wellbeing and human freedom into indices as well as just narrowly focusing on GDP (a country's total value of goods and services produced) and believes this could improve policymakers' responses to problems in the economy in the wake of the global financial crisis. The economist told Reuters "If you have indicators that concentrate on human wellbeing and human freedom then you could get 'there' much more quickly by thinking about policy decisions in that light."

Orphantrust

the poorest countries in the world with over half the population living on less than \$1 a day

<http://orphantrust.co.uk>

On a more positive note I completed the shopping for Bottomley House Orphanage. I arrived at the orphanage at the pre-arranged time and once again the hard-working girls were writing away at their desks. As I approached the hall, the girls broke out into fits of giggles punctuated by smiles and waves! Sister Bijoya told me to go in, talk to the girls and look at their work. I learnt about Bangladesh's seasons, one girl asked me to read out loud about the six seasons, another shared the beginning of a Bengali story 'The Red Cow' which, she read aloud in Bengali before translating it into English. The best moment of the day was when the room of smiling girls enquired about my family. One asked about my siblings, I told them I have 2 brothers. They then enquired about sisters, I told them I have none to which they replied.....

“We are your sisters!”

Orphantrust

the poorest countries in the world with over half the population living on less than \$1 a day

<http://orphantrust.co.uk>

Suhel, a multiple shop owner from the same road who helps the orphanage and I ventured back towards Old Dhaka as we had done yesterday

armed with the knowledge of how many of each size of shoe we needed. We located the shop, worked through the list and once again the cargo was boxed, tied up, loaded and dispatched to its destination!

And all that remained was to write up this blog and eat a delicious snack; fresh rotis (bread), coconut and gulab jamun (sweets)!

By Christopher Downie