



*Bulari—14th January 2016
A happy but too short a life at PUSS*

Malcolm Harper reports

Four months have gone by since our last newsletter, and, as ever, lots of things have been happening at the **PUSS** school and on the railways in Orissa. The state is now called Odisha, but we have decided not to go through the formalities of changing our charity's name; most people who live there still call it Orissa, but like Bombay, which is now called Mumbai, this will probably change as the years go by, and so shall we.

Everyone at **PUSS**, and its whole community of friends, suffered a sad loss on 14th January. Those who have been there, and many others, will remember little Bulari. Her grandfather, who was a beggar, brought her to **PUSS** in 2009 when she was seven. Her father and mother had died of AIDS, and Bulari herself was a fragile little thing when she arrived; the disease had already taken a serious toll and the prognosis was not good.

But Kuku and her colleagues did a wonderful job. They found a specialist clinic in Cuttack; Bulari went there for check-ups every month or so, they provided the medicines she needed, and she came to play a regular part in the **PUSS** school, although she quite often had relapses and had to stay in bed or go to the clinic.

Kuku was her mother, as she is for all the children at **PUSS**, and everyone else at **PUSS** was her family, she had a happy

but too short little life. Bulari herself knew too that she did not have long to live, but nobody foresaw that she would live as long as she did, or so happily. She put on weight, and grew, and got stronger, but above all she became a smiling joyful little girl, and her life at **PUSS** was a happy one.

I have many memories of her; she was mischievous, a bit naughty as happy children should be, a bit spoiled too, but in such a nice way. I remember her looking out of the upstairs window if we were going out and she could not come. Above all I shall always remember her mischievous smile, and a slightly sideways look.

PUSS has recently spread its wings geographically; three young women from China have spent time there as volunteers, organised by AISEC. Linnan and Mumu are at **PUSS** right now as I write, and XiXu has just returned to Sydney University after working at **PUSS** for several weeks. You can read her impressions of **PUSS** in the panel on the reverse of this newsletter.

The Chinese link will certainly flourish, but older ones are also well-sustained. Alex Davies from Scotland and her friend Sandy are at **PUSS** now; this must be Alex's fifth or sixth visit, and numerous other young women from Scotland have followed her and her friend Vicky's example. I look forward to seeing a blend between Odissi, Scottish and Chinese dancing when I am there early in March.

Best decision of my life

AISEC volunteer, Xixu, writes about her time at PUSS



Xixu and some of the children at PUSS

I know that I have made many stupid decisions in my life, but thankfully coming here volunteering was not one of them. Only having being here I know how lucky I was to have the experience and memories, those were the best days in my life. They have inspired me and helped me to find out how many things I can do to make other people's days better. Classroom or dormitory, every minute I spent with the children was precious.

Though they don't have much materially, they are the most talented and happiest kids I have ever seen. They helped me to build my confidence and to speak in public; "sister" they said, "please one song". They asked me to sing them an English song or to learn dancing with them. Their English is not perfect, but they have such courage to interact and be proactive; I treasured that, and learned from it, and I encouraged them to stay that way.

I shouted out to my friends to buy some **PUSS** greeting cards and the result was amazing, they love the cards as much as I do and quite some donations were generated. One friend has given a few hundred dollars. However, I am not here to brag. I know that Sister Kuku, who is responsible for all the kids every day, will make sure that all the money will really help the children. "Every rupee counts", she said gratefully, "I can buy one candy with a rupee, and that makes a kid happy, that makes a difference". I shall never forget her words and how happy I was to be able to help.

My stay has come to an end, but the journey of life still goes on, **PUSS** is part of my life now.

News from SOCH

SOCH continues to grow; they will shortly rescue their 2000th child, and Manoj plans to start a new team in April, at Puri railway station in the seaside temple city. I went there with him in December to meet the railway authorities and to help to persuade them to accommodate a **SOCH** team on the platforms. The rescue load there will be heaviest during the massive festival when Lord Jagannath's vast sacred cart is dragged through the streets by thousands of devotees, but the **SOCH** team did a survey of newcomers to the station and they find that even during the quieter months enough children show up at the station to make Puri a worthwhile place to have a team. The new team will be supported by a grant from The Funding Network (www.thefundingnetwork.org.uk), through Chris Pouncey's contacts, supplemented by other donors.

That will make a total of four teams, and as ever they will have to be supported not only when they are started, but thereafter for as long as they are needed. This is where we and all the children in Odisha/Orissa are so dependent on you, our regular donors, so please keep it coming!

Manoj will be coming to the UK in the second half of March. He is a talented young 'social entrepreneur', and we hope to make it possible for him to meet as many of our supporters as possible, at Filgrave and in London. We shall send you details shortly. He hopes in particular to raise support for his next project, which is a camp, or rather a series of camps, for 'hard core' children who have lived, and often die, on the railway stations and the streets for months and even years.

These children do not generally respond to the fast turnaround approach which **SOCH** uses for children who have only been separated from their families for a few days or even hours. Our good friends at Hat Trick Productions are organising his visit, and it will include an occasion for our supporters to meet Manoj, here in Filgrave but also we hope in London.

In the meantime, thanks to all of you for all you do; the more you give the more we need you to give!

Malcolm Harper, Chairman, Friends of the Children of Orissa.
Filgrave, February 2016.



Registered Charity No. 1074935

c/o Ursula Kraus-Harper (Hon. Secretary)
The Old Farmhouse ■ Filgrave ■ Bucks ■ MK 16 9ET ■ UK
Telephone: +44(0)1234 711764
Email: u.krausharper@btopenworld.com

www.orissa.org.uk