

PARTNERPLAN

An ecumenical appointment with:



The **Methodist Church** 

Gillian Rose – Bangladesh December 2010

Bollobhpur Hospital
PO Kedargonj
District Meherpur
Bangladesh

Gillian Rose is an
Ecumenical Partner of the
Church of Bangladesh Group

Dear Friends in Scotland

Sunday 21st November 2010, and “stir-up” Sunday, the last Sunday before Advent season begins next week, and time to get a letter into the post to be in time for Christmas. And I am writing from a much cooler Bangladesh than when I signed off my last letter to you all. The thermometer on the wall of my room is reading a cool 25°C (76°F) and I noticed many scarves and mufflers in church this morning! The girls have got their navy blue uniform cardigans out and are wearing them in the early morning and on night duty. The hospital bedding has been brought out of store, aired in the midday sunshine (which is very hot still) and the patients are sleeping under quilts at night, and fans are no longer whirring. The mothers now seek the morning sun for their new babies sitting outside and rubbing mustard oil on the little naked bodies, to make the baby strong (a tradition in Bangladesh). My dog Tom has had his Sunday morning bath and is sprawled out in the sun. And his mother Ma, with two new puppies also has them out in the sun for a warm up, before returning to her bedding under the bed in my room.



The sky is brilliant blue, cloudless, and the river which runs at the foot of my garden is reduced already to a trickle, and rice fields are encroaching on both sides and heralding another water crisis in the hot weather next year. For these rivers were previously wide and fast flowing and dangerous to cross – now reduced to mere replicas of their previous state.

In our remote part of rural Bangladesh we are quiet and at peace, and little of the political strife and turmoil reached us, though a recent country wide all day “strike” called by the opposition party, following between party friction over the vacation of an army house, did hamper everyone’s movements and our girls were not able to go for their awaited holidays and outside programmes had to be cancelled.

The majority community have just celebrated the second most important Muslim feast of the calendar, namely the “Korbani” festival, which celebrates the sacrifice by Abraham of his only son, only they believe it was Ishmail, the elder son of Abraham, by his wife Sarah’s maid Hagar, who was taken by Abraham for the sacrifice.

The Hindu community have also celebrated “Durga Puja” the biggest feast of the Hindu calendar and terminating in the immersion of the goddess Durga in the nearest river.

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The Buddhist community too have just concluded the celebration of their greatest religious festival, the 'Danuttam Khatin Chibar Dan', during which the religious dress robes for the chief monk, are made within 24 hours (including spinning the cotton to make the cloth, cutting and sewing and finishing the garment) and is then presented to him. In his speech to the assembled gathering the chief monk Bana Bante, advised all to avoid bad things, falsehood discrimination and division among people.

And on the same day the Garo Tribal community (those who have not yet become Christians) celebrated their 'Wangala' festival thanking their almighty 'Misi Sajong' for the gift of rice, the first seeds of which they believe came through answer to prayer.

And yet again on the same day the coastal communities celebrated a 200 year old three days and two nights long traditional 'Raj Ustshab' (festival), the festival that opens the fishing season in the region.

For Bangladesh is a land of many cultures, tribes and traditions. And through the majority population is Muslim, the minority religions are tolerated peacefully, and all have freedom of worship and the government encourages everyone to celebrate their festivals. The Christian community is a minute 0.04% of the burgeoning population still, though growing steadily especially through the work of the Pentecostals and the Baptists. And this work is difficult and dangerous, for although minority religions are tolerated, preaching the gospel and proselyting amongst the majority Muslim community is not tolerated, and it is tough for the Muslim who converts to Christianity. He is hounded out of house and home, and his life is no longer safe, neither are the lives of the preachers. In contrast the Hindu community are more tolerant towards converts and whole families are coming into the church.

One of our previous students, Elizabeth, a widow, remarried after several years of working in a clinic. The husband John was a very new Christian from a village Hindu community. When Elizabeth went to her new home, she found that she and John were the only Christians in the village. But now, after several years of living and working amongst the villagers (Elizabeth's house is known as the "Nurses house") many families have come to know Christ and a little church has been built for regular worship and John Talukdar, a Pentecostal minister from the nearest town, comes to minister to the growing congregation. So there is much to be thankful for, and many to be held in prayer.

But to return to Bollobhpur hospital where three months have sped away since I last wrote a letter – three months of routine classes five days a week for the students (our girls), who monthly change over of duty at the outstation village clinics. Monthly meetings of our community Health staff and senior students when monthly reports are presented and we learn something new together. Weekly Bible class for the girls, daily prayers in the chapel and on the wards, and on each Friday working a visit from our parish priest Rev Diptymay, to celebrate communion in our little hospital chapel, and then to take the sacrament to the bedside of those too ill or infirm to attend the service. This is especially a joy for our elderly patients in the Geriatric wing to be able to receive communion regularly.

September 2nd, 3rd and I invigilate the final Anatomy and Physiology examination, the group well prepared by Staff Nurse Hannah, and writing busily, eager to pass well and to be able to commence the next stage of their training namely the midwifery classes that they will begin with me. There is always great enthusiasm to start learning midwifery and to become case nurses.

And today too, the post brings the awaited results of the final examination, and all have passed and the good news is quickly sent out to the different clinics where they are working on rotation. Everyone is happy and relieved!

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September 6th 2010 brings the first of five seminars on primary health for village women, to be held at five venues, namely Bollobhpur and the four village outstation clinics. The seminars aim to bring together 60 women who use the clinic or hospital and to teach them the basics of healthy living for themselves and their families. The day includes midday rice with a meat curry (a great luxury for a poor/ middle class Bengali family). Indeed we cannot afford to give our girls even once a month, there needs to be some special occasion, such as Christmas, Easter or New year's Day and the price of rice, the basic staple commodity, rises almost day by day to previously unheard of prices.



But to return to the 60 women, they enjoyed the day together, many already knew many things, and they were able to pool their knowledge and share with each other. My part is to throw questions at the of the of the sessions and to see what they have learned. We are grateful to CARITAS, the Roman Catholic Bishops relief organisation for aiding with finance for three five programmes.

September 18th Sunday, and a crack of dawn start for Khulna, taking a new group of girls and empty oxygen cylinders for refill. Our hospital micro is 'sick' and again in need of a garage!! Indeed we really need a new vehicle rather than keeping spending money on repairing the present one – and I have put this on the agenda for our next Management Committee meeting! We set off with a very nice driver in a hired microcar, but a tyre bursts halfway there, and another puncture as we reach the oxygen company. But it is all great fun, and we arrive eventually, three hours late to be greeted by Reba and Arthur and the clinic staff there. It is good to be able to spend some time with Kalpona who is grateful now to have a senior laboratory student on rotation, each month, to help her in the laboratory work as she copes with her increasing muscle weakness. She gets very depressed and especially now that two of her three brothers are also developing the identical muscle wasting disease, and she worries about them more than about herself. But as I tell her, she is able to send some of her salary to help them out at their village home, which is a very positive contribution she is making, even though her disability is greater than theirs. Please keep her in your prayers. She is looking for some help to start a little village shop for the brothers alongside their home. At least they will be able to “eat and keep alive”, as it is said in Bengali language!!

We return safely, no problems on the way, leaving the new group of girls and Ponkosh, the laboratory student for the month, the returning girls are soon reuniting happily (and noisily) with their group.

September 27th and a change over again, as eight excited girls pile into a hired microcar with their bags and bagging all set to relieve their friends who have completed their three months operation theatre and surgical nursing training at Joyramkura hospital in the north of the country. We are grateful indeed to Dr Taposh and Dr Lucy for making this possible for us. This group will return on December 27th and leave us at the end of December, their training complete.

Monday October 4th brings the final examination for the 18 girls who commenced their Preliminary Training school three months ago. They have been preparing busily eager to be able to wear their first uniforms and I even caught them practicing “bed making” in the classroom at half past eleven last night!! And it is good to be able to report that all did well, both in the written and the practical, and on Sunday 23rd October, during a simple afternoon service in our parish



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church, their caps were blessed, and placed on their heads, and lighted candles in their hands they made their Nightingale nurses oath, before God and the congregation, promising to live holy lives, and to uphold the standard of nursing. Pray God they may complete their training successfully, and “do something with their lives”, as they so often mention in their letters of application for training.

Sunday November 7th and a very special day for us. During the afternoon service in our parish church, one of our Hindu students, Lolita, who has accepted Christ as her saviour, was baptised into the Christian faith, and became one of us, what joy! Lolita is now attending confirmation classes and will be confirmed, along with another seven of our girls, in December. Please keep Lolita and the other confirmation candidates in your prayers.



Thursday November 11th and another exciting day in the life of Bollobhpur hospital, for a new incubator for our small babies is being unpacked and assembled, to the great excitement of the nursing staff and students. And in the laboratory, great enthusiasm and rejoicing, as the long awaited Analyser is unpacked and explained, and a compact Distilled water plant is set up and demonstrated. It is impossible to describe our joy and delight, and our deep humble thanks to S.K. Foundation, the Netherlands, and to Mr Spier who visited us previously and was kind enough to speak up on our behalf and organise a generous grant. A second incubator is also on order, and some of the grant money remains in the bank and will enable the purchase of an ultrasonography machine in the near future. We are grateful indeed. I include some photographs of the staff and students with their new ‘toys’!

Monday November 15th and we hosted our friends from the Bangladesh National Hospital for the Blind, Khulna, for another Eye camp, always an event greatly enjoyed by everyone. The camp is well attended and eventually a bus load of blind and semi blind, including three of our Geriatric ward inmates, sets off for the hospital for surgery the next day, 56 in all. We receive reports that all have been successfully operated on, and on

Thursday morning November 18th three days later, the hospital bus returns, and the patients are welcomed by their waiting relatives. And what joy – “we can see!” Always an event I am happy to arrange, and many in this area have received new sight through our camps. Thank God with us for the privilege of being able to supply this service.



November 28th Advent Sunday, and time to bring my letter to a close. I personally love the season of Advent, a time of hope and expectation and renewal. Purple hangings and vestments in church this morning for our parish communion service, and I sit on my verandah in the “winter” sun, to finish my letter to you. The dogs have had their Sunday bath, and are drying off in the sun, the two puppies eyes have opened and they are being washed down by their mother’s moist tongue.

A heap of examination papers on the table alongside awaiting marking heralds the beginning of the end of the year examination season, a busy time for us all. There has been another “all change” in the community clinics again, and a group of excited new case nurses have gone out, and the finalists have come in to the hospital for final preparation for their external examinations. They are a very good group of girls, and should do well.

We are still without our own resident Medical Officer and relying still on the services of government doctors brief visits, which is far from satisfactory. But all the same, the hospital is full and busy,

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and the girls are getting plenty of experience. Our Senior Sister Mary works alongside me tirelessly in the absence of a doctor, and thanks be to God we cope.

Sister Milsury is badly missed for her unique input of bedside nursing in the wards but we are glad she is enjoying and doing well in her BSc. Nursing course. Please keep her and indeed all of us in your prayers.

The hospital Management Committee met last Friday, and the need of a Medical Officer and a new hospital microcar was again discussed, so hopefully, God willing, something will happen.

Christmas will be here before you receive our news, so I send greetings for a happy and blessed Christmas season, from all of us at Bollobhpur, and grateful thanks for continuing to keep alongside with your interest and your prayers.

May God's blessing be upon you all.

