

February 2, 2013 will always remain etched on my mind. That was the day I traveled with a group of volunteers to distribute blankets and old clothes to the poor in Ejipura, which is a suburb of Bangalore, India. Ejipura was in the news the last couple of days as over 2,000 squatter families were forcefully displaced from 22 acres of land that was illegally occupied. The government ordered these dwellers to leave the property by January 31st. The very next day, the police and government vehicles leveled at least 2,000 tin-roofed tenements displacing all its occupants, estimated at about 15,000. Some of the families were relocated outside the city limits, but about half the families had nowhere to go. The property was cleared by the government to make way for a mall, which is part of the growth and development of the city.



Before the demolition
(Courtesy: The Hindu Newspaper)



After the demolition
(Courtesy: The Hindu Newspaper)

We reached Ejipura at 8:00 pm and were appalled at the site that greeted us. The 22-acre land parcel is surrounded by busy streets with heavy traffic. None of the street lights were working. The entire area surrounding the cleared site was full of displaced residents living on the sidewalks. They had no food or running water. Some of the families put up makeshift roofs comprising of plastic sheets, old clothes, tin sheets and newspapers. Their beds were flattened cardboard boxes. There were no pillows. These families on the sidewalks sat in total darkness, except for the lights of the cars that passed by. The whole area was dusty and strewn with garbage. We stopped the car and took out the blankets to give to some of the families. Soon there were dozens of people surrounding our vehicle pleading for giveaways. There were old people, young children, and pregnant women, each pleading for a blanket to stay warm during the cold night. In addition, we had old clothes to distribute to the children. It was extremely hard to decide who should receive a blanket as there were dozens of people vying for the limited blankets. Children started tugging at our clothes pleading for a blanket or a piece of

clothing. Some of the children were crying, others were playing with stones or riding tricycles. A few of the older folks were crying. Others were sitting on the sidewalk peering aimlessly into the darkness of the night. The whole experience was heart-wrenching.

After the distribution, we left with mixed emotions. We traveled back in silence with both a sense of emptiness and gratitude. What was the plight of these poor people? How long could they live in these dire conditions? What did the future hold for them? If they were forced out from the sidewalk by the government, where else would they live?



A sense of hopelessness
(Courtesy: Prema Jyothi Productions)



An uncertain tomorrow
(Courtesy: Prema Jyothi Productions)

A zillion questions crossed my mind. If we were in a similar situation, how would we manage? I had no answers! I could not but feel grateful for all that we were blessed with. After this experience, how could we, even for a moment, feel depressed or miserable with the happenings in our lives? How could we complain for even a second if we compared our lives to the helpless folks in Ejipura?

It's been a week since I visited Ejipura. I can still vividly remember the faces of the people I met and interacted with. The experience will live with me forever. It has given me the will and determination to be my best so that I can be more and do more for the less fortunate. I plan on visiting Ejipura again next week. This was truly an unforgettable experience, one that I will cherish for a long long time.

Contributed by David Faria

Appeal: If you would like to help the people of Ejipura, please contact us via email and 100% of your donations will go towards the displaced families. In the U.S., every donation is tax deductible as Prema Jyothi is a 501c-3 non-profit organization.