

**GUJARAT GOVERNMENT AWARDS A MISSIONARY NUN, SR LISSY PAUL
Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ**

It is a very rare event that the BJP led Government gives an award to a missionary nun. So I was pleasantly surprised to hear that a missionary nun working among the Adivasi tribals in South Gujarat got an award from the Gujarat government in 2010. Sr. Lissy Paul of Carmelite Sisters of Charity (CCV) received the government award for her outstanding medical services to sickle cell anemia patients and her contribution to control the spread of the disease. There is an added reason why I am pleasantly surprised and overjoyed. Sr. Lissy is my own youngest sister.

The citation on the award memento reads: “Sickle Cell control programme a Govt-NGO partnership project of Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Gujarat, presented to Sr. Lissy Paul, Vedruna Niketan, Unai, for excellent care and support services as an NGO to Sickle Cell disease patients”.

I am well acquainted with the health care services of Sr. Lissy for the last 15 years among the Adivasi tribals in South Gujarat. I have attended as an invitee in a seminar she organized in Vidya Kiran School at Unai in 2009 for the sickle cell patients and their families for creating wide awareness of the sickness and educating them about the ways and means to control the spread of the disease.

I have also visited several times her Vedruna Niketan dispensary at Unai and have joined her to visit interior tribal villages in her mobile dispensary. I have watched her treating her patients with much love and concern and making herself one with them speaking in their language while, without knowing the tribal language, I did feel myself a fish out of water. With her selfless medical services the tribals have accepted her as one of them and lavished on her their love and friendship.

In caring for sickle cell patients Sr. Lissy treats not only the sick persons but she also reaches out to their families and the whole tribal society through health education. As part of her health education programmes Sr. Lissy has trained scores of tribal women as health workers. She has also made a documentary film on sickle cell anemia called “A Ray of Hope”.

I am often impressed by Sr. Lissy’s knowledge of the tribal language, culture and the whole tribal life. She has studied deeply sickle cell anemia, a prevalent disease among Adivasi tribals in South Gujarat. She says, “Our Adivasi people have suffered the sickness of sickle cell anemia for generations and still no medicine has been discovered to cure completely the disease. Allopathic and ayurvedic medicines do not cure completely a sickle cell patient. Often the allopathic and ayurvedic practitioners do not know about the sickle cell anemia and consequently instead treating the sickness they prescribe medicines for the symptoms of sickle cell disease like unbearable pains in the bones, blood clots at joints, persistent weakness in children, etc. So the patients get only temporary relief and no cure.

When Sr. Lissy started her medical services among the tribals in South Gujarat she was holding first rank in nursing after studying in St. Martha’s Nursing College at Bangalore, Karnataka state

and she was also a Registered Medical Practitioner (RMP). Then, neither the government nor private medical services have reached the interior tribal villages in South Gujarat.

Sr. Lissy learnt from the tribal patients coming to her Vedruna Niketan Dispensary at Unai that there are Adivasi Vaidas (tribal medical practitioners). She contacted them. Seeing Sr. Lissy's interest and her efficient medic-care of the tribal people the Vaidas shared their knowledge and medical practices in treating sickle cell anemia patients with Sr. Lissy. Consequently Sr. Lissy started looking for alternative medicine different from allopathic and ayurvedic medicines. She studied deeply the Adivasi medicines and tribal medical systems. She experimented with them obtaining medical herbs from the forests in tribal areas.

Speaking about local tribal medicines Sr. Lissy says that compared to allopathic medicines, the local tribal medicines have absolutely no side effects. Though the tribal medicines give slow cure, the result is good and lasting. Then, to study deeply the tribal medicines Sr. Lissy went and stayed with a priest doctor practicing, teaching and making tribal medicines in Madhya Pradesh. She learnt much about local and tribal medicines and practices.

Thus after equipping her with local tribal medicines, Sr. Lissy started experimenting and making herself tribal medicines in her own hospital at Unai.

Sr. Lissy says that, after knowing much about the diseases among Adivasi people we have prepared some 15 much effective Ayurvedic medicines through Vedruna Niketan hospital. Of the 15 efficacious medicines from medical herbs Aloevera Health Tonic medicine has been proved very effective and useful treatment of sickle cell anemia. With these ayurvedic medicines Sr. Lissy made treating the sickle cell anemia patients very effective as the medicine was made cheap and affordable for the Adivasi people.

While making 15 efficacious medicines from medical plants and herbs from the closely forests and from her own herbal gardens Sr. Lissy experiments with local tribal and ayurvedic medicines. A number of herbal plants like Aloevera and wheat grass are grown in the vicinity of her Vedruna Niketan dispensary at Unai.

Sr. Lissy says about the herbal medicine that, "The medical herbs which we use to prepare these medicines are found in the jungles around us. Some medical herbs are cultivated in our fields. These medical herbs are neither expensive nor they cause any side effects. The medicines prepared from these aromatic medical herbs protect the tribal people from many kind of sickness.

Sr. Lissy says that sickle cell anemia is a hereditary disease. Sickle cell anemia patients can be divided into two categories: those who suffer the disease and those who carry the disease in the bodies as carriers. The carriers may give their children the sickle cell anemia by heredity. If both the wife and husband are carriers, then their children will certainly get the sickness. But if one partner is a carrier and the other is free from the sickness then the likelihood of their children getting the sickness is rare. Sr. Lissy lays a lot of importance to health education. Her specially trained adivasi health workers regularly visit tribal families and teach them about sickle cell anemia and the importance of cleanliness, balanced nutritious food and preventive medical care, etc.

Sr. Lissy also takes time to test the blood of all children in tribal boardings and tribal dominated schools. If a child or an adult is found suffering from sickle cell anemia or a carrier of the sickness, then Sr. Lissy tests the blood of all his/her family members and treats those who needs medical treatment and health education.

Thus working for years among the tribals in South Gujarat Sr. Lissy has done an extraordinary service both in treating sickle cell anemia patients and in controlling to a great extent the spread of the sickness in tribal areas in South Gujarat. (Contact the author: ciss@satyam.net.in & www.vpaulsj.org)

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