



AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?

Blair Williams

As I grow older and look back on life, I am struck by the huge part that synchronicity, randomness and just dumb luck has played in determining what I have, where I am and who I have become.

Jaikumar, a distinguished Harvard professor, tells a story of the thin line that separates fortune from misfortune. While in his 20's, he and a friend were descending a 24,000 foot mountain in the Himalayas, when an avalanche hit them. Jaikumar dived to the right, while his friend jumped left and was never seen again. Jaikumar was dragged several thousand feet down the mountain, lacerating his body, fracturing his insteps and dislocating his hip. Barely conscious when he came to rest, he realized he must move or freeze to death. He crawled for several hours before collapsing unconscious. Unknowingly, he had collapsed close to a peasant woman's hut. She found him and nursed him to consciousness. She knew that he needed immediate medical help, so, even though she was very slight, she carried him on her back for two days to the nearest village, stopping every few yards to get her breath and take a sip of water. At the village she browbeat the headman to send Jaikumar on a donkey to a medical center another few days journey. Jaikumar says the journey on the donkey was the worst part of the entire experience. The peasant woman refused any compensation. Jaikumar recovered, and later immigrated to the USA where he gained fame as a Harvard professor, winning numerous prestigious international awards. He never forgot the goodness of the strangers who helped him, and built several schools in the villages where he had his mishap. He always recounted his story to his students to illustrate how fragile life was and so dependent on random happenings. He never ceased to wonder at the series of improbable strokes of luck that befell him and the incredible actions of the village woman who saved him. He concluded that, "Out of good fortune come success, and, out of success comes obligation" (HBR Case 9-600-047, 1999).

Recently a TV series described the origins of humankind. It was an astounding story and the conclusion was that we evolved to being the dominant living creature on our planet by a succession of lucky breaks. Who we are is the result of a huge lottery, one sperm of several hundred thousand fertilizing the egg that became who we are. Jared Diamond in his best selling 'Guns, Germs and Steel' further suggests that the affluence of some countries is not so much due to any biological differences, or any particular intelligence or application, but more because of environmental conditions. The Saudis live a good life because they happened to occupy an area where oil was found!

So where does this line of thinking lead us? Today, 2000AD, we Anglo-Indians live all around the world. We are a truly cosmopolitan group of people. From an estimated 500,000 living in India in 1950, half of us emigrated to English speaking countries, primarily England, Canada and Australia. We emigrated because we believed that these countries may give us and would certainly give our children a better life. We also emigrated because many of us were fortunate in picking the right time, being screened by the right people and possessing or appearing to possess the right credentials. If we who are abroad look back, many of us will realize the good fortune accompanying our emigration. Today we have settled down in the countries of our adoption and we are living a fuller quality of life. The future for our children appears even brighter.

Those of us who have been back to India and seen the condition of many of our older folks, realize how lucky we have been. Today there are scores of Anglo-Indians in their 60's and 70's and 80's, living precariously, with little or no shelter and have to search and struggle to feed themselves daily. Here are a few samples of such persons:

Simon Glass, 71, lives with his wife Rita 68 in a small mud hut with a tin roof at 'Hadi Bagan'. Simon has two sons and daughter who help occasionally. He and his wife make and sell paper bags. Simon has TB.

Ivan Peters, 76, lives with his son in a small room for which he pays a monthly rent of Rs 110/- His son does odd jobs. Ivan receives an occasional lunch from the MC sisters. He has a chronic heart condition.

Thelma Dolby, 69, lives with her crippled sister, May Rodricks, in one room with a leaky roof for this she pays a monthly rent of Rs 50/-. Thelma has cataract in both eyes

Beryl Christian, 75, lives with her married daughter and three children in one small room for which she pays a monthly rent of Rs 67/- Beryl depends on her neighbors for her food

Cyril D'Silva, 81, lives with his wife, Louise, 71, in a small hut with a tin roof for which he pays a monthly rent of Rs 100/-. Cyril is blind in one eye and has a cataract in the other. He has three daughters but they do not help

Bertram Samuel, 86, lives with his Mary, 75, in a large room and kitchen. He served in the Army during the war, but receives no pension. He works as a handyman doing odd jobs in the neighborhood.

Mae Fernandes, 85, is a widow living in one small room for which she pays a monthly rent of Rs 100/-. She depends on her neighbors for food.

Olga D'Cruz lives with her grand daughter in a small room with a tin roof and pays a monthly rent of Rs40/-

Lilian Marston lives with her two sons in a small room. Her two sons do not help her. Her eye is to be operated upon for cataract.

Violet Graham lives with her crippled daughter Sabrina (run over by a bus) in a small hut plastered with mud. She prepares pickles and jams and sells them.

The list is endless. Abandoned persons, living a wretched existence, desperately seeking food, shelter and some comfort. And to think they could be living reasonably well in Australia or England or Canada, but were just unlucky. Further, any one of them could have been one of us. Imagine our daily lives under those conditions. It is truly frightening.

Do we have to help them? The answer has to be a resounding YES. It is not important how we help them, or through whom we help them, but it is important that we do so. And an intention is of no value unless it is supported with an action. With our numbers abroad, we can cover them easily. We cannot expect other agencies

and institutions to look after our community, even though many are providing much help. Throughout the world, persons help their community after their family. Tribes help their own Tribe. This is the way it is----and should be; otherwise it becomes too big a task. No one community can feed the millions of the world; so we go to our own communities to help ease the suffering, and the pain. Look at the example set by communities that really look after their members; look at the Jews or the Parsees. These communities have extensive organizations and resources dedicated to helping their fellow beings in need. What is our experience? In two years of administering CTR, a USA based charity; we get a response from less than *ten of every 100 persons* we contact. We, as NRAI's (Non Resident Anglo-Indians), are not helping the needy in India in any concerted manner. Why?

We are a Christian community and the essence of Christianity is helping our fellow human being - and when this fellow human is a person from our own community the need to help becomes imperative. Looking up Luke Chap X, verses 25 to 37 - " And, behold a certain lawyer stood up, tempting him and saying, Master, what must I do to possess eternal life? But he said to him: What is written in the law? He answering, said: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength and with all thy mind: and thy neighbor as thyself.* And he said to him: Thou hast answered right. This do: and thou shalt live. But he willing to justify himself, said to Jesus: And who is my neighbor? - and Jesus related the parable of the good Samaritan. The good Samaritan helped his fellow being. Why? Because he wanted to alleviate the pain that his fellow man was suffering. And he did.

So why do the old and poor Anglo-Indians continue to suffer abandonment? Partly ignorance; many of us are unaware of the extent and degree of their poverty. Partly neglect; most of us are too busy to spare a thought to these unfortunate brethren. Partly indifference; it's them and not us. Partly because there is no easy mechanism in place for us to help. We can continue to speculate on such reasons indefinitely. The fact is there are thousands of old, poor Anglo-Indians existing all over India and the fact is they *are not* being helped sufficiently. In trying to understand why we, Anglo-Indians, have not provided more help to our less fortunate community in India, we came across a interesting book 'The Great Indian Middle Class' by Pavan K.Varma (Penguin 1998). Mr. Varma states " Temples in India will have their coffers

overflowing, but few of the donors would see much spiritual merit in using this same money for alleviating the misery of the thousands of the visibly poor around them. - ..In Hinduism there is no institutionalization of the contribution of the individual to his community within the arena of spiritual search and fulfillment. It is not surprising, therefore, that 'welfare work in the slums and care of the poor in general *was, and still is* (italics mine), a monopoly of Christian missions' (Gunnar Myrdal, Asian Drama)"

What can we do?

First, let us locate agencies in India who can be relied upon to use the money sent to them to help the A.I. community. Here are some of these agencies that we have checked:

CAISS (Calcutta Anglo-Indian Service Society) serves the poor Anglo-Indians in Calcutta by providing welfare, rations, medical help, education and employment. Their address is c/o Lawrence D'Souza Homes, 138 Lenin Sarani, Calcutta 700 013, India.

Sister Marissa. She runs the Marian Education Center at 190BG Picnic Gardens, Calcutta 700 039 and caters for drop outs and has a crèche and day care

FINS (Friends in Need Society) They run old folks homes in Madras and Bangalore. A Dr G. Francis at 1/2 Ponniamman, Koil St., Egmore, Madras 600 008 is the President

DVD Educational & Charitable Trust - this is run by Mr. D.V.D'Monte a long time leader of the Anglo-Indians in Madras

Secondly, let us locate agencies abroad that collect money for Anglo-Indians in India. Here are some that we know of:

Calcutta Tiljallah Relief, Inc. PO Box 6345, Monroe Twp., NJ 08831, USA. Is a US government approved Not for Profit organization. Provides a monthly pension to poor, AI seniors in Calcutta, Madras and Bangalore. Sponsors young AI girls at Loreto, Entally. Has a branch in Canada Ms Y.Peters, 51 Brock Av., Toronto, ON M6K 2L3 and in the UK Ms J.Chambers, 16 Bailey Close, Botley, Hants SO 30 2TW

Kalimpong Association (UK) Charitable Trust, 63 Woodcote Valley Rd., Purley, Surrey CR8 3BG. They provide residential education for over 300 Anglo-Indian boys and girls at the Kalimpong Homes.

Anglo Indian Concern- located in the UK - Rachel Thurley, 4A The Styles, Godmanchester, Cambs PE 18 8JF, England. They operate in Madras and provide education, medical help and financial aid to poor Anglo-Indians in Madras

HPAC (Help a Poor Child) - located in the UK 76 Middleton Av., Greenford, Middlesex UB6 8BS. They support Goans and Anglo-Indians by operating child care centers in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta and Goa.

Third World Support Services Inc., 26 Hanover Road, Suite 1211, Brampton, Ontario L6S 4T2, Canada. They have been helping charities in India for over 20 years and are a Canadian government approved organization. Mr. Ray Athaide is the treasurer

Trevor Dragwidge Trust Fund, UK helping Anglo-Indians by providing upkeep for the elderly and educating poor children. A trustee member is Dennis Rebeiro, 4 Prince Rd., South Norwood, London SE25 6NN, UK

Finally, now that we have located agencies in India and abroad, what do we need to help them? We need compassion and love. What is compassion? According to Webster's dictionary it is "sympathetic consciousness of others' distress, together with the desire to alleviate it". Sir Richard Leakey, a famous paleontologist, tells a story about the evolution of mankind. Initially man was a quadruped. With four legs, like other animals, if one of the legs got injured, man could manage on the other three. As man evolved, he became a biped. Now if one of his legs was hurt, he became vulnerable. With a hurt leg, a person cannot survive unless other members of their tribe helped them. Thus was born 'compassion' man's concern for his vulnerable fellowman. This Sir Leakey maintains is the key to man's survival. Love is the essence of life; and where there is love there is compassion. But love and compassion together ease suffering, only if they result in action.

Many Anglo-Indians in India, particularly the very young and the elderly, are in dire need of help. There are the old people who are lonely and poor, because, not only have their relatives deserted them; but so has their community. There are children, whose young mothers have been deserted by their husbands and who are so poor

that they cannot take care of the little ones. They live in slums where both the little girls as well as the little boys have been abused or in danger of being abused. This is our community; these are our brethren. Depending on what we do in the coming few years, history and our children will judge us, either as a caring and compassionate community, or as a selfish and callous community. The jury is still out.

Am I responsible for my brother? Am I my brother's keeper?

Blair and Ellen Williams immigrated to the USA since 1976. Blair was a manufacturing executive and Ellen a school teacher. With a couple of friends, they started Calcutta Tiljallah Relief (CTR) in December of 1998, dedicated to helping poor Anglo-Indians in India. As of Jan 2001, CTR provides a monthly pension to 50 seniors in Calcutta, 30 in Madras and 10 in Bangalore. 16 young Anglo-Indian girls are sponsored as residential students at Loreto, Entally. The vision of CTR is to provide a pension to every needy Anglo-Indian senior.

CTR's website may be checked out at <http://home.att.net/~blairw/wsb/index.html>