

Order Council
Bombay Nexus

MIRACLE IN GUNFOUNDRY

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Let me tell you about the miracle done during the ITI in Gunfoundry. It was indeed a miracle! Gunfoundry is not the same since.

Gunfoundry 5 is about 2000 feet by 1200 feet, with a population of about seven to ten thousand people of all castes and creeds, coming from north, south, east and west of India. It is a kind of pocket that could fit into any part of the country. Gunfoundry is a mixture of rich and poor, educated and illiterate, of Hindu, Moslem, Parsee and Christian. The four churches in the Local Church Galaxy, St. George's CSI, Centenary Methodist, Ramkote Methodist, and St. Joseph's R. C. Cathedral are located in and very close to the locality. It was smack in the middle of this area that the miracle, the second in the series planned by the guild took place.

Before proceeding any further let me read to you an article published in the DeccanChronicle, the leading English daily in Andhra Pradesh. A report was also published in two leading Urdu dailies, "Siasat" and "Rahnuma-i-Deccan."

Although a little nervous about such a report being published so early, we felt that it really was time to begin to tell our story, especially after witnessing the kind of support received from the Municipal Corporation and the enthusiasm from the locality.

The Gunfoundry miracle was not just an accident, nor did it just happen. Like somebody said yesterday, "TajGunj did not just fall into our lap. We were on the look out for something like this..." It was the same with Gunfoundry. For about 12 weeks now, we have been meeting in a small room given to us by one of the members, Miss Olive Strettle, in Gunfoundry. We called this the guild, although strictly we were something like a fore-runner to the Guild. We started with three or four grads and went up to sixteen people meeting. We had two or three Hindus and one Moslem working with us on the PCE. Here in a dark stuffy room, with only candle light, we started out training and planning. We went through all the usual methods and you know what that does! What I am trying to say is that we were prepared. We knew what to do, whom to inform, what authorization to get and what to expect. Together with members of the Hyderabad House, we had held LENS, CSI, RSI, Imaginal Education consults and so on and had begun to build a climate. Five Municipal Corporation people had been through LENS, including Dr. G. Suraya Rao, Urban Projects Officer and number two in the Corporation. The number one Man, the Special Officer, Mr. Narendra Luther (Hindu not Christian) knew of our work through several contacts made by the house members, and was in strong support. All this simply indicates that we were ready for action!

Let me now give you some idea of the situation in Hyderabad and Gunfoundry. We have a Special Officer in the Municipal Corporation, Narendra Luther. Special Officers are appointed when the normal government machinery breaks down, like during President's Rule. Our Municipal Corporation was so corrupt that about three years ago, a Special Officer was appointed, who had

very wide powers, and like all Special Officers, Luther is a man of integrity, deep sense of responsibility and very powerful.

About thirty hours before the 'workday' Robyn came to me with the task of selecting a site for the miracle to be done by local residents and members of the ITI. There is nothing unusual about being called on in the 11th hour to do a job in this organization, so we got to it. We had to find a task that would take 180 man hours to do, it had to be located in a central place to impact the maximum number of people, it had to be an eyesore and the dirtiest job that even paid sweepers wouldn't do! We felt it had to be located fairly close to the first miracle site, because that is where we had some support.

After talking with several members of the guild and a few key local residents, the group selected a rubbish dump about 30 feet by 6 feet. I have seen it lying there all my life - and I am 50 years old! Bordering this dump is a Public Latrine, about 30 feet long and having about 20 cubicles, which always emanated such an abominable stink that most people avoided this road if they could help it. The latrines serve about 500 people in the surrounding streets. Alongside both of these is the Community Hall build by Mr. Yazdani, a local Gunfoundry resident, ten years ago, when he was a Municipal Councilor. It has been used only two or three times in ten years because of the surroundings. You can imagine using a hall with your eyes and nose closed!

I was really very reluctant about going ahead with this spot - it was all too dirty and embarrassing, especially facing my family, and I could not really imagine those priests and nuns in the ITI cleaning latrines! Anyway luckily the miracle worked and in 24 hours later my family looked upon me as a hero! Many others who had laughed in my face the previous day, are now asking me to help them out in their sanitation problems!!!

So, a couple of us went across and picked up Mr. Somanay, a very staunch Roman Catholic who had stayed away from us, but he began to see the possibility as we spun our story and how he would also benefit, so he had to come. (His wife attended the closing feast of the ITI a week later.) Then we went across to see Yazdani, a leading Advocate, and key to authorization in the Moslem community. He too was excited by what the guild had been doing, its plans and of course the miracle.

That afternoon we knew the miracle had worked 24 hours in advance. After conversations with Luther, Surya Rao and others, the Municipal Corporation agreed to purchase over Rs.1000 worth of material. All this happened in less than one and a half hours. So we went off to do the purchasing which was fun and games.

On the morning of the work-day I went down to the site at about 6:30 a.m. to find that a lot of the garbage had already been removed! A couple of members from the House arrived at 7:00 a.m. and were furious to see the very symbol being destroyed. All this was being watched by Dr. Surya Rao, and I think he learnt something that morning. This is why I say God is on our side. Dr. Surya Rao was convinced that there was more to it than simply cleaning up a rubbish dump.

Many local residents, a few Municipal Officers and others had gathered ready to work, when the ITI party arrived singing "When Iron Men Go Marching In". The entire company crammed into the community hall and were addressed by Mr. Yazdani. Then we went to work, cleaning, shovelling, loading, scraping painting, digging with a kind of military precision and excitement, laughter, colour and determination. It was a sight to see nuns and Municipal Officers loading trucks and shovelling dirt! One member soon had all the children of the locality working along with the rest. Crowds began to gather and they were wondering what ever was happening. They never in their lives ever seen anything like this, yet they felt identified because their very next door neighbours were in there up to their armpits in dirt.

During the morning Mr. Narendra Luther, Special Officer, came by. He was deeply struck by what was happening. He spent quite some time talking with people and sharing common concerns for the locality. I think this visit itself was indicative of the strengthening relationships with other local bodies in this city.

Four hours later, latrines were cleaned, and painted, community hall was painted, the 30 by 10 by 6 rubbish dump was transformed into a park with plants and a fence around it. We had performed a miracle. We had won!

Many people have asked about the reaction to this event. I would just say that already it has sparked off a number of other miracles. Many of the rubbish dumps have been cleaned up and streets are being maintained more diligently. The main children's park which had fallen into ruin is being renovated and municipal staff in Gunfoundry has been doubled. Local residents are caring for this particular area, and are enquiring about the guild and training with the ICA.

Finally to end on a personal note, for those of us who haven't yet found an effective way of communicating with God - what I witnessed going on in those four hours was a bunch of people expending their energy and soiling their hands with the dirt of the land - this was a most powerful prayer.

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Gunfoundry

