

A DAILY WALK

by Alexandra Woodward



Traveling the same route to the school everyday, I have started to recognize faces as I pass by. Most people here usually follow the same routine day after day; if they have a job, it is typically a stationary one, and Indians in general tend to live by patterns.

But the more familiar I become with this place, the more real the suffering becomes. The area approaching the school is a very poor area, a small slum in which small stores are just starting to sprout, and most people either live in tiny, dirty homes, under tarps, or on the street. Everyday as I pass by I watch one particular old woman, who can always be seen squatting among the piles of garbage that collect against a stone wall on the side of the street. If she didn't move occasionally I never would have noticed her in the first place; she is so withered and so small that she is no bigger than a seven year-old, and her clothing, as ragged and filthy as the trash next to her, covers her completely. This morning she was facing the road directly for the first time, and although she was sorting through the rubbish as usual, this time I saw her pick something out of it and put it into her mouth. After seeing her in the trash piles day after day, it is a reasonable assumption that she would be eating from them, but even still it turned my stomach to see her do it. It is one thing to assume and another to witness. How do people survive like that? How much do they end up consuming in a day? How is it that this woman has not died from disease? I wonder at her age, and whether her years or her lifestyle are responsible for her haggard appearance. What was her childhood like? Was she ever married?

As much discomfort as it causes to see people in her condition, it is something that no one can change. But is it humane to accept that this is just how life goes, and turn a blind eye because we are more fortunate? How much do we reach out? It seems like it should be possible to eradicate poverty, but the unfortunate fact is that there will always be people working against our efforts, whether knowingly or not. So how do we try to help these people? What will last?