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HOPE IN DHAPA

There exists in Calcutta a long neglected area, an area commonly called a slum; but to the people residing there, 'Dhapa', a place, a home. Hope began for Dhapa with the devastating floods of 1969 and the persistence of a young man for whom Dhapa had been 'home' for the twenty-three years of his life. During the floods this young man came to know of the Cathedral Relief Service because of their outreach and help. His enthusiasm was such that without any organisation, any committee, and resolutions, he was able to start through C.R.S. a milk distribution centre, a primary school, a dispensary, the making of permanent drains, the sinking of tubewells, a workshop for manufacturing cotton gloves, and the distribution of clothes to the very poor.

The young man got his organisation, his committee, in due time; and through State Government help he was able to start a public library, a club for school students, and a music centre. Is this the end? Surely not. Now there are plans for adult literacy classes and the opening of a craft centre.

There is hope in Dhapa because there is a spirit of caring, concern, love, where the mental and physical resources of the local people have come together. There is hope in Dhapa because this young man, and the group of young men he has gathered round him, are determined that all men have rights to sanitation, clean drinking water, education, recreation and work. There is hope when men realise that they are not isolated, and brother can reach out to brother. The world sees Calcutta as the second dirtiest city: but it is from these depths that the world has a lesson to learn. This is the lesson of Love—in Dhapa.