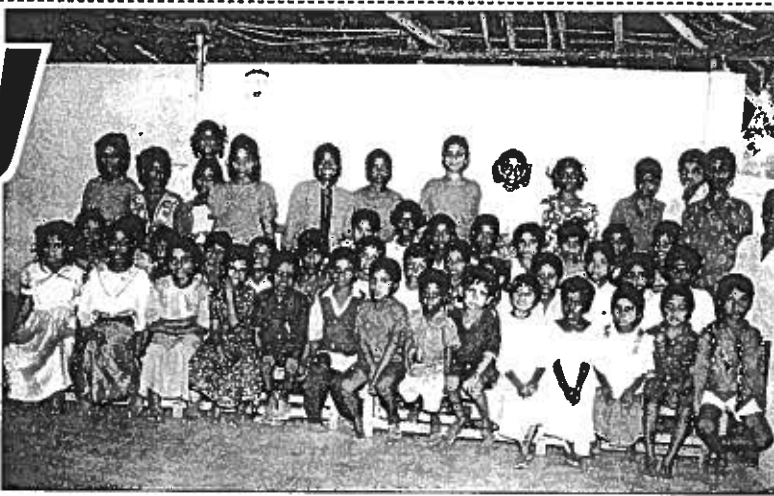


worldwatch

A ministry of hope

Pastor John Arul has pioneered 45 churches in India over the last 17 years and believes passionately that God wants to turn ordinary people into extraordinary people. SIMON WATKINSON met him on a recent visit to Salisbury



● Pastor John's orphans: He wants to build orphanages all over India

JOHAN Arul has a glittering CV: his church in Madurai city has grown from 35 to 1,200 members in seven years, he has pioneered 48 churches in his 17 years of ministry in India's southernmost State of Tamilnadu, has tutored 100 men and women for full-time ministry, composed 80 songs and produced four audio cassettes which are used extensively in village and tribal ministries. He is also Principal of the School of Jesus Bible Institute and founded an orphanage which now accommodates 110 children.

However, the high price of these achievements has been persecution – John has been on an Indian Government 'hit-list' throughout his ministry and twice been attacked and left for dead by extremists.

"When I became a Christian, I started witnessing in the street and from 1976 to 1978 I travelled all over India as an evangelist," John

told me. "Afterwards, I worked for a tea company and spent most of my income on Christian outreach to local tribal villages.

"Then at the end of 1979, the Lord gave me a burden to start churches. My first church started in a shed with three people. This grew to 85 people within six months, so I thought that it was about time to resign from tea making!"

John's hectic day begins at 5.30 am with two hours of prayer, Bible reading and meditation. He arrives at the office (which has a 24 hour prayer centre) by 9am and is often back there reading staff reports into the early hours.

As well as travelling 100,000 miles throughout India each year organising five crusades (each costing £2,000), he helps other churches and feeds 170 people each day. Half of his total monthly income of £500 is spent on rent and 35 staff salaries.

"I serve the Temple City for India, which is full of temples with round the clock Hindu worship. This city of two million people has a huge demonic presence, but Reinhard Bonnke's recent crusade relieved some of this oppression," he explained.

"At the moment our church is held in a rented cinema theatre. I believe it will have thousands one day, so we must first build the congregation and then I believe God will provide a plot of land on which to build a church that is big enough.

"Seeing people give their lives to

Seeing people give their lives to God is the best part of the job

God is the best part of the job and really warms my heart, but it grieves me so when people leave my church and pastors whom I have trained fail in their ministry because this isn't God's will."

John's steadfast faith and delegation of tasks to the laity plus his ability to survive on just three hours sleep a night are the keys to his success.

"I desperately want to be a good pastor for everyone, but can only serve 150 people effectively," he conceded.

His work with orphans began in 1995 when two small children were left outside his church with an anonymous note asking him to look after them. The problem is huge. With two-thirds of India's population living below the poverty line on an annual



● Pastor John: "I desperately want to be a good pastor"

income of £60 to £70 and the average life-span being 42-45, most children quickly become orphans.

They are usually either given up for child labour, prostitution or may tragically fall prey to gangs who cut their hands off or gouge their eyes out so that they can join begging gangs. Of the 450 million children in India, an unacceptable 50,000 die below the age of 12 every year.

Set against such tragic statistics, John's ministry is a lifeline of hope to those he serves.

"Children are the future," he stressed, "God has been faithful in helping me feed the orphans; one man bought me an acre of land and we are constructing larger premises

to house the children. The three storey extension will cost £10,000 to finish and I also need a vocational training centre for skills training.

"I want to build orphanages all over India to save these poor children and show them the love of Jesus."

Childlink, set up in 1997, aims to raise funds from UK sponsors and send them to India to help with the work. For more details contact: John & Bron Fergusson, Childlink, Ebble lodge, Bishopstone, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 4BT e-mail: jfergusson@wyrecompute.com

■ Simon Watkinson is a freelance journalist based in Wiltshire



● Foundations for the new dormitories for the orphanage