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INDIA MISSIONS

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of the elders of
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“...from dead idols to serve the living and true God...”
1 Thessalonians 1:9

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india ink

THE CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS OF WORLD RELIGION

No one can deny that our world is changing in many ways & in many places. It can be both frightening & frustrating. Trying to learn new things that put you in an unfamiliar setting. Increase in the flow of information. Changes in technology—daily.

But there is a very real—& huge—change of another kind going on in our world today. It began in the early 1960's & is accelerating. It deals with the world's make-up of religion, & it is startling. One thing we have been told is that Islam is the world's fastest-growing religion. That is NOT true. Christianity, in its broadest sense is growing by leaps & bounds. WHERE it is growing is the real change in our world.

In the 1960's, for every 4 believers in Jesus in the West, there was only 1 in the East, even with many more people living in that part of the world. By 2000, all that had changed: for every 1 believer in the West, there were 2 believers in the East. By 2010, more change—for every 1 believer in the West, there were 4 in the East. Today, there is an even greater disparity. For every 1 believer in the West, there are 7 in the East.

What has happened? A recent study has shown that 100 years ago, 80% of all those who professed to be Christians lived in Europe or North America. Today, that number has been cut by more than one half—only 40% of the world's believers are in those 2 parts of the world. For the first time in 1,000 years, the majority of those who believe in Jesus live either south of the equator or in the eastern part of the world. Christianity is NOT dying—it is shifting!

Dr. David Barrett—famous mission & church growth expert who traveled to almost every country in the world to study “Christian” patterns—said in the early 1960's we were on the cusp of a global phenomenon. This would be a world-wide demographic shift in religion. He was more than right—he was almost a prophet. Dr. Barrett may have been the first man to recognize this situation. In 1985, I read a magazine article in which he showed some of the proofs of this truly amazing fact.

One of those proofs was that the largest church in the world had 300,000 members—& it was in Seoul, South Korea. By 2000, the percentage of South Korea's population claiming to be Christian was 42%; today it is 56%. Thousands of Muslims are leaving Islam every month in Africa for a faith in Christ.

A comment from another source shows that since 2000, the number of people in India who are becoming believers in Jesus is growing at an exponential rate. That is from the Joshua Project—seeking to get Bibles into nations in their native languages, & where a faith in Christ is not the predominant religion.

A book published in 2007 discussed what had happened with 707 million people in Southeast Asia, China, Africa & India over a period of years. What was it? There were 2 common factors—people had left their native religions & had become believers in Jesus. This number was then growing at a rate of 175,000 souls per day.

If you think the numbers we are reporting to you are not true, not accurate, not honest—you need to consider all these facts stated above. India is & has been in the midst of this great demographic shift in religion. We are in the midst of the greatest Restoration Movement in the world; India truly is now the epicenter of New Testament Christianity.

The closest thing to the Lord's church in the first century today is what is happening in India right now—without the miracles & apostles. India is the hope for the spread of the Gospel in Asia & then on to other parts of the world. They will be sending missionaries to the USA soon. Think on it!

india notes

SOME LIKE IT HOT!

I love Mexican food. Evidently, many other Americans do, too. In our home town, we had as many as 5 at one time (our population is less than 7,000). One of them burned down (well, at least the kitchen did), & they sold out. Another had damage from a bad storm & just folded. A 3rd was just a hole in the wall, for "street" food. It closed.

Now we have 2 Mexican restaurants, & they are both very good places to eat. One of my favorite dishes is chili rellenos—however, too often the cook & I do not agree on what makes the correct (best) type of chili rellenos. I love enchiladas & tacos. I love most kinds of Mexican food.

Some folks find Mexican food "hot". This is mainly due to the salsa served with the chips, or other types of salsa that is put over the food (esp. enchiladas). Some like it hot. The problem is, "hot" can be a relative term.

Well, folks, I can tell you that you do not know "hot" until you have eaten Indian food. My first trip to India in 1979 taught me that. People would ask me (after I returned home) just how hot the food really was. I said on a scale of 1 to 10, it was a 12!

Just recently, we were in the Houston area. We stopped at a service station to find out for sure where our hostess lived—and discovered this was also a small Indian food restaurant as well. So we ordered one dish to split between the 2 of us—boli kababs (chicken dish).

I have eaten some hot food—but folks, this was enough to fry your tongue. I mean fry your tongue. Fortunately, we had ordered some Indian bread (naan) that helped to kill the flames. Bread works better than water.

So, the next time you eat Mexican food, & think it is "too hot", just remember that food from south of the border does not hold a candle to Indian food. And several friends recently have said that Thai food is even hotter! After our experience the other day in Houston, I do not know how that could be humanly possible!

Our work involves a number of ministries. Each requires financial fuel to accomplish. Right now, our efforts are focused on: (1) buying sewing machines for tailoring centers & to provide sewing machines to needy Christian widows; (2) helping Christian widows whose husbands were Gospel preachers; & (3) getting our workers in the field to preach the Word. We need your help to do this! Please send a generous gift today to Church of Christ India Missions to—

CHURCH OF CHRIST INDIA MISSIONS

P. O. Box 1448

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—OR—

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A LOOK AT INDIA

ATTENDING SERVICES

(One of my personal challenges is keeping track of the huge numbers of people who I meet each year. Unfortunately, I fail miserably! For this reason I see many people & hear many stories & I have no name to put to those faces & events. The following story is about a smiling face without a name I could remember.)

Bro. R. Premdas (a team leader) was organizing my schedule in Bangalore & we were conducting about 14 Gospel meetings each week. Some of these were conducted in small church buildings, or small houses, tiny huts or even in the street. After a 40 minute drive through Bangalore's awful traffic, we reached a small neighborhood of Kannada-speaking people.

After arriving, it progressed (as most of these meetings do) with looks of awe & marvel that an American was in their ghetto. We were given preferential seating (often the only chairs) & waited while they finished the other parts of the meeting program & until more people arrived. After I spoke, an Indian preacher spoke & offered the invitation with several responding to the Gospel.

Most of these folks were denominational people our Indian brethren had been teaching for quite some time. However, one of the attendees was a Christian widow. She had already accepted Biblical teachings & was a member of the New Testament church & regularly attended a local congregation. The subjects we taught were lessons she had heard many, many times. She simply wanted to hear "the old, old story" as often as possible. Like most Indians in these services, her joy was clear to see & she listened carefully.

Typically after services, most people throng around us almost as if we were "rock stars". There is much bowing & hand shaking. Often the ladies are more reserved in their greetings with palms held together—and often asking for prayers—a Christian widow made a point of coming to me boldly & shaking my hand. Through the translator I learned she had already obeyed the Gospel.

She lived & worshipped some distance away in another neighborhood. Then I saw she was handicapped as she hobbled over to me. Both feet were crippled & one was horribly deformed. She was in obvious pain & had great difficulty walking.

It amazed me to realize she had walked over a mile on those feet to hear the preaching of the Gospel! She humbled me with her sincere devotion & joy in the Lord. All the excuses I have ever heard not to attend worship or a Gospel meeting seemed small & ridiculous.

I pray none of us will ever again complain about the small obstacles we face in getting up & going to worship, Bible study, or a Gospel meeting.

NO MORE EXCUSES, CHURCH!

—Jerry Edwards—

KAREN'S KORNER

"**THE BEST LAID PLANS OF MICE & MEN**" came to my mind as I began thinking about writing this article. For those of you who might not be familiar with that saying, it continues with "oft go astray (or awry)". This is from a poem written by Robert Burns in 1786. It seems this past year or so has been filled with such situations for us.

For the first time in my 74½ years, I think I have finally reached the "growing old" stage. I can't say that I like it, but I am sure that I will adapt to whatever God has in store for me. I have always said I was able to adapt to all the travels, the changes in food, the extreme heat of South India & the cold of Northwest Alabama in winter (well, it is very cold for us!)—whatever God puts before me. But I am now beginning to wonder. Oh, I know that this, too, shall pass. But "when?" is the \$64,000 question!

This has been an extremely busy year for us & it isn't even half over. We returned from India soon after Thanksgiving with plans for me to take a trip to North Carolina with 2 daughters-in-law to see the Biltmore House while decorated for Christmas. An ice & snow storm made it necessary to cancel those plans. Maybe there will be another time. Oh, I certainly hope so.

Last year Ron & I were in Kentucky for appointments to give reports to congregations which support our work. Realizing that we weren't TOO far from the recently built Noah's Ark & the Creation Museum, I had finally talked Ron into making that trip so we could see them while we were in the "vicinity". Plans were made; we got up on the morning we were to begin our trek—and I became

terribly sick, so those plans were scrubbed. Maybe another time. However, now I am almost afraid to make any special plans!

In August, as we were nearing our 54th anniversary, we realized if we were ever going to see some of the tourist spots in India, we needed to make some plans. So we made a trip to Amritsar in Punjab state in northwest India. We saw the Golden Temple & a few other things in the city. We planned to see the closing of the gates between India & Pakistan. It was VERY hot & would be a fairly long drive. We decided that trip would not be a wise thing to do since Ron was not feeling well. We canceled that trip & stayed in Amritsar. Maybe another time!

There are still places in India Ron & I haven't been able to visit—hopefully in the years we have left to work in that great country, we will find the opportunity to see a few more of India's amazing sights—or revisit places we haven't seen in many years. If any of you would like to visit India, we would be happy to have you in our home & help you in any way possible.

India is a fascinating place to visit. It is dirty—very dirty, in some places—but something one has to overlook. It must be realized India is not America, but it still has many wonderful places to visit. I think my favorite place to visit is Rajasthan. Of course, by the time this goes to print, that might change! But please let us know if you would like to make such a trip. We would love to have you!



TOP ROW: (L) Construction for Hyderabad's metro (elevated train) system is continuing (M) A big Gospel meeting (R) Sandeep "tying the knot" for his new bride, Prasuna at their wedding—the proper way is 3 knots for the "thali", the Indian equivalent of a wedding ring

BOTTOM ROW: (L) Near the very bottom tip of India (at Kanyakumari), a street vendor sells very lovely sea shells (M) A beautiful temple near the sea—lit up at night (also in Kanyakumari) (R) Ben with Bro. K. ("little") Sukumar & his wife & 2 sons—they live in Zaheerabad, the last city on the highway to Bombay on the border of Telangana state

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IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Going to a Wedding

Marriage customs in Bible times continue in India today. There are many similarities—and on my last trip I was privileged to experience some of them in a wedding in February.

CH Chinna Kotiah is a preacher on our team, a team leader & a good translator. He arranged his daughter's marriage—and last fall, he invited me to speak at her wedding. I agreed. He asked me if a tailor could come & measure me for a new safari suit for the event.

This Indian custom is like Bible times. Just as the father provided wedding garments & expected his guests to wear them at the wedding (in Matt. 22:11-12), I was given a new outfit to wear at the wedding ceremony.

The morning of the wedding, I arrived early at the home of the bride for photos, & joined in the motorcade the 2 miles to the venue. Along the route a 10-piece marching band led the way, playing loudly, attracting the attention of everyone along the route. We stopped several times along the way so that the wedding party could get out of their cars & join in the pre-wedding "dance".

The traffic had to go around our party as the young men jumped up & down to the music & waved their arms from side to side over their heads. The girls "danced" separately in similar fashion in little groups. Even though it was hot, they seemed to be having a great time. These were mini-parties to celebrate the event with the bride & all her friends & relations on the way to the wedding. It took over an hour to arrive at the huge event hall.

On the left side of the entrance there was a large banner with a color photo of the bride (Prasuna) & the groom (Sandeep). (The bride & groom are both members of the Lord's church.) The banner welcomed everyone to their wedding. The wedding was scheduled for noon—we did not arrive until after 2 PM, & guests arrived throughout the ceremony—very typical for India!

The stage was set with 2 thrones for the bride & groom with seats on either side for the 6 speakers & the master of ceremonies. I preached a Gospel sermon on the urgency of obedience. The other speakers recounted their memories of the bride, the groom & their families. They also offered their best wishes & prayers for a happy marriage along with glowing words of encouragement.

Their vows were traditional, & after the exchange of rings, the groom tied a thali (a string necklace with a tiny gold charm) around his bride's neck, tying it three times. This is customary in Indian weddings & may be where we get the phrase, "they tied the knot"! The nuptials lasted for an hour & a half, & the reception lasted the rest of the day. What an absolutely wonderful experience!

—Ben Renager—

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INDIAN SPICE

Curry 'N' Spice

By the time you read this, Karen & I should be in India. This will be a little shorter trip, because we will return to the USA for a wedding. This is a very special wedding—because Brendon, one of our grandsons—is getting married to Courtney Brown from Ohio.

From time to time, brethren talk about poverty in other nations in the world. Certainly India does not have a "corner on the market" when it comes to having needy people. But for anyone to think that any country could be any worse off than India is disingenuous.

The villages of India—especially those so small they are populated only by untouchables—are horrible. No other nation has a caste system that is so segregationist & unfair to those who are victims of poverty by an accident of birth.

Poverty, filth, disease, degradation, depravation, persecution by high caste Hindus—all are endemic for such people. Not all of these outcastes are in this pitiable condition—but the majority of them fit into this niche of Indian society.

We are looking for more helpers in our work. We need men to raise funds for our efforts, as well as men to go to India to help in our efforts. Interested? Give us a call!