

Foreign mission to India from 1976 until 1979

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Two and a half years passed since I first came to India. I went there in 1976 as a foreign missionary of the Unification Church. Our centre and home were located outside the city of Bombay.

Every day it took me one hour by train to go there and one hour to come back. On the way I saw many scenes of hopelessness. In fact, in my whole life, I've never seen such misery. So many people are all clustered together. The first impression, came from the countless beggars, hanging around and they moved me very deeply. These were inhuman living conditions, in whatever direction I looked. There were small children, young and older people all looking for something eatable or simply begging on dusty roads. Now and then the beggars approached me as well, because of the general belief that tourists and foreigners have lots of money. They were expecting a handout from us. If I wouldn't have felt the responsibility for my new mission country, as well as God's heart, I might have left India right away. But I did push these thoughts fast aside.

Today I already got accustomed to many things, like the overcrowded buses, trains and the long human queues, for example. One had to be quite athletic to get on and off the bus. It felt like being in a can of sardines, there were simply too many passengers. Those who really didn't have any money, got to ride for free, the conductor didn't seem to mind. Riding on the roof or even almost hanging outside of the bus or train -- everything seemed to be o.k.

The population of India is 700 million inhabitants. Note: I wrote this report in 1978. In the last 30 years the population has grown and has now more than 400 million inhabitants more than before.

Thus it represents the second largest nation on earth after China. About 80 per cent of the population lives in misery and poverty. Over 75 per cent are illiterates and speak only their native dialect. For a regular Indian, human beings possess the same value as nature and the animal world.

So nobody feels really disturbed, when the cows are walking on roads and sidewalks. The cow is a sacred animal for the Indian and its meat, by law, cannot be consumed. Now and then I observed, how a sacred cow got rice and vegetables to eat, while the cows of hungry beggars stood around, watching the spectacle. The holy cow -- the religious custom from Hinduism, the most widespread religion in the country.

The larger cities of India, however, are strongly influenced by western values. This caused the disappearance of older Indian habits and customs. Western fashion and food are westernizing the Indian subcontinent.

In the countryside, where tens of thousands of illiterates live, Indian traditions are still strongly practiced. Reincarnation, the belief that humans are physically re-born after death, is deeply rooted in the Indian soul. They also strongly believe, that they can be born again in an animal.

But early on Christianity had gained a strong foothold in India. The apostle Thomas brought the gospel after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ into the southern part of India. Then, in the 16th Century, the British came and settled on the Indian subcontinent by opening up tea companies; this led into India becoming a British colony. Mahatma Gandhi was the driving force behind the movement that led to the regaining of India's independence and autonomy in 1947. Today, Indians are impressed by western life-style, they admire Western science, technology and the Western educational system. It is therefore a great challenge for us three missionaries to bring new hope and a new world vision to the people in India.

Our first Unification Church Centre consisted of two provisional rooms on an animal farm.

Mosquito nets were covering the windows to protect us from the aggressive insect. What was bothering us the most, were the mosquitoes and the unbearable heat. Technology in our center was practically non-existent, everything was quite primitive, so we prepared our meals on an old petroleum cooker. These were the ingredients: Sara [Mazumdar], our sister from America, Kazuhiro, the brother from Japan and me from Germany. At the very beginning we agreed to use English as our common language, but even though -- cultural and language misunderstandings were quite common at the beginning of our endeavour. But still, we understood each other without much problems. In the city, we rented a small office, to invite our guests. We conversed about every conceivable topic with them -- about God and the Spirit World, about the purpose of life and the ideal world. We were teaching the Divine Principles, the teachings of the Unification Church and we discussed all of that with our guests. The Indian philosophy stresses very strongly the invisible world and therefore it is not too difficult to talk about God and spiritual things in general. However, putting things into practice is a very different matter altogether and it seemed to be a huge challenge for the Indians. As we know, Christian values always require changes.

We opened up a small school in Calcutta by cleaning up and reconditioning a garage and transforming it into a small classroom. Up to ten children between the ages of seven to twelve were attending. Our Indian students were getting regular lessons by Anita, an Indian member of our Church. Every day she was teaching three to four hours. The children were from our neighbourhood; their parents had a small income and lived under extremely poor circumstances. Sending children to school was not affordable by the families. Therefore, they were left to their sad fate. It was such a joy to see our "Little Indians" sitting in that overhauled garage and studying. For the first time in their lives these kids were dealing with books! A whole new life was opening up for them!

I learned so much from the people of this country. During the first years, I could gain so many experiences. Indians are very warm-hearted people making it easy to relate to them. It turned out that being European and having white skin was an advantage, because many wanted to be friends with me.

Many times I was invited by Indian families whose sons and daughters supported our Church mission. Indian hospitality is impressive! It is a requirement in India. As soon as you enter somebody's home, you are offered a cup of tea.

Another point that moved and impressed me deeply is the relationship between parents and children. It simply seems to be deeper and more intimate, than in the Western world. Even if a son or daughter marries, he or she continues to live with their parent and support them until their death. Terms like "Senior Citizen's Home" or "Homes for Children" aren't being used here. I was impressed, of how responsible members of the family felt for each other.

Furthermore, Indians seemed peaceful and patient to me, in contrast to us Westerners. It seems, that we are a lot more impatient, active and hectic. Us Europeans emphasize much more on the individual, while people in the east pay more attention to the collective.

I could see very clearly, how these two worlds (East and West) need each other and are able to supplement each other.

My hope was to help the poor people in India in various ways. I wished to serve, to convey the heart of God and this new message for the age of today in India.