

Why I Went to India

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So you all know I went to India – My first trip overseas. I do not recommend it as a first trip overseas. I left my house at 3:15 a.m. on Monday morning, drove to the airport for a 6:00 a.m. flight to Chicago, went to a two hour **Orientation Meeting**, then back to the airport at 1:00 p.m. Our flight to Frankfurt was delayed for two hours, but we got on the first **8 ½ hour flights**, another layover, and a second 8 ½ hour flights to **Hyderabad**. By the time we got our **luggage** and to our hotels, it was almost 3 a.m. on Wednesday morning India Time. Because there is an 11 ½ time difference, that was about 3 p.m. Tuesday here, which meant I had been going for about 36 hours by then, and had a **wake up** call coming in 4 hours. I didn't need it, because I couldn't sleep anyway. That was a heavy duty trip for a first time overseas traveler!

To say there was a culture shock is putting it mildly. We stayed in nice hotels, but right outside your hotel, this is what you would find (**cow**). There was **filth** and poverty and overcrowding everywhere.

We had been warned about not **eating** anything unless it was cooked, and not to eat any fruit unless you could peel it yourself, and under no circumstances to drink any water unless it was brought to you in a bottle and you broke the seal yourself. Most of the time we had no idea what we were eating – I ate a lot of rice and noodles – and thankfully I didn't get sick.

And then there is the **transportation**. Words cannot begin to describe it. They drive on the opposite side of the road, and while there are yellow lines, they seem to be only a suggestion. Everyone honks constantly, but our driver tried to explain it this way. “Your country, honk is shout. Here, no shout. Honk means ‘Side, please.’” Whatever. I rode around a lot in the front seat of a Toyota Land Runner, so I got to see it all. I've got a little video I took that doesn't give you the full effect, but it will give you an idea. (**Video**) Inches away from vehicles and pedestrians, the driver talking on his cell phone and rarely slowing down. It is like a constant game of “chicken,” seeing who will back down first. About 2/3 of the vehicles are motorcycles and scooters. I saw them hauling everything from eggs stacked four feet high and held on with a bungee cord to steel beams about ten feet long. However, the thing that impressed me the most was scenes like this (**six on bike**) traveling about 35 mph. They also have a lot of those three wheeled carts like the postmen used to drive in the U.S. A small percentage of the vehicles are autos and minivans.

Another issue was **communication**. English is the language of commerce, and many in the cities speak it, but only as a second language. And many do not speak it, but pretend that they do. To make it even more confusing is how they respond when you talk to them. If you say something, they smile and waggle their head around like this (demonstrate). Can I have bottle of water? (head waggle). Do you understand me? (head bobbing) Where is the rest room? (head waggle) Is my hair on fire? (head waggle)

So why in the world did I go to **India**? Because I was invited. And why did they invite me? Quite simply, they want to educate the Western world. They said the West needs to be exposed to what God is doing in the rest of the world. “They” is Mission India. Their goal is quite simple: They want to **Make disciples and Transform India For Christ**.

Let me share some of what I learned over there.

- 200 years of British rule ended in 1947 – Watch the movie Ghandi!
- DEMOCRACY, albeit a corrupt one.
- English
- Missionary Visas stopped in 1968

According to estimates, India is the second largest nation in the world population wise, with between 1.1 and 1.2 billion people. Here is a **map** of the world you’ve all seen before. It shows you the land. However, if the map were done by **population**, it would look like this. India is so large that one state– Utter Pradesh – would be the sixth largest country in the world by itself. **365 million children** under age of 15 in India – more than the population of US. Another way to think about it is to tell yourself that **one out of every six people** in the world lives in India!

India is a Nation of over **1600 languages!** This map shows the major language groups and where they are spoken. In the cities, many speak English. 38% of those who are literate speak English. But only 2% of population High School Grads (10th grade).

India is a **spiritual nation**. Unfortunately, it is misguided. 827 million Hindu, 138 are Islamic, and about 24 million are Christian. Less than 3% of the population profess a faith in Jesus as Savior. And even though only about 13% of the population is Islamic, India has the 2nd largest Muslim population in world. In fact, before the split with Pakistan, 1/3 of the world’s Muslim population was in India.

As I said before, Mission India wants to change that. Their goal is to **Make disciples and Transform India For Christ**. Their purpose and calling is not to send missionaries, but to make disciples. It won't do a lot of good in this day and age to send guys named Schwietenberg and Speerbrecher (two guys on the trip) to work among the people of India. We have discovered they will respond much better to indigenous, local people. So Mission India is doing that and focusing on three things: **Church Planters, Children's Bible Clubs, and Adult Literacy**.

Church Planters

One of the principles of Mission India is self-sufficiency. While well intentioned missionaries have done some good, in many cases the churches in India have become dependent on Western funding, which cripples them. Mission India is trying to change that through their Church Planter program. Local believers are trained by an area pastor to go out and share their faith, concentrating on a specific location. It is a two year program in which they spend time both in training and in actual witnessing. Each pastor has ten church planters under his care.

We visited a Lutheran Pastor, **Selva Gundalan**, at Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Chennai. He was training his **second class of 10**, 5 of whom were Lutheran. His first class established 5 Lutheran congregations and other independent churches. See that big guy? He and I got along well! (2). We **worshipped** in one of those Lutheran Churches last Sunday. We heard **Scripture read** in the Tamil Language. **One** of our pastor's from Washington state preached the sermon through an interpreter. They went through the communion liturgy in their Tamil language, singing the responses using the melodies from p. 15 in TLH. I knelt down on a concrete floor and received the Sacrament of the body and blood of Jesus with them for a strengthening of my faith and the assurance of forgiveness. And I praised God for what he was doing in that place.

These church planters are paid about \$1500 per year, which gives them all the support they need in that economy. They have a goal of starting two churches within the two years. At the end of that two years, they are on their own. No more outside funding. They will have to make it on their own. And they will in turn train new church planters. And it is working! Congregations in this country are sponsoring teams of 10 church planters for \$15000 per year. And lives are being transformed by the Gospel.

Adult Literacy

Most of illiterate in India live on less than \$1 per day. Mission India has an Adult Literacy program that hopes to improve the lives of people here on earth and give the certainty of eternal life. These classes are held in late afternoon or early evening five days a week. Mostly women attend these classes because the men are still working. They learn to read and write in their local language, as well as to do basic arithmetic. The materials also teach basic hygiene and cleanliness. But a key in all of this is that their primers use Bible stories to teach them reading. Many of those being taught are Hindu, but they are hearing the Good News of God's love for them in Jesus in the classes. They read for themselves about Jesus dying to pay for sin and rising again to open heaven to all believers.

Our first afternoon there we visited an actual Adult literacy class being taught. The **home** was three rooms. The husband is a tailor, his shop being the front room of the house where some of us stood. Behind him is the bedroom, about a 10 x 10 room. The steel bed frame was on its side up against the wall to make room for the class. The **tailor's wife**, who has only a 10th grade education, which is a High School graduate in India, is the teacher. There were over twenty women in that bedroom to soak up the knowledge. The room behind that was the kitchen, where others stood to observe. Many of the women stood up and demonstrated the reading ability they had acquired, some even reading from the Bible in their own language. You could **see the joy** on their faces when they stood up to read for us and we applauded their efforts. They had a sense of accomplishment and self-worth. You see, these are not dumb or stupid people – they are uneducated. Mission India is working to change that, and sharing the News of Jesus as Savior with them in the process. We were told that about one fourth of this class were Christian, the rest being Hindu. Many of them had expressed an interest in learning more about Jesus. We asked them if how their husbands felt about them learning to read and write, and without exception they said their husbands were supportive. In fact, a principle Mission India is encouraging is EOTO - Each One Teach One. The women take home what they have learned and teach their husbands as they are able. Basic literacy at a fifth grade level is achieved after attending classes for 2 hours a night, five days a week for 52 weeks. The cost of bringing literacy to one student is ... care to guess? \$30. For \$900 you can sponsor an entire class of 30 students.

Children's Bible Clubs

We visited several Children's Bible Clubs. These begin as a two week all-day long Vacation Bible School in the Summer. They then invite everyone to join their "After School" clubs which meet for two hours a day, five days a week. They play, they learn songs, they hear Bible stories, they memorize Bible passages, they get some basic instruction. Even though this is called an "After School" club, for many it is the only education they receive. The children range in age from 5 to 15. They may be poor, but there is a joy and happiness in their lives that you don't see very often

The **class that I showed the children** singing "Walk, Walk Walk" – most of them were Hindu, but their parents let them come and even came with them. We have about a dozen of them stand up and **recite Bible verses** from memory in their native languages. They were **reciting entire psalms!** They were reading stories from the Bible. (Note the woman with the shaved head – a Hindu mother there every day listening!) The lesson that day was the feeding of the 5000.

The teachers of all these clubs are Christians. One we talked to was persecuted by Hindu and Muslim neighbors for teaching the children about Jesus. Her neighbors said it was fine if she wanted to spend time playing with the children, but don't mention Jesus. She and her church prayed that God would change minds, and He did. Now the children come, the parents don't object, and the children are growing in faith.

When we showed up, the neighbors came out of their shacks to see the sight, tall white men with strange clothes, speaking English. Many came up and just wanted to shake hands with someone from America. We took lots of pictures with them. **But the kids** themselves really touched my heart. You could see the joy they had in being able to go to these clubs and learn about Jesus. They are, in turn, telling their parents about Jesus and the Spirit is working through the Word to lead people to faith. We heard testimonies of children bring 20 of their friends to the clubs, of children bringing their entire families to Jesus. And I thought, "A little child will lead them."

Here is the incredible thing. The cost of connecting a child to a CBC (as they refer to them) is \$1 per child. \$30 underwrites the cost of a 10 day summer VBS. That includes books, supplies, scripture and follow-up materials. I hope we will come up with some support here at Grace for this ministry. I will be proposing some things to the church council in coming weeks and months.

Over a billion people in India. Less than 3% are Christian. One of the largest unreached populations in the world. It is a huge task, one that can seem insurmountable. Which reminds me of that old question: **How do you eat an elephant?** An elephant is huge – how can you eat and elephant? Do any of you know? **One bite at a time.** That is the attitude displayed and lived out among the people of Seva Bharat/Mission India. One bite at a time.

The first two morning we were there, we attended opening devotions and lectures at the Mission India Headquarters. We heard them singing songs in both Telegu and English. The one that struck me the most was when they sang – with gusto – “Shine, Jesus, Shine.” They were praying, sincerely, as they sang:

Shine Jesus Shine, fill this land (that is 97% pagan) with the Father's Glory
Blaze, Spirit, Blaze, set our hearts on fire
Flow, River, Flow, flood thenations with grace and mercy,
Send forth your Word, Lord, and let there be light.

The power of Mission India is that it is surrounded by prayer and it relies on the Word of God to accomplish its purpose. I hope that we will be able to partner with them in the days ahead.