

The Journey of One Hindu Man that Continued into Another Generation

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In 1990, a young Hindu man from a Brahmin background travelled by bus for many hours from northern Karnataka to the city of Bangalore in South India. There he met a good Indian friend of mine who helped him in his request to look for a job. His own work in the weaving industry was in jeopardy and being made irrelevant due to the presence of a large multinational company moving into the area to compete with the local industries functioning with individuals who of course could not compete with the mass production of the big factories.

In the course of looking at all the options of finding work, my Indian friend, Shekhar, who is also from a Hindu background, began a discussion about Jesus and asked Suryanarayan about his opinion of what he knew about Jesus. They continued this discussion for about three weeks in between talking to different possible employers. As they dialogued about Jesus from what they had read in the gospels, Suryanarayan became more intrigued about this person Jesus.

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Although he had heard about the name of Jesus, He actually knew nothing about the person of Jesus and what He had done. In his place, there were no known believers or Christian presence or churches as it was a strong Hindu community that would not tolerate any Christian presence in their area. But as the conversation

continued, Suryanarayan became more and more intrigued and amazed about this person named Jesus. The discussions continued late into the nights and there came a point where Suryanarayan wanted to yield his life to Jesus and follow Him for the rest of his life.

As it turned out, there were no options for work in Bangalore at that time and so Suryanarayan went back to his home town and continued his work. But now he was so excited about Jesus that he immediately shared with his wife and his two young children. He was able to read the Kannada bible to his wife and slowly she was persuaded by what she was reading in the gospels and most of all by the change in Suryanarayan's attitude towards her. Now he was treating her with respect and taking far more interest in their children. And they began to talk with their relatives who all lived nearby and many discussions ensued. Slowly, several families responded to the Good News. They all continued to go to the local temple— not for worshipping the Hindu gods— but to relate the amazing love of Jesus to their friends. The temple was not just a religious center but the place of importance in the community for all kinds of ceremonies. This included marriages, funerals, the naming of children, New Year celebrations and at least 12 other festivals that were important to the community.

Suryanarayan came back to Bangalore and asked Shekhar to come up to his own town in northern Karnataka and advise him on what to do with all these families who were responding to the Good News. Shekhar went many times over the next several years and listened to the issues that the group was facing. Then Shekhar would pray with them and encourage them to find their own solutions. Often, they would pray through the night when they could not see an obvious solution.

BY **RAVI SHANKER**

Ravi Shankar is from a high caste Hindu background in Northern Karnataka where there are no known believers in his community. He has his own business and repairs cars, motor bikes and trucks with a small team of mechanics working for him. Along with others, he has been instrumental in the spread of the Good News in his community and is now seeing a response with the next generation, in other communities and beyond.

Shekhar would talk with me and we prayed many times that the Holy Spirit would reveal His purposes to these new believers. They were often insisting that we give them a solution as they felt we knew the Scriptures better than they did. Our response was that they knew their circumstances far better than we did and so we had confidence that the Holy Spirit would show them the right pathways for their context.

These new believers were so excited about Jesus that they would spend several nights a week after work visiting relatives and friends and neighbors and explaining the Good News. They also loved to read the Scriptures and treasured the many insights that the Holy Spirit was teaching them. Everybody shared in these discussions which usually consisted of several families in one person's home.

The families spent much time in Deuteronomy 6:1-9 learning how they could disciple their families with a view for three generations.

Some of the relatives were illiterate despite being able to speak several languages. When they would see how others were gaining such amazing insights then they too would be very motivated to learn to read. The government programs usually took one year but we found that these new believers would often be reading within two to three months.

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As many more families were responding to the Good News, they began to work out the best way to help everyone. They worked out from 1 Tim. 3:12 that the father was the natural leader of his oikos and was called a deacon. The father who had a concern for other families as well as his own was known as an elder (1 Tim. 3:1-7). They saw these roles not in terms of positions but as functions to be performed devoid of status or position or money. In fact such a person was truly a servant to others.

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Over the next years the number of families kept growing. They did face pressure from several church planting groups who would stumble across so many believers and try to

baptize them or force them to deny their Hindu roots or tell them that they needed to build a building and have a qualified pastor. Such efforts were constantly resisted.

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Four years ago, Suryanarayan died. By this time his son was married and had two small children and he assumed the leadership of this expanding movement. He has 25 elders that work together as a team. He is as committed as his father and has such maturity at 35 that he surprises everyone. He prays a lot and really serves his people. Even the older friends of Suryanarayan respect Vishnu very much. We are starting to see the second generation taking the good news to the next generation. The group numbers well over 2,000 families and continues to keep expanding today. 

