

Dreaming the Impossible

Can a younger generation of Indians be raised up as laborers for the Great Commission?

—Shibu K. Mathew

Mathew, a 26-year-old executive from a multinational company left behind a sizable paycheck, quit his job “to do something that outlasts this life” and joined a company that supports the cause of mission.

A student group in South India comprised of students from five states recently raised \$4,300 for a two-week mission trip.

India is in transition. Gurcharan Das, in his best seller *India Unbound*, portrays the social and economic transformation that is taking place in contemporary India. He divides the last fifty years into three eras:

1. Our Spring of Hope (1942-65)
2. The Lost Generation (1966-91)
3. The Rebirth of Dreams (1991-99).

He says this generation can dream and fulfill dreams which would have been unachievable for their grandparents. The above examples show some of the determination and flexibility of the youth of India.

The success of Indians in the area of information technology (IT) has spurred optimism among younger Indians—in spite of daunting issues

like poverty, illiteracy, and a



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population exceeding one billion.

Liberalization, globalization and the Internet have added the needed impetus for an entrepreneurial spirit. Earlier generations typically found security with a government job and stuck with it until retirement. Today’s generation is swapping jobs and constantly looking for an opportunity to climb up the ladder. They have a “just do it” mentality.

According to the 1991 census, 55.4 percent of India’s population is between the ages of 15 and 59 and 26.6 percent is between the ages of 15 and 29. Economists predict that India will lead the new millennium because of its large pool of workers available for IT and related fields. India’s growing practice of “exporting” its human resources to different parts of the world is expanding the international impact of Indians. Cashing in on this opportunity, many multinational companies have started branches or main operations in India. The new-generation “yuppies” are earning in a month what their grandparents earned in their lifetime. Consumer companies are making specialized products to suit this young and rich market.

Though these changes affect a small percentage of the population, attitudes and preferences are changing fast in all areas of life, especially



among the younger generation. The older generation is also adjusting to the changing situation by learning to send e-mails to their children far away.

Are Indian missions and churches taking advantage of the opportunities offered by this new environment? Is the younger generation excited about finishing the task of reaching the unreached people groups of India?

“The missions and churches have been slothful in getting more young people, but God is raising up more youth to be involved in missions,” answers Kumar Swamy, the South India director of Operation Mobilization. He continues, “After the death of Graham Staines (the Australian missionary martyred with his two sons) we had a recruiting camp. We had many apprehensions, but to our surprise more than 60 youngsters came for the camp.” He also cited that the number of recruits from Orissa, Goa and Maharashtra is increasing—apart from South Indians. “We get an average of 25 young people at all the Discipleship Training Schools (DTS) in different parts of India,” remarks Jiggu, YWAM leader in Bangalore. Some 30 percent of DTS participants continue on with YWAM; the rest are challenged to be involved

in missions at different levels. Half of the participants in OM's recruiting camp stay with OM for church-planting efforts. The rest are sent back with a missionary vision, with some pursuing theological studies.

Although these numbers are encouraging, they are meager compared to tasks that face the church in India.

What is hindering India's young people from being involved in missions?

Lack of understanding about God and mission. Jacob Isaac, director of Kerygma Ministries which focuses on urban youth, said that if the youth are challenged, they will respond. But their missions awareness is minimal. Saju George, director New Life Computer Institute (NLCI), agrees that more missions education is needed at all levels.

Parental pressure. Indian parents will typically spend all their earnings on their children's education in hopes of getting support from them in their older days. They will oppose a mission career, which is always at minimal pay and without much social status, except in a few parts of the country.

Materialism. As discretionary income is increasing, consumerism is also increasing multi-fold. An affluent lifestyle is preventing many from committing to missions.

Wrong concept of mission involvement. Most students equate mission involvement only with full-time commitment and are not aware of other roles in mission. While many are willing to go as a missionary, behind-the-scenes roles are often ignored, as they are considered insignificant. Churches are willing to support a field missionary but not an office administrator in a mission office. Because of this attitude, most Indian mission organizations lack good administrators, accountants, computer operators, editors, etc. Many who do not fit a field missionary role opt to pray or support missions rather than to get directly involved.

Lack of follow-up. Sufficient support has to be given to interested students to continue in their mission commitment, otherwise they lose interest, suggests Dr. Shaji Thomas, who recently led a short-term mission trip.

How can we motivate the younger generation?

The awareness for mission has to be increased. OM's Kumar says that more mission meetings must be

life to medical missions, and she is mobilizing others to do the same. During his student days a man Vijay participated in a National Missionary Training camp organized by the Union of Evangelical Students of India (UESI). The field exposure opened his eyes, and now he is a Bible translator in North India.

Through its Student Volunteer Program, the India Missions Association is giving opportunities to young



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organized to focus on students and lay people. The plan of God and His mission should be taught in the churches and youth groups. Missions must be emphasized as part of discipleship. The responsibility of reaching India should be laid upon Indians. Forming mission interest groups at local levels for young people can create mission awareness. Preaching and teaching the Great Commission should be reintroduced in the pulpits. Praying for missions should be practiced as a church, in groups and within families.

Cross-cultural trips. Mission exposure trips are the best mobilization tool, according to Dr. Thomas. One team member who is a medical student has decided to dedicate her

people to be in the mission field for a month. Last year, around 20 students visited various fields through this program. Jose Thomas, coordinator of SVP and missions secretary of UESI, says that he wants to "send a hundred students every year through this program." Except the month-long SVP, no other missions are offering regular short-term exposure programs that are open to all lay people.

Mobilizing theological students. There are more than 300 Bible training institutes in India, but the majority of them focus on pastoral ministry instead of missionary training. A study of non-Catholic clergy by prominent sociologists T. K. Oommen and Hunter P. Mabry found that there is an unhealthy

“craze” among theological students for higher studies. After finishing their studies they either opt for urban parishes or continue the pursuit of education—thus the rural parishes are depleted of pastors. Their study also reveals that, while 70 percent of Christians in India live in rural areas, over 50 percent of the pastors live in cities. These prospective pastors must be mobilized, so they can, in turn, mobilize the churches.

Mobilize the churches. “Mobilize the clergy. It is easy for them to challenge youth groups and the churches. Then the pastors will let go their young people and other resources,” advises OM’s Kumar.

Catch them young. Saju George proposes that students should be mobilized before graduation, so it will be easier for them to make career decisions. Sunday School and Vacation Bible School materials should have a mission emphasis to challenge children.

Using creative means of mobilization. A survey among young people says that TV influences their decisions and attitudes. New Life Computer Institute uses media effectively to mobilize for Bible translation. Saju George says that visual media make the challenge more effective than an ordinary message would. Kerygma’s Jacob Isaac also indicated there is need for more Indian mission videos. Missions should be communicated through drama, skits and songs.

More resources. There are many mission magazines but most are used as promotional materials. In a survey done by one mission magazine, 90

Frankly Speaking

Overcoming complacency for the lost of India

I feel jittery to think of the things to be done to influence this nation for Christ. I am slightly angered by the snail’s pace at which the churches and organizations go about addressing the needs of this nation, constantly arguing over non-matters such as church vs. parachurch and other rubbish, which will never be solved nor win one person to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. I really believe that these are of the devil to slow Christians down to uselessness while millions head for eternal damnation.

I guess that there are two ways to go. One is to take the side of the opponents of William Carey and say, “The Lord does not need your help or mine to reach the world. He will get people to do things in His own time!” Talk about callousness! This would let me relax and keep going at my own speed, without a care for seeing the nations and people around me come to Christ.

My complacency causes me to question whether or not I really believe that hell is real. If so, how much do I really believe that people go to hell

without the Lord Jesus Christ? How much do I really believe that Christ is the answer for each individual’s sin, that Christ is the only One who will change the ethos and corruption of men and, ultimately, change the nation?

If India is to ever change, we must be committed to the ethos of Jesus and convinced of the reality of salvation through Christ. I just wonder if the church and all of us are ready for it. Or, will our complacency cause us to perpetuate the same practices and excuses which have made very little difference to this nation? Think and pray, man.

The response is for me to proactively think, drive and do what needs to be done to influence the nation and see people to come to Christ.

Let’s do something significant in the days to come—corporately motivating people to make a difference for Christ in this nation—which will spill over to many other parts of the world!

Your Brother,
K. Rajendran
President, India Missions
Association

percent of their readers were above the age of 40. So most of the information reaches only the older generation. The need for youth-oriented mission magazines is crucial. Information about various ministry opportunities should be provided on a regular basis.

Promote creative ideas of mission involvement. As entrepreneurship increases in India, Christians should be trained in tentmaking efforts and deployed in unreached areas of India and abroad. Jacob Isaac suggests, “Youth will more interested in specialized ministries than generic ones.”

moved to North India. Using their hobbies, some housewives who took the class are raising money to support missions. Through its missionary conferences, retreats and other programs, UESI mobilizes more than 100 students every year.

But these efforts are like a drop in the ocean of India’s needs. Unless churches and missions coordinate efforts to mobilize lay people now, India will continue to be a missions challenge for the coming generation. May the Lord raise more dreamers who “expect great things from God, and attempt great things for God.”

What can you do to mobilize India?

- Pray that God will raise up more workers and mobilizers.
- If you are called to minister in India, use the opportunity to mobilize.
- Create Indian mission resources, including videos, for mobilizing youth, children and adults.
- Challenge Indians abroad to support missionaries working among India’s many unreached people groups.

Mobilization is bringing about more involvement. For the last six years, New Life Computer Institute has been mobilizing young people for Bible translation. As a result, more than 50 have decided on Bible translation ministry.

Another tool for creating awareness is the South Asian version of *Perspectives*. This book is now being used by various training institutions. In Chennai, after a *Perspectives* class, two participants joined the ministry and one pastor