

# Indian Mission Care: Dark Obstacles and Divine Opportunities

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*Overview: This article describes the challenges of sending cross-cultural workers within India. It deals with both issues for executive leadership and for the individual worker on the ground. As executive leader in the India Mission organisation (now with over 200 member agencies), the author aptly details his own personal struggles and pastoral concerns for the welfare of workers. These are the types of concerns that keep him awake at night, anxious, and calling out to God for help. He advises leaders responsible for sending workers to plan strategically for the long-term welfare of these workers. Executive leadership should not just hide behind “have faith in God” but work out practical avenues of caring for these workers. Areas of concern mentioned in the article include: discouragement and loneliness from insufficient financial support, organisational difficulties, finances, medical, additional educational and spiritual input, retirement planning, children’s education, and persecution. Those of us working within and from China are certainly not alone!*

It is 12.45, after mid-night. I toss in bed pleading sleep to take me over. I was very tired with all that happened today. When I finished my evening meal, I went to bed at 8.30 pm. I woke up with dust in the air and listened to the new Indian city phenomena of FM radio. The old melodious Hindi songs were good. After a while I got bored and continued to fight my sleeplessness, but failed. Insomnia! Or is it fears to which I have become numb?

It is now 1:15 am. I toss in bed pleading sleep to take me over. The opportunities for communicating Christ in India are fantastic. There are 132 member missions with the India Missions Association. Persecution of Christians is daunting in the country and fanatics are acting like Nazis, even though India, as a country, is moving forward. As Christians we are trying to be positive with a belief in the Sovereignty of God. There is a rat race, as so many groups are trying to be the definitive voice of Christians. There are tendencies to attract the “global Christian market” by the “distinctiveness” of our organizations. If possible, we add spice--*masala*--to increase the flavor of our organizational descriptions. Or to use another metaphor, we are willing to play different types of chords to attract outside interest:

- regional chords such as South, North, and North East Indians
- the chords of the despicable caste tantrum
- the chord of Church vs. para-churches
- “North India is needier than the South” slogan
- “sending missionaries” vs. “using native workers” chords
- “missionaries feeling that there are no good local people to train and carry on the work” vs. “the locals feeling that there are no good missionaries and they are exploiting us”
- the chord of the “we” *Dalits*--the lower caste people in the Hindu ladder of castes--are neglected while the upper caste Christians “rule” us
- the chord of some saying that the *Dalits* are lazy and incompetent
- the chord of male chauvinism and a forced submission of women while 50% of our nation are unreached women who will never be reached by men.

We can add many more chords and to our organizational music. Such practices though will continue to keep us disunited, and will carry us through the next millennium without making a dent in sharing the love of the Lord Jesus Christ in India.

We are asking many questions such as “where are we going as the Church, as missions, as missionaries and as human beings who want to follow Christ?” There are still so many unanswered questions like “who will share Christ to the growing urbanites, the emerging educated class, 30% of whom are women; and also to the rural people who comprise 60% of our overall population of one billion people.

We are also asking many other questions. Who is teaching the gospel-sharers? Who is teaching the emerging new Christians, some of who dare to go to churches in areas where there is potential persecution? Who is training people to share Christ with different sectors of the Indian masses? There are several Bible colleges, seminaries, missiological and cross-cultural “pedagogues”--what are they up to? Do they have the whole picture of India? What is their philosophy of training and for what do they train people? What are the end results envisioned? Is the training for maintaining the existing churches and win a few more tokenisms? Where are trainers for the grassroots workers? Where are the workers to the income-tax payees and the *yuppie* Indians who are moving to other parts of the world and perpetuate stronger “Indian culture”?

We are asking about the vision of Indian Christians for India? Often Indian Christian churches and missions are puny-minded and have very little challenge to harness politics, art, culture, and the imagination of Indians. No wonder we are minorities forever. Christians are not main streamers but peripheral on-lookers and highly trained to be critical of secular and also the sacred. Our pet theologies (not Pauline theology of Christ) have made us to be critical of everything.

These questions meander through my mind, and nearly overwhelm me, up until 2:20 am. Although all these are “high, legitimate and honorable” thoughts, I start to become worried about different “earthly, no good” thoughts. Where should my children go to school? My daughter faxed her application forms today paying Rs.1260, trying to find admission in a college for her post graduation. What do I do with my son in eleventh grade who is growing bigger than me! I am 49. Where will I end up if I get a stroke or cancer or heart attack? By God’s providence, so far so good.

With all these overwhelming good as well as useless thoughts, I look at India Missions Association and all the limited skills we have as individuals and as a team. I almost panic. It is now 2:30 am.

Here are some commitments to make us at IMA uneasy. We have *Indian Missions*, a quarterly magazine that is always rushed and I am always unhappy with the mistakes we continuously make. We try to produce some “interesting” IMA brochures, which is often unsatisfactory. We are trying to make a video of IMA’s work, which so far has resulted in a major fiasco of scripts. Our research needs help. We are trying to upload information about member missions and IMA into our developing website, and we are pretty slow. I am not sure how much my team is coping with the demand and understands the urgency. Should we continue to fire people or should we develop them? Do we have the time to fool around and dilly-dally in all that we are supposed to do? Even if there will be the balance, where are the competent, dedicated men and women of God who will work for such a small amount--6000 rupees per month--while they can fetch 16, 000 rupees in the market? With their 6000 rupees income, after paying a monthly house rent of 3000, what else do they do with their salaries? Eat, pay insurances, spend on education for children, transportation, and have some entertainment like buying some good books to read or some music tapes to relax (why should they relax, they are supposed to be “dedicated” men and women of God!). How do they manage? Well, their wives can work and the young children can look after themselves! What if the wife is not trained too much and/or can not get a job? Ah! Should I go to sleep now? It is 2.45 am.

We have felt that many missions in India, which do not have a voice apart from their immediate region, must be helped in their needs, in the event of any emergency such as persecution, famine, and flood. So we organized a Project Manager who continuously receives projects proposals and liaisons with prospective funders.

We have organized many networks that are supposed to be serving the missions and inter-connecting each other. There are prayer initiative networks, pastoral care networks for missionaries and the CEOs, the Bible translation network, the leadership-training network, the student mobilization network, the missiology network, the research network, the missionary welfare network, and others.

But we lack the time, leaders, and the funds to get them moving. We are constantly saying that the Church should be mobilized. But very few realize that the task is so big and the church in India is very small. It is easier for a parochial group to scrounge for money from their constituencies but this is not enough to really scratch the surface of the mammoth missions task. I roll over yet again in my bed and wonder how we could be better impacting India as a whole.

IMA has vision to expand to Delhi, North East and other places because we want to be the uniting factor of missions in the country. All of this is very legitimate. There have also been underlying fears that if we do not do it, there will be several regional missions associations claiming their legitimacy, and uniqueness--that they are more spiritual, more focused for the global and local marketers. They are fine but we will continue to fractionalize.

Now I consider the financial strength of IMA. This not only makes me sleepless but also makes my stomach acidic. The member missions give contributions of about 0.2% of their income. Most missions give the minimum--that is, three thousand rupees. Most of these contributions, when combined, cover the existence of IMA for two to three months. The IMA staff also have to visit member missions, sort out many difficulties, represent them to many bodies in and out of the country, run leadership training programs for the missions, keep in touch with the CEOs and at least with the emerging second generation of leaders in missions, guide the missions in the country, and be the consultants of missionary welfare for the missions. How do we do it?

The executive members of India Missions Association have been very sympathetic but what do we do? Shall I go to sleep now? It is 3.00 am.

### ***Maintaining Perspective***

The reason that I share this account with you is *not* that I am so frustrated that I want to quit. It is to ask you to pray, better understand the task ahead, stand with us in the ministry, and also, for my colleagues, to learn to work together better. I write in case you are having similar trials as I am, to assure you that you are not alone. Many CEOs and other leaders have many similar sleepless nights. Yet there is sense in that God is in control in the midst of chaos. God is also at work in me and in you. Let Jesus be praised for the movement of His Spirit among us. Yes there are many dark obstacles in India, but His light is far brighter, turning the Enemy's ploys into Divine opportunities for His people. Let us not lose this crucial perspective!

### **Obstacles for Indian Missions**

Missionaries face many obstacles such as demonic forces and opposition from those who chose not to believe in Christ. There are also struggles within missionaries themselves. Some of them go to the mission fields carrying many unwanted habits and significant unresolved issues from the past. Some struggle with a deep sense of insecurity or incompetence, the backlash of their family background, pressures from both their immediate family and their parents, peer pressure from non-missionary friends, and the temptation to compromise to find an "easier" road in life. Thus, missionaries have a tremendous task of disciplining themselves to become a special agent of the gospel. In the words of Marjorie Collins (1986):

For some [missionaries] it is easy to adjust... Others feel the whole adjustment is interesting... But one thing that does not radically change is you. And because you have to live with you the rest of your life, it is well to consider some of the little things (and big things, too) in your personal life which can be or ought to be adapted, adjusted, deleted or enhanced. And it is never too early to begin! (p.25)

One mission leader shared with me some of his struggles as a missionary and as a mission leader. It sounds so familiar! He has to find a balance between: ministry and family, work and health care, personal relaxation and giving time to others in the mission, direct soul winning and leading a soul-

winning agency, choosing priorities and non-priorities, being big-hearted and knowing that he was being taken advantage of, taking time off to evaluate himself and constantly working in ministry, having time with God and fulfilling work demands, and having the home and office together in the same house. Apart from all this he said there were financial struggles, especially after marriage, and the need for hospitality because of pressure from constant visitors.

### **Discouragement and Loneliness**

The roots of discouragement are many. Poulose from Kerala was a missionary in Bihar. Being the only son in his house, he felt responsible to arrange the marriages of his two sisters. Heavy dowry burdens weighed him down with worries. In this situation, he found it hard to concentrate. Devan, a weaving technologist and now a missionary, was the first Christian in his family, struggled to send Rs. 300 as a monthly remuneration to help his family. As an Indian, he is normally expected to provide for his parents' needs. He was constrained with a big responsibility and was reluctant to spend anything on himself beyond his own food expenses.

Some workers are discouraged when they have had to live in primitive places without modern equipment or facilities in the midst of the computer and email age. The pressure to keep pace with new scientific developments and the new communication techniques challenge a missionary working in cities and towns and related to middle and upper class people.

Marjorie Collins (1996, p. 216) describes loneliness as “a fog which arrives out of nowhere to envelope the soul and cause it to feel lost or wayward...If loneliness lasts for a long period of time, it erodes the ability to work well, and produces a number of problems, both in relation to personal matters as well as in the area of ministry. Loneliness often turns to self-pity. Missionaries often carry burdens, many heartaches, and discouragement. Because of a fear of being misunderstood, very few missionaries speak of their difficulties.”

### **Organizational Issues**

There are also pressures within agencies in the form of difficult relationships with co-workers, poor leadership, clan-ruled authority structures, unorganized plans, and inadequate training for accomplishing the task. In the organizational structure, too much accountability is expected of some missionaries while others were not required to be as accountable due to favoritism. These factors can kill missionary zeal over a period of time.

Even forty-year-old missionaries can feel frustrated when senior missionaries do not trust them because of their younger age. Young missionaries are forced to hear stories of how their elders have suffered and so they should also expect to suffer and sacrifice even though the times have changed. Yet sacrifice is an attitude of heart. Sacrifice can not be forced upon people by legalisms. Thus, there has to be sensitivity in adapting to the new ways both in technology and also in adapting to a new generation of people in the mission to enhance the work of missions.

When one missionary was married, the mission insisted that the new wife quit her job, so as to help her husband in the ministry. The wife did not feel that she should give up a profession for which she was trained. She felt that she could serve the Lord by remaining in her profession. Eventually, the mission asked both the husband and the wife to resign. Such tension has been seen in many agencies.

### **Finances Issues**

A prominent, well-educated, Christian leader in his mid-fifties, who could have made it well in the secular world, could not make his ends meet as a missionary. His children were very disappointed and felt that their parents were useless, as they could not provide many of their basic needs. The missionary parents, though prominent leaders, felt quite heart broken. The whole family asked the same question, "was this the right thing to have done with their lives?"

Another missionary, working with an unreached people group in the North, said that his mission, ten years back, paid him a monthly salary of four hundred rupees. After ten years he received around one thousand rupees a month. Financially he and his wife could not survive. Therefore, he resigned and left the mission. He wondered, "How has it come that we use the noble name 'evangelist' for the lowest category of church worker--workers who are half-trained, half-paid and half-starved? And how does it come that respectable Christians feel uncomfortable with the very idea of evangelism?"

One particular mission has about eighty-seven workers although it does not have a regular pay structure for them. Each missionary was paid 200-300 rupees per month. The missionaries struggled to survive. For example, living in an one-bedroom house in the North cost a missionary, his wife, and two school-aged children Rs.4000 a month in 1991. Today it would cost between Rs.4000 to 6000 in large cities, and between Rs. 6,000 to 10,000 in cosmopolitan cities and commercial townships (Daniel, 1997). Because of such financial pressure many decline from the missionary service and many chose not to join mission work at all.

### **Medical Issues**

M.C. Matthew (1995), a noted medical doctor in Vellore Christian Hospital, conducted an informal survey of two sending organizations. Many of the workers suffered from frequent illnesses. "There are some who experience exhaustion because of the nature of work. The average age of missionaries [interviewed] may be crossing 35 [sic] years, with at least 25% [sic] of the missionaries in their mid-forties. This makes them vulnerable to illness of middle age like hypertension, diabetics, backaches, arthritis, acid-peptic disease, psychosomatic dysfunction, etc [sic]."

An important concern in Indian missions is the payment of major medical bills. Even many minor medical bills can mount up. Many missions have many different methods to pay off the medical bills of their missionaries. Most struggle with the systems. There was no one system, which was satisfactory.

Most missionaries have no medical insurance and when they fall ill, they struggle to pay the bills. The mission agencies, perhaps are willing to pay the big bills, but have no money to do so. The missionary feels a burden to the mission when he falls ill. His own self-worth and security have deteriorated. This situation has to change. Missionaries should not feel that they are a burden to the agency, or this will affect their families and eventually the children will never want to come back into the mission field. Not only the children, but also others who consider missions will hesitate when they know a missionary is not taken care of adequately.

In the new Indian missionary scene, the cost paid is too high for the missionary. The cost includes deficient medical care, insufficient salary, and inadequate schooling facilities for children, meager retirement benefits, complete lack of housing for future and no provision for decent insurances. Several missionaries that I have interviewed agreed that missionaries and Christian workers were the ones who did have much savings, nor any health insurance, neither retirement benefits nor death relief schemes. The consensus was that this state of affairs resulted from the false theology called "faith", until some disaster such as a heart attack struck them. One missionary's wife became mad and the mission could not treat her because of the lack of funds. Eventually the missionary also died while his wife was left homeless.

### **Ongoing Educational and Spiritual Input**

Missionaries need ongoing training and opportunities for personal growth and spiritual refreshment. The larger missions have been dealing with this situation because of their size and recurring requests from their missionaries. They have also realized the value of investing into the lives of missionaries as a part of enhancing their effectiveness and also as a preparation for future leadership. The leaders wisely envision expansion and the passing of the mantle to the future generations. Thus, the aspect of studies at a midpoint of a missionary's life has consciously been planned.

The smaller missions struggle to provide such ongoing input. In general, this is because they have not experienced much numerical growth and have very limited funds. The missionaries felt inadequate, worn out and had wanted to catch their breath. While the missions leaders have struggled and made positive and negative decisions, the missionaries have been caught in the middle and some have become victims of the delayed decisions or the wrong decisions. The result is the missionary suffers from a lack of motivation and a sense of inadequacy.

Missions will have to cope with more and more people wanting to go for studies in the middle of their careers to enhance their efficiency and improve their focus, so as to not to get into a perpetual rut. If such a provision is not catered for, then the missionary simply quits the mission and goes to another mission which is able to help; or he/she just gives up missionary work altogether. However, two or three years of mid-term training for the missionary is well worth considering in the light of the future fifteen or twenty years of his service.

### **Pension and Retirement Benefits**

The issue of the future is not easy for any missionary of any nation unless it is planned well. The mission leaders as part of pastoral care for the missionaries should plan pension/retirement issues with their personnel and not avoid facing such weighty issues. There may not be easy answers but they have to be found.

Slowly, the mission agencies are becoming aware of the needs of the missionaries who will retire. Most missionaries do not feel comfortable living “in the shadows” of their children, as is the case for many Indians in the country. Very few of the present missionaries have any income from ancestral properties. Thus, there have been anxieties on both their part and the mission. Credible mission agencies have been progressively aware of the pension needs of retiring missionaries. Pensions would assure a regular income for the retired missionaries. The missionaries who will retire in the coming few years have not prepared for their retirement and pension. The younger missionaries have been encouraged to pay in money for a pension. The Executive Committee of IMA requested that all the IMA staff be put under a pension scheme as soon as possible to provide a regular income in the future. In the same way many missions are planning to get into pension schemes.

The best years of a missionary are spent in winning people to Christ, but when he/she retires, he/she has no where to go. There is not any pension plan, or a house to live in, or a plot of land where he could build a house. Patrick Joshua commented to me, “When a missionary retires, he has to live the rest of his life with dignity.” Home is a place of rest and care, of belonging and security. A home for the missionary is a blessing and it is not unspiritual to have a house.

Rev. Diraviam of the CSI diocese mentioned that this was a problem among the clergy also. Most retired bishops and pastors lived with their children in cities like Chennai. There were some thought about housing for the clergy back in 1984. In 1991 a decision was made to buy a plot of land at Chengelpet, 60 kilometers away from Chennai for the clergy, but the program fell through. Coimbatore Diocese had a scheme. In the diocese compound itself the retired pastor could rent a house for a small amount until he passed away. However, Diraviam recognized the need for one's own house where the pastor's wife and children could continue to live. This could be worked out if, from the time the pastor entered ministry, a sum of Rs 1000 a month allocated for his housing could be set aside to get him a good house when he retired in thirty years time. The allocated Rs. 1000 a month could be given for the house built with a housing loan. A similar plan could be worked out for missionaries also.

### **Children's Education**

Many missions, especially the smaller ones, have made very little allowance for the education of the children. The problem increases more when the missionary's children enter college for higher education. It is difficult to get the large sum of money needed for higher education. Some children, in the worst case scenarios, have reacted very negatively to this situation, resenting the "sacrifice" which parents/others have demanded of them.

Most parents who live in the city manage to keep their children with them, even though they might not get the full support for the city education of their children. But some parents have to send their children far away to a hostel. They have no choice as there are insufficient funds for children to go to a closer and more expensive hostel or school. If only they had more funds they would have preferred to have their children near their working place in a hostel where they could see them more often and where they felt comfortable with their children's education. The mission leaders must plan in such a way that the missionaries are not coerced into sending their children only to the schools which the agencies recommend 1000 kilometers away!

We must not lose the opportunity to invest in our children. They deserve good care and a good education if they are to grow and positively impact their society. Further, if the missionary's children are neglected, neither they nor others who may consider mission work, will likely come into the missions.

### **Persecution**

There has been some persecution in India for Christians in the past few years. Houses have been burned, people have been forced to move, and there have been some deaths. However, it is not as much as in Indonesia and other parts of the world. Persecution is largely from some religious fanatics who are opposed to the idea of the equality of human beings and who believe in the superiority of their religion. The minority religions in India are still largely considered “foreign”. Christianity is especially seen as being “Western” and an attempt to “colonize” the religion and culture. These fanatics, like many others, erroneously believe that the “Hollywood culture”, as portrayed in the media, is in fact the “Christian culture”. This personification of Christianity is perceived as a threat to the integrity and unity of India as a Hindu nation.

Another factor affecting the persecution scenario is that mission efforts have mostly impacted tribal groups rather than the “thinkers and influencers” of the country. Thus when the fanatics verbally or physically assault Christians, the secular thinkers do not support Christians. In fact, often the Indian political parties make use of the accounts of persecution for their own vantage rather than actually sympathizing with Christians.

Persecution does psychologically affect missionaries, with ongoing fear being a major result. The IMA tries to help in any way possible when there is persecution. This includes practical support and care. The IMA also tries to encourage mission personnel to communicate the gospel to the whole of India (and not just to certain groups) and in culturally appropriate ways. We hope that this will produce more sympathizers (not to mention disciples of Christ of course!) who will at least view Christ and His teachings positively. Nonetheless, when the uniqueness of Jesus is being proclaimed as the only way to salvation, many will get offended and persecution can ensue, a historical fact for both India and many parts of the world.

### **Opportunities for Member Care and the Gospel**

Christians need to systematically care for their missionaries who carry the good news of Christ to all. They need training to give them good tools. They need care to relate to their own co-workers. They need to provide adequately for their needs for the family, including their children's education. Preparation for crises and possible persecution is necessary. And missionaries need a good salary compatible to the normal secular ones, accompanied by planning for their housing and pension after their retirement. A large percent of the success of the mission depends on the care we give to missionaries. A good strategy for the work is not the only reason for the mission's success. Care of the missionary and strategy go hand in hand.

In the India Missions Association, we realized that India will never hear about and respond to Christ unless there is healthy care of missionaries and Christian workers. Therefore, the need of member care for missionaries and Christian workers has become critical to take the gospel forward. The leaders of the IMA have organized member care-related seminars and consultations and written on several pastoral care topics concerning Christian workers, the CEOs and leaders; missionary families and

children; and the medical/financial welfare of missionaries. There have been networks established on member care, counseling, welfare, children's education and others. We are thus doing our best to raise the profile and awareness of member care.

The IMA in particular has held several meetings for people involved in different aspects of pastoral care, from rest/renewal home directors to psychiatrists involved in missions. The idea is to help member care workers link together and develop complimentary roles in caring for missionaries. We hope that missionary care departments within organizations will be created/strengthened, that regional care centers will be formed, additional rest/renewal houses will be set up, and that there will be a greater understanding of the ongoing needs of missionaries.

A network of member care centers/hubs are also key. Since India is so vast and diverse, with the mission agencies and missionaries being geographically so spread out, we will need many centers which will cater for missionaries from/within their regions. This is not to abdicate the role of each mission in caring for its own people, but rather is a compliment to what they are doing/developing. Many times agencies need outside specialist support, for example when there are cases of extreme difficulties such as severe mental disorder, physical disorders affecting health and mind, and special educational and behavioral issues for children. Specialists associated with such centers could help.

The IMA, in conjunction with other groups, is working to help develop an ethos of member care within missions today. We want to support mission leaders and sending groups as they care for their people. Our approach is becoming more proactive, and there are many opportunities which we believe the Lord is giving us. We fully expect to see missionaries become more effective as we work together to nurture them and their families for the long-haul. And we fully expect a splendid harvest of people for the Lord as a result of their commitment and care.

### **Reflection and Discussion**

1. The author lists many struggles for Indian mission personnel. Which ones relate to your context?
2. In what ways can these obstacles be turned into opportunities for God's Kingdom. Give examples.
3. In what ways can these obstacles actually obliterate Christian missions? Give a few examples.
4. Where can leaders go to find help for some of their struggles, such as the types of personal issues that the author recounts in the beginning of the article?
5. How does your organization provide for the member care needs of its personnel? Also describe how member care is part of the organization's thinking/ethos.

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