
SENDINGSARBEID ONDER NATALSE INDIËRS. *

“What is it like to labour among the Indians,” I am often asked by my friends in the Transvaal. “Is it easy?” “Do they accept the gospel gladly?” “In which language do you preach to them?”

The following article is a humble attempt to answer a few of the most common questions put to a Christian minister engaged in missionary work among S.A. Indians.

Owing to racial and political classification as well as on account of casual observations “the Indians” appear to the man in the street in the Transvaal as a homogenous group, viz., the people he meets when he takes a stroll down to the “Coolietown” of Fordsburg, Pretoria or Rustenburg. The males all seem to wear strange pot-shaped hats, the women

folk sport vestments known as pantulets to our greatgrandparents. Every Friday they leave their dingy shops called "Bombay Bazaar" or "Calcutta Emporiums", and surrounded by a numerous noisy progeny wend their way to the nearest mosque. These are not the Indians I should like to talk to you about, besides they form only a portion of the variegated Indian population of the Union; the bulk of the Indians is quite different, racially, linguistically as well as regards character, religion and customs, also they are not traders.

I am working among Tamils, Telugus, Hindi, and Goorkha. Most of them are descendants of labourers brought over from various parts of India about 80 years ago to work on the sugar plantations along the South and North Coasts of Natal because at that time the Zulus were not suitable for this kind of work.

If you know India you will notice that they all belong to racial groups which are originally devotees of the Hindos religion. Our converts are in the majority from Hindooism, there the gospel finds a fruitful field. The type you meet with in the Transvaal, being Muslim, has yielded very few and occasional converts as everywhere else in the world where Christ is preached to Islamitic peoples.

Of the previously mentioned groups, the initiated is soon able to spot the rather dark skinned Tamils, who form the bulk of every Christian congregation, as they accept the gospel most easily of all Indians. They are willing and faithful workers and diligent seekers after truth.

Quite different from them are the Aryan Hindi, who speak a language basically akin to ours. Many a high caste Brahmin is a prominent leader in Christian congregations. They have so far supplied all ministers and ministerial candidates in the Methodist Mission, probably because they are born leaders of men with a dignified, lofty bearing and quiet, courteous manners. Some of them are not very much different in looks and skin colour from Southern Italians or Portuguese.

The Telugu again differ racially and linguistically from the other too are also light skinned. But one of the most interesting groups are the Goorkhas, well known to students of military history as fierce fighters. We have a whole settlement of these people on the North Coast near Umhlali and Chaka's kraal, whither their forbears migrated from the slopes of the Himalaya Hills Kingdom of Nepal. The uninitiated is apt to mistake them for Chinese as they show distinct benjoloid features being racially akin to the people of Thibet and Sikkim.

Do you now understand why there is no one Indian language, but many. It might be interesting to know that all speak English, almost all preaching and teaching is done in that language as it is the only one understood by all.

Now I shall try to explain to you what Christ means to Hindoos and why they accept Him. Superficially informed Europeans especially those who have theosophic leanings are often heard to say that one religion is as good as another, they all lead to the same goal, only the road is different, we should therefore not attempt to foist our views on totally differently minded peoples, etc., etc. Have a look at Hindooism. Although this religion as represented in the famous Bhagarad-gita (The Lord's Song) and the Upanisads teaches many lofty and high things, concrete Hindooism is to-day practically speaking a mass of syncretism, superstition and magic. It defies instinct, especially that of sex, giving divine authority to human passion, yea even using human procreative organs as divine symbols. Whether dogmatic or practical it has to offer to the sinner but a weary round of reincarnation caused by behaviour in previous existences, with which the impersonal divine powers themselves cannot interfere. Their gods are quite immoral displaying all human passions and living in ridiculous legends. How can the pot-bellied Elephant-headed god Ganesh or the monkey god Hanuman bear the burden of sin or save a broken spirit!

The ex-Hindoos themselves know why they have chosen Christ, it is to them that we must listen. It is a heart-refreshing spectacle to watch them bearing witness to the release and joy Christ brought into their hearts. The reports of the Acts of the impact of the gospel on pagan souls is here repeated again and again. The concomitants are absent neither! In most cases allegiance to Christ means that friends and relatives turn enemies, the convert is forsaken by his parents and his family, he literally becomes an outcast. This is a tremendous loss to an Indian to whom the family and the clan are primary conditions of existence. Sometimes it also involves economic difficulties and business losses. Let me give you a recent example! A young Hindoo Sanscrit scholar who used to exercise priestly functions at engagements, weddings, funerals, etc., accepted Christ. His family turned their backs on him, likewise his intimate friends. When he fell dangerously ill, some of them offered help on condition that he would forswear his Saviour and return into the fold of Hindooism. As he remained steadfast, he received no help. But he leaned entirely on Jesus, and I am glad to say, he is well again serving Him as a lay preacher in his spare time. I think we shall see him in the ministry soon!

It is amazing to see the zeal of those who found Christ. Every converted Indian is a forceful evangelist. He does not cease to proclaim what change He has brought into his life. The ideal of the Christian congregation is realised here, he goes about arguing with his own people as a layman on their own terms and in their own mentality. Many converts are gained this way.

Again a phenomenon which has almost completely disappeared in Western churches may be met with in missionary work: obsession by evil spirits. However much it may be belittled and mocked at by 'enlightened' people, it is there, and the impact of the gospel is also there just as in the time of the New Testament. Let me give you a case. In the family of an ex-Hindoo priestess, one woman who should have inherited the office had she not turned Christian, was troubled by attacks which manifested themselves in screaming, fainting, fits, etc., it was not just hysteria. Repeated prayer, laying on of hands and stern command to leave her in the Name of Christ resulted in a complete cure and liberation.

Many missions labour in Natal for the same cause, some of them quite weird and sectarian in our eyes, but all are needed, because Hindooism copying Western Christian ways and ideas launches vigorous counter attacks. Deliberately those elements which resemble the requirements of our standards are brought to the fore, others suppressed and relegated to the background. Missionary efforts are launched, pamphlets printed and lectures organised, aided by the satanic teachings of theosophists.

And yet this is rather a confession of failure than a sign of victory. Theoretical Hindooism is too complicated, mystical and philosophic to attract the masses, orthodox Hindooism has no message save superstition, magic and empty fairy tales of all too human powerless gods and an impersonal pantheistic divine force of the world and not above the world. The aim of Hindoos is jivan mukti, i.e., the attainment of bliss, joy, peace in divine fellowship. Most of them confess their failure to have attained it in this life, they hope that they, perhaps might reach it after several reincarnations. Christ gives jivan mukti to His friends here and now in a real and experimental form, this is why Christianity wins and will win more for the Kingdom of God.

Strangely enough, a friend who in his capacity as a valuator of property has to visit many Indian homes, confessed to me the other day: „You know, on entering a home I can say immediately whether or not

the family is Christian, an aurora of happiness and peace seems to meet one on the threshold." Is there any more justification of our work among them necessary?

Durban.

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[*Hierdie artikel van 'n bevriende Metodistiese sendeling in Durban word onvertaald geplaas met die besondere doel om die atmosfeer suiwer te bewaar van 'n bydrae uit die nasionaal en religieus van dié van ons verskillende geesteskring waarin die skrywer lewe, sodat die fundamentele eenheid van die Christelike geloof nieteenstaande die histories veroorsaakte verskille des te sterker tot ons mag spreek.—Red. Koers.]
