

How India's 'Untouchables' Are Stirring a Spiritual Revolution

India's economy is growing, and its population may soon overtake China as the world's largest. But behind these trends is something much bigger: Christianity is growing faster than government leaders will admit, and the spiritual changes are reshaping a nation that has been identified with Hinduism for thousands of years.

I saw this with my own eyes this week. A miracle is occurring in India that will shake the world in our lifetime.

What is most remarkable about the growth of Christianity in India is that the people spreading the gospel most aggressively are not foreign missionaries but indigenous evangelists who have been stuck at the bottom of the oppressive caste system.

Consider the case of my friend Prasad, who is a Dalit—otherwise known as an “untouchable.” Defying his background, he planted a church in a major city in southern India 20 years ago. Today he oversees more than 100 churches in his region, and he provides hot meals to 1,500 poor children every day at 20 feeding centers where the gospel is served along with rice and vegetables.

Another young pastor named David, who was trained by Prasad, recently moved into a one-room apartment in a slum community on the outskirts of a major Indian city. With a monthly income of less than \$200, he and his wife are aggressively sharing Christ with children and adults. Both Muslims and Hindus are converting to Christianity because of the courage of a man who is classified by the caste system as “backward.”

Further south, in a region of India that is known for its ornate Hindu temples, a young evangelist named Raja operates a home for abandoned girls, provides food and clothes to neglected orphans and offers counseling to abused shop workers. He and his brave team use motorcycles to reach remote villages in tribal areas where many of the local Hindus are highly resistant to other religions. Even though he has been pelted with rocks and threatened, Raja has planted churches in 32 communities.

The cruel “untouchable” label was pinned on Prasad, David and Raja when they were growing up. Hinduism teaches that Dalits are outcasts who deserve to be at the bottom of the spiritual scale of human worth. Even though India supposedly outlawed the caste system years ago, Dalits still suffer horribly through social stigma, denial of education, bullying and discrimination in housing and jobs.

Yet despite the continued oppression, Dalits are the key reason the gospel is spreading so quickly in India today. The same people who were told they weren’t worthy enough to enter a Hindu temple are finding that Jesus Christ touched lepers, sinners and other “untouchables” of His day and invited them to dine at His table.

Everywhere I went in India this past week, I met people from the lowest caste background whose lives have been transformed by Christ. They have found true value and dignity after meeting Jesus.

And I was happy to worship with them, hug them, eat with them and remind them that there is no caste system in God’s kingdom.

An intense spiritual war rages in India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was elected in 2014 as a self-avowed Hindu hardliner, is working with his pro-Hindu government to stop Christianity’s growth (as well as the growth of Islam). Acts

of violence against Christians—including the burning of churches—have increased so much that Open Doors now lists India's persecution status as "severe."

But the violence isn't stopping Dalit believers. As I ministered to groups of pastors this week, it was obvious that they have pulled the rug out from under the old system of Indian oppression. We can expect sweeping changes in India in our generation:

- **The caste system will disintegrate.** Wherever Christianity goes, true prosperity follows. Today, born-again Dalits are getting high-tech jobs and graduate degrees; the underdogs are overcoming a system that was rigged to oppress them. The more Christianity grows, the more the caste system is becoming irrelevant.
- **The killing of baby girls will stop.** At least 60 million female babies have gone "missing" in recent years because of either sex-selection abortion or infanticide. This is because many families simply prefer boys for economic reasons, so they killed their baby girls. As early as 1991, the Indian Census began to show a dramatic drop in the girl-to-boy ratio. But today, Christians are rescuing abandoned girls from trash bins and raising them to love Jesus.
- **The status of women will shift.** In the past, Indian women have suffered silently from domestic abuse, social discrimination and sexual slavery. High-profile cases of violent rapes in the past few years have tarnished India's global reputation. But now Indian Christians are challenging the dowry system—a tradition that requires families of girls to pay exorbitant fees to their prospective husbands. As Christianity spreads in India, the gospel is elevating the dignity of women, and Christians are educating girls and empowering them to be leaders.

My time in India this week convinced me that we will see a

massive miracle unfold in India in our lifetime. A nation that was rigged to favor the rich is literally being turned upside down because poor “untouchables” have been touched by Christ.