

Missionaries Bring God's Love to Societal Outcasts in India

India's culture is full of heritage and vibrant traditions. But some are beyond humanity.

Tradition holds that when a woman loses her husband, she has three options: throw herself on top of her loved one's funeral pyre, marry one of her deceased husband's younger brothers with the family's permission or lead a life of self-denial.

"In many ways, becoming a widow is like a social death," says Lindsay Ackerman with the Grand Rapids, Mission India. "You are literally outcast from your own family, your own community. There are some who would even say looking at a widow is unlucky."

Many in India's society see widowhood as a curse from the gods.

"It's really difficult for a woman to overcome that, because if the gods say that she's cursed, there's nothing she can do to change that," Ackerman says. "All she can do is accept her lower status in the community."

Regarded as an "untouchable," a widow's status couldn't get much worse. Shunned and degraded, without a source of income or job skills, many Indian widows fall prey to slavery and the sex trade.

A widow named Mahira managed to avoid these evils, but her position in life was a far cry from comfortable. Desperately trying to keep her only son in school, Mahira worked as a street sweeper during the day. She also washed dishes and mopped floors in local homes.

Like many girls in India, Mahira never attended school. But

she was determined for her son to escape the curse of illiteracy. One day, she chose a path that would alter her life's direction.

When a Mission India adult literacy class began in her village, Mahira enrolled. She began learning to read and write five nights a week for the next year. Although Mahira learned about Jesus in her literacy booklets and from her teacher, she wasn't interested in hearing more ... until her mother became sick.

Mahira's mother was taken to a private hospital, but the doctors couldn't help her. So Mahira began praying to the God she'd heard about in her classes: Jesus Christ. Within two days, Mahira's mother showed signs of recovery, and in two months her health had improved greatly.

Mahira received Jesus Christ as her Savior, and both she and her son now attend church regularly. When Mahira's in-laws learned of her salvation, they became upset and kicked both Mahira and her son out of the house.

But it's not causing them to deny Christ. They're living in a small rented house, and Mahira's love and faith in Christ continue to grow.

Pray for Mahira as she prepares to be baptized soon.

Mission India's adult literacy classes are bringing hope to widows throughout India. Job options open up when widows learn how to read, giving them hope for the future. They also learn about the one true God who loves them, which gives them hope for eternity.

"We just really need to pray overall that as the message of the gospel spreads, India as a culture will come to value its women," Ackerman says.

Pray that more widows will come to know the one true God.

“That is the one true hope they have that will change their lives forever,” Ackerman says. “To know that they’re valued, to know that they are cherished will just change their entire perspective on their life.”

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