

An Indian Looks at Missions

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Many people demand an explanation for the alarming brain drain from India to America. There are nearly 150 Indian Adventists who hold degrees (Bachelor of Arts, Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Medicine), who once actively served the church in India, but who now reside in the United States. People often say that it is a tragic thing for these nationals to leave the church work and come to the United States. When a national of India comes to America, he is often accused of being a lover of ease and comfort; but when an American goes to India, he is said to be compelled by a spirit of self-sacrifice and love.

It must be recognized that there is worldwide exodus from country to country. Some Indians come to the United States because of the same curiosity that makes some Americans go to Europe or Eastern countries. One must realize that not all Indians are sent to the United States by the church. Most of them come on their own initiative. If the reader were on the committee that releases the national church worker, or grants a leave of absence, he would realize the struggle the Indian has to go through for his dream to be fulfilled. The conditions under which the Indian leaves his country give him little motivation for returning.

I

Nothing frustrates the nationals more than the mission stories in which missionaries are portrayed hungry, thirsty, weary, and living hand-to-mouth in a strange land. Possibly the nationals may go overboard in expressing their feelings and thus completely rob the foreign worker of his due credit. The missionary does make sacrifices, but his real sacrifices are neither mentioned in mission stories nor recognized by the natives.

One of the greatest sacrifices a missionary makes is leaving his kinfolk and friends, the people who really understand him. Also, in many areas of the world he and his family are in great danger from crippling or fatal exotic diseases. Another factor often ignored by the natives is that a missionary who returns to his homeland, if he does not plan to go back to the mission field, may have to start almost at the bottom of the ladder, whereas his classmates may be holding important positions. Materially, however, one can hardly name a thing we have in America that the missionary goes without in the mission field, with the exception of television, the lack of which might be a blessing.

The missionaries have access to information about the nationals' salaries. So nationals feel that they, too, ought to know about the salary scale of their missionary friends, but this is not permitted. An American auditor can look into the accounts of the natives. Would not the natives be committing a cardinal offense to inquire how the foreign workers' budget operates? Even the working policy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (1970) does not mention any such figures. A study conducted by the Loma Linda University Department of Sociology and Anthropology revealed that 100 percent of the 1,011 students who participated in the study had incorrect information on the salary scale of the missionaries.¹ Half replied that missionaries get less pay than homeland workers, but that it's worth more. A fourth said that they get the same pay, and slightly less than a fourth said that they get less pay and that it is worth less. Some thought that missionaries and nationals get the same pay. None of them knew that the missionaries actually get much higher wages than the nationals.

I discussed the salary scale with a prominent missionary friend. Though I still do not know the accurate figure, I understand that the norm for foreign missionaries in India is \$490 per month, and it ranges from 94 percent to 112 percent. In Indian currency it would be approximately 3,675 rupees. This is in addition to all other allowances and fringe benefits. The salary of a governor of a state in India is about 3,000 rupees per month. The norm for the nationals is 500 rupees (\$66.50). The range is between 30 percent and 170 percent. If an Indian should reach the maximum, it would be 850 rupees (\$113.33). How many nationals can attain the position of president or secretary of the Division Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to receive the maximum amount?

Some natives suggest that if the missionaries and the Indians were paid equal wages, this would end the problem. However, if the natives were to get pay equal to that of the missionaries, they would become the victims of

the very thing of which they accuse the foreign workers. They, too, would be cut off from the people and rendered ineffective in their work. The better plan would be for missionaries to be paid about the same as the natives; but they should be compensated when they come back to America, or a part of their salary should be withheld in the headquarters for later use. This, I admit, is a very difficult problem to solve.

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Another factor which discourages the native is the administration of the service of ordination. An American missionary is ordained to the ministry either before leaving the homeland or within a couple of years in the mission field. However, a native has to wait for ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five years, or even longer for ordination. It seems that an ordination at that stage is really to celebrate retirement or indicate the favoritism of the officers. A person who joins the gospel ministry should be carefully observed for two or three years — after which he should be either ordained or advised to choose a profession more suitable to his capabilities and life-style.

According to the present church structure, ordination enhances a person's position in the organization, which puts him into a higher category. The higher the category, the higher the salary. Being human, the national finds it rather difficult not to think of material gain ensuing on his attainment of ordination.

It is a tragic but true story that most of the missionaries and natives meet only in churches, at committee meetings, at post offices, and at other public places. Apart from that, natives and missionaries are strangers to one another, with the exception of some who are personal friends and who do invite one another to their homes. It can be asked: Why doesn't the native invite the missionary, since the latter is in the former's country as a guest? The problem is that the two live on such diverse levels that the native cannot afford to invite the missionary.

The book *The Ugly American* tells the story of an American ambassador who was sent to an Asian country. Realizing the situation, he began identifying himself with the general public, and he required the same type of service from his colleagues. He was reported and charged with indiscreet actions. In reply to the charges, he sent a letter to the White House saying that all things "must be done in the real interest of the people whose friendship we need."²

He objected to Washington's sending men loaded with cameras and good wishes. He asked for: (a) men who would study the history, geogra-

phy, language, art, culture, religion, customs, and practices of the country that they wish to serve; (b) men who would not take their families abroad unless they are willing to live on a level which will not cut them off from the public in whose interest they have been employed; (c) men who would subsist on wholesome and ample foods available in local stores; (d) men who would not bring their private automobiles, but use the public transportation system like everybody else; thus automobiles would be used exclusively for official purposes.

The reply he received was by cablegram: *Reply negative to all suggestions. . . . Such actions . . . are highly impractical. We would not be able to get Americans to serve overseas under these conditions. Please return continental United States first available transportation. Anticipate substantial replacement your present staff. Signed Secretary.*³

It is interesting to note that the requirements outlined in the *Ugly American* were the very characteristics which the early Christian church looked for when choosing the missionaries. How many missionaries of the Adventist church would be willing to serve under these conditions?

III

The General Conference working policy reads: "It is necessary and all-important that every missionary learn the language of the people for whom he is to labor, so that he can preach the gospel or otherwise instruct them in their own tongue. . . . To aid in securing a thorough knowledge of the language, each person pursuing language study shall be examined by a competent committee at the end of the first and second years of study. . . . Those who, after fair trial, are unable to become proficient in the language will find themselves greatly handicapped in their work and often obliged to modify their entire missionary program, if not withdrawn from the field altogether."⁴

Has any missionary been withdrawn because he was not proficient in the native language? Or does his handicap modify his missionary program, so that those who were sent to preach, being inefficient in language, become administrators?

The world is looking for missionaries who will get involved, who can demonstrate that Christian faith is the religion of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Along with the licensed ministers, the church must send men who possess special talents and skills: electricians, engineers, plumbers, businessmen, technicians, agriculturists, doctors, nurses, and public health personnel. Such men may set up private enterprises or work for the government or

other private agencies. The work of such people will not only be more acceptable to the public, but it will usher in an era like the apostolic era, during which the church grew by leaps and bounds.

William Carey spent forty-one years in India as a missionary. Within a short time he translated the Bible or portions of the Bible into forty-four Indian languages and dialects. The secret of his success was that before he left his homeland he knew more about India than the native workers. He served as a professor of oriental languages for thirteen years. He knew the people, he loved the people, and he served the people. He was one of them. Though he is dead and gone, he still lives in the hearts and minds of the Indian masses.

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Miss Georgia Burrus of California, the pioneer of the Seventh-day Adventist church in India, reached that foreign land in the autumn of 1895 and was followed by a crew of five colporteurs. They sold literature all day and conducted evangelistic campaigns at night. The missionary of the 1970s may wonder how, but these workers had a daily schedule for learning language. They learned the native tongues to identify themselves with the people.⁵

IV

Why do the nationals leave India and come to the United States? No single answer can suffice. People come for different reasons.

Education. Spicer Memorial College, the only Seventh-day Adventist senior college in the entire Southern Asia Division Conference, does not offer graduate studies. Religious convictions make it unfeasible for Adventist youth to attend non-Adventist institutions. Therefore, if a person desires to study beyond the level of the bachelor's degree, he is left with no choice but to go to the New World. Until a graduate program is offered at Spicer College, it cannot be assumed that the natives use "further studies" as a false excuse to leave their country. Although a vast majority of the Indians come to the United States for educational purposes, there may be some who come for many other reasons.

Better economic security. The more a native observes his overseas colleagues, the more dissatisfied he feels with his simple way of life. A standard of living that his eyes feed on becomes the target for which he ultimately aims in coming to the United States.

Dissatisfaction with his job. There are others who may not get along with some church member or some national or overseas worker. Instead of staying on the job and fighting the problem within themselves, they decide to ask for a leave of absence and migrate to the New World, hoping to find a

paradise in which they will not have to make adjustments or conform to policies.

Alienation. There are others who remain abroad because they feel that they are not wanted in their homeland.

Curiosity. Mankind is always curious to explore the unknown, and the Indians are curious to visit the world just as much as Americans are.

Should the Indians be urged to go back to their country where the need is much greater?

Indeed, I must admit that the qualified natives can make a tremendous contribution in their own land. However, to God, an American or a Canadian or an English soul is just as precious as an Indian soul. For God, the whole world is a mission field. Therefore a person must live and serve wherever he thinks he can contribute the most and wherever he believes the Lord directs. An individual filled with and directed by the Holy Spirit would be a blessing no matter where he lives and serves. But unless he has personal convictions and commitments, his absence would not be much of a loss anywhere. It is God who calls, it is God who sends, and it is God to whom each person has to answer.

REFERENCES

- 1 Betty Stirling, *Attitudes of Seventh-day Adventist College Students toward Missions*, occasional paper number one of Loma Linda University Department of Sociology and Anthropology.
- 2 William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick, *The Ugly American* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company 1958), pp. 267, 268.
- 3 Lederer and Burdick, pp. 268, 270.
- 4 *General Conference Working Policy* 1970, p. 179.
- 5 *Eastern Tidings*, pp. 2-4 (May 8, 1941).