MAHARASHTRA

RAINY SEASON, 1965
We were eating lunch when the missionaries returned from a large "religious fair." They had gone to this holy place to distribute literature, preach, and sell gospels.

"It is not the same," they reported. "People really aren't seeking for God as they once did. They come with a holiday spirit to their holy place..."

This was in 1947. After lunch we went into the garden. Some tribes-people were passing on the road and we were full of questions. The same missionary who had come back from the "religious fair" with disappointment began to tell us of the many tribes in Maharashtra. "I wonder if the time has not come to reach out to this people? No one is doing any concentrated work among them. The Bhils, Banjari, Gond and Pardhi are difficult to reach. Some live a gypsy-type life others have no written language."

Would anyone catch the vision? To whom would the Spirit of the Lord Jesus speak in compelling force?

In 1958 we were asked to move to an area where there had been no fruit for many years. We traveled by rented truck for hours. The children were restless. My husband was on top of the load with the men who were helping us move. The road was dusty and temperatures soared at noonday. We arrived as the sun was setting. Lamps had to be filled and lit. Beds had to be assembled and made ready for sleeping. We were tired and hungry but people began to crowd around and interrupt the unpacking. One man was very persistent. I became weary of it all and asked, "Why must you see the missionary tonight? Can you not come in the morning?"

"No," was the reply. "I live many miles down this road. I will return in eight days for marketing but I am hungry and thirsty to know your God."

Early the next morning my husband and others were on the road to his hut. He was a tribesman and lived on his own land. His brother and six years old nephew lived with him. The boys' mother had died in childbirth. The little lad took care of the home as the men worked in the fields.

On arrival the men learned that the headman of the village needed help. His wife was dying. They were used of God to offer assistance and comfort in that home. A whole village opened up with love and friendship. The missionary went to live in the inquirers' hut for several weeks. They cooked together, they worked the fields together, they slept in the same one-room house and daily they heard God's word.

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Have You Ever?

Have you ever been to a place and wondered how the people came to live and build their city there? I began to wonder when four of us came down into the village of Mannamanuar. This village nestles against the high mountain about 6,000 feet above sea level and about twenty miles from Kodaikanal where our Missionaries' Children's School is located. There seemed to be an abundant source of water that led into the village. Across the valley were terraced fields of potatoes, rice, and wheat. Vegetables were plentiful. Perhaps this is enough to attract over 1,000 people. Whatever the reason there is a people there who need Jesus.

Have you ever stood before a crowd who did not know your language and with whom you could not communicate in theirs?

Have you ever met a person who is eager to go out and witness for the Lord? The type who finds you busy with important things or leisure and urges you too to come along? Lawrence, a tailor from Kodaikanal is one of those men. I don't know what church he belongs to, but I do know he loves Jesus. This love drives him to get assistance from all who love the spread of the Gospel. We went with him to Mannamanuar.

Lawrence and his sons together with the local evangelist began singing songs. The children came running and adults came and stayed as long as they could to hear a story of Jesus and His love. Maybe some came to see the two white men who were standing there keeping time to the music. For nearly an hour the story of Christ was told to them in their own language. What a joy it was to give the news of God's love.

Have you ever prayed that the seed of God's Word would find lodging in the hearts of those who hear? This seed planting is going on right now some place in India. Pray the lord of the harvest to give fruit from the seed planted and may He send laborers to gather in that fruit.

—C. H. Dyke
Loba couldn't keep his mind on the words being sung. In spite of his love for the throbbing rhythm of the drums, the exhilaration of the ringing cymbals and the enthusiastic clapping around old Dasoo the itinerant bard his attention wandered wilfully. It kept going back to the words on the little paper he had unearthed the other day. Was it only last bazar day that he had re-read the paper message which had lain forgotten for almost five years?

"I must listen to Dasoo," thought the Banjari youth, "Some day I shall have to pass on his teachings to my own sons."

Dasoo's voice boomed across the square over the turbanned heads of the crowd seated before him. He was holding forth about the glorious exploits of Mithoo Bhaiya the freebooter of olden times who was now the patron saint of the entire tribe. In fact Mithoo was revered as the tribal deity in the hearts of many of the oldsters. Dasoo the bard was being carried away as he fervently enlarged on the legends of Mithoo the intrepid raider. Sage old heads nodded agreement and whispered reverently to one another. Well they remembered some of the more recent plundering in which they had had a part. Many a fat ox had been added to their already flourishing herds at the expense of unwary farmers along the route of their wanderings. Dasoo's eyes lighted with new fire as he related tales of successful kidnapping raids... especially one where 7 new strong children had been added to their tribe. Truly Mithoo had given success in the raid because of the sacrifice prior to the great foray.

Loba wondered if it could possibly be true that his forefathers could have been cruel enough to do what Dasoo was relating. How could God require them to bury a living child up to his neck in the hot earth and have them stampede their herds with their hundreds of
sharp hooves over the victim until nothing remained to prove their misdeed? "I wish I could remember more of what the little paper said about the sacrifice of God for our sins," mused Loba.

The tribal women were off by themselves in a circle swaying to the music. Black eyes peered through the heavy silver hair-ornaments that hung before their faces.

Before his mind could wander again he caught the nod of old Nanoo, his grandfather, who sat nearest the bard. It was the signal to go for the tea.

"It's too bad we didn't get that new cup after all," said Loba half aloud as he slid stiffly to the ground from his perch on the cart. "Of course old Nanoo did an excellent job of wiring the two halves of the old cup back together," he said aloud to old "Reddy" the cow as he ducked under the overhanging thatch of the home hut. "Reddy" had a corner of the house to herself. Loba's mother was fanning the fire with one hand and rubbing smoke out of her eyes with the other. The room had no ventilation. Heavy brass anklets jingled musically and her gypsy skirt swirled dangerously near the open flame as mother bustled around the room and deftly poured the sticky molasses tea into a small brass kettle.

"Begone with you boy . . . do you want Dasoo to die of thirst and thus bring disgrace on our whole Tanda, hustle now lazy fellow!"

He wove his way dexterously across the crowded council square and retired as quickly as he could after presenting the tea. Again his thoughts were on the folded paper at his waist-band, tucked away from prying eyes. "I shall read it again first thing in the morning," vowed Loba. Only old Rajah the dog saw him surreptitiously slip the folded paper from its hiding place, and Rajah couldn't tell.

"What can the paper mean, that God loves us . . . and that He sent His only Son to die in my place . . . did the 'Yesu' really pay for my sins?" Thoughts whirled through his troubled mind. "How did they get these words written in our Banjari language? I'm glad I learned the letters in the government school."

The bard lectured on.

Loba mused on, "I remember the day the white family drove into the mango grove with their "Double Motaar." By stretching his neck Loba could see Old Knobby the huge mango tree where they had made camp.
"That sassy Ramoo thought the 'cart-house' (House trailer) being the larger of the two was the one that pushed the little one they called a jeep. But I insisted the front one was the 'Ox', whoever heard of a cart being pushed! Ramoo wasn't quite so bossy after he found out I was right."

"It was foolish of old Aje to start the rumour that these folks had come to fill the cart-house with kidnapped Banjari children. I can still feel the cane after I got caught by uncle spending the afternoon in the mango grove... Uh-huh! how it did smart! We never would have gone had it not been for that little orphan girl 'Peeshee', she was too dumb to be scared... went right up to the white Memsaheb to get her sore eyes fixed. That did it all right... we all defied orders the next day. I'd love to hear those 'phono recarts again'."

"When I close my eyes I can still see the pictures the other man showed... the Banjari man with them who knew the 'Yesu Way' explained those cinema pictures so that my heart was cut."

Loba was distracted from his reverie by a dog fight that had flared up between Rajah and old Bob-tailed Baloo. A well-aimed stone soon put a stop to that and Rajah won the best spot near the fire.

"I can't believe what Dasoo is telling us... that we should make offerings to the 'Devi' (Living goddess) who lives in the next Tanda. How can she give favours? If the paper is true then Dasoo is wrong and we are a deceived people. What hope have I got?" thought the boy, gloomily.

"...I wonder why he didn't come back? Maybe he'll send someone else. Perhaps he's dead... they did look awfully pale... those white people. I wonder if they found out that the Message was not for the Banjaris after all... That must be it!" concluded Loba.

"But no! they said it was for ALL. Tomorrow I shall clean up the camp site in case they come back this season." —R. F. Perret

HERE AND THERE

1. A Sunday School Institute was held in Yeotmal by the Berar Kandesh Christian Council assisted by the Evangelical Fellowship of India. Nearly fifty delegates attended. Pray that the helps received in July will bear fruit in the Sunday Schools throughout the year.

2. Pray for results of Short Term Bible Schools held in many districts in August and September.

3. Special efforts in Village Evangelism will be made from October through March. Pray that many who have never heard will repent and believe that Jesus is the Christ, the only way of Salvation.

4. The Annual Marathi Missionary Conference will be held in Akola in November. Rev. H. P. Williams of Northside, Chicago, will be the speaker.

5. Three Nagaland tribes-people are studying at Union Biblical Seminary, Yeotmal this year. One young Naga man graduated last year and has returned to minister to his people. (See Alliance Witness—June 9, 1965 The Religious Caravan Abroad).

6. Missionary children will come home in October. They return to Boarding School in Kodaikanal the first part of January. (There are 26 Missionary children in the Alliance Marathi area and 20 of these are in our "Longcroft" home in Kodaikanal.)
He was lying on his bed .... a leading Christian of the village. We had come to Pandhri that night to have a meeting and invited him to join us. Pandhri, as with most of our villages, carries on its own lay-led worship, and with the scope and responsibility for witness thus provided among susceptible relatives and neighbours, numbers have come to Christ and believers made strong.

We were stunned with our friends reply, “I have no need to come” he said. “God meets me right here on my bed!” He was bitter. His feud with his brother—the elder of the group—had been going on for weeks. Corporate worship had almost died out in that village. He ought to have known better. He was the only man in the village who had completed the prescribed course at the Chikalda Lay Workers’ Institute. Possibly as much as anyone he was influential in bringing the eight new converts of his village to Christ. Now, however, he was seething in his own resentments. Despite all efforts made to achieve a reconciliation he remained adamant. We could only pray.

Weeks later, in the adjoining house, his brother’s boy fell ill, and soon passed away. Our friend began to think and to recognise this as God’s awful voice of accusation and judgment. He became crushed with contrition and with a flood of tears, repented bitterly.

After becoming reconciled to his brother the song of the Lord once again filled his soul. In the few months since, eight individuals—some of whom had been hostile to the gospel—became inquirers. They eagerly received the careful instruction that was given in intensive preparation classes, and fervently made their prayer of confession and commitment to the Saviour. All of them were joyously baptized. Today this local village church, encouraged by these new ones born into the family, and strengthened through regular, lay-led worship, is maintaining a vigorous witness in the town and seeking to erect a much needed building for worship.

“Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation ... then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.”

—J. L. AMSTUTZ

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Weeks later we visited again. The elder brother listened to a language quite like his own from the phonograph. Tears ran down his cheeks and he whispered over and over “... It is so sweet to my ears... for me, He did all that?”

When the record was finished the little boy said pleadingly, “Now, talk to your God”. We prayed. God answered and weeks later a visiting pastor baptized one of the brothers.

Six years ago we left that area and as far as we know no one has returned.

The population of tribes in Maharashtra: Bhil—575,022, Pardhi—21,417, Gond—272,564 and 242,046, Banjari still speak their mother tongue.
Evangelism-in-Depth

Some Pastors Speak

What has Evangelism in Depth meant to your church?

"Some of the church members got the vision of witnessing among their own circles i.e. in school and at the offices. The responsibility of personal witness is felt very strongly. Some of the church members are doing it regularly."

"Our people are coming to prayer meetings more regularly as a result of this program."

Do you know of any personal conversions as a result of Evangelism-in-Depth?

"Last week our young people distributed ten thousand tracts. They took these from door to door, from shop to shop and handed them to people on the roads. On Sunday a new boy came to our church. He was a Hindu. He said, ‘I read this paper (tract) and God convinced me of my sin. I have repented and He has given me His salvation. Now I have come to your church!’"

Have the Prayer and Bible Study groups continued in your area?

"We have a few prayer groups who are praying sincerely."

"Prayer groups in our area have helped maintain the spiritual standards of the church. I, as a pastor, am helped much in facing the church problems."

"Yes, these groups meet regularly. One family who never came before had a son become violently ill. They prayed and God heard their cry. Their son became well and now they are attending the prayer meetings regularly."

What are the Future plans for this Program?

"From the end of October 1965 to the end of February 1966 sixteen evangelistic campaigns will be held throughout Northern Maharashtra. Our goal is to reach non-Christians with a clear powerful presentation of Jesus Christ."

"We will need a compelling concern to drive us continually to pray and to work, and an insatiable faith to reach out for a manifestation of the saving grace of God. Pray for us."