

OH INDIA . . .

(Taken from the book by Carl Lawrence)

Population: 1 billion

Hindus: 88.2 percent

Muslims: 11.0 percent

Sikhs: 1.9 percent

Christians: 2.6 percent - 26.5 million people - believers - 5 million

Indias 1 billion people live in many large cities and 800,000 villages. They are intelligent, gentle and kind. They speak 14 official languages and 1,200 different dialects. They worship untold thousands of gods under the restrictions of 26,000 castes.

By law the caste system is now illegal. But by practice it is the controlling factor in every segment of Indian society. Consider, for example, an article in the news magazine *India Today*. In a village not far from Delhi, a rural Dalit laborer had a love affair with the daughter of a high caste landlord. The lovers and their Dalit go-between were tortured, publicly hanged, and burnt by agents of the girls family in the presence of some 500 villagers. Or consider this June 19, 2000 report from the Associated Press headlined, "Massacre highlights ancient system of social hierarchy." Hema Shukla reported from Miapur: "A drizzle on Sunday dampened the smoldering pyres and ashes of 34 low-caste militia a day earlier in ongoing violence over India's ancient system of social hierarchy." Bits of bone and body parts were visible on the pyre and were later carried by family members to the Ganges River. This destruction vividly illustrates that whatever the government may say, the caste system is alive and sick in India.

The word "caste" comes from the Portuguese word *casta*, which simply means "breed or kind." In the Indian languages it is sometimes called *varna*. The roots of the caste system go back to the sacred text of the Rig Veda of 3,000 years ago. At the top is the Brahman or priest. At the bottom are the untouchables. These castes are hereditary and one is never allowed to move up in the system.

Carl Lawrence is a veteran missionary with twenty years service with the Far East Broadcasting Co. and thirteen years as mission's director for the Haven of Rest Radio Ministry. In Sept. 1987 he sat in Damoh, India with three other men: Ziden Nutt of Good News Prod. Intl., and Vijai and David Lall with Mid-India Christian Missions. At that time God gave these men a vision to reach the millions of India with videos. They believed that India might well be the first nation in history to leap directly from radio to video, bypassing television. Even though the people are poor, they are still able to get together with friends and neighbors and somehow find the money to rent a video. In Delhi's major shopping center, for example, there are 286 different stores and 57 of them are video rental and sales shops.

Today, with the help of God and the sacrificial service of many people, there is a production facility in Damoh India producing Christian videos. The government of India has been so impressed with the quality productions of this ministry that a number of their programs have been featured on national television. The first was a video on how to prevent blindness in children which was aired on April 7, 1993. Later they were privileged to produce a video about the birth of Jesus to also be shown on national television. This was particularly important as many in India have the mistaken idea that Christianity is a "foreign" religion that caters to the rich and powerful. That program was seen by over 100 million people. Then the government asked them to produce a video based on Good Friday and Easter. This too has been shown on national television. Next they undertook the parables of Jesus. Over 1,000 hours of production are now reality, representing the philosophy that "quality" is more important than "quantity". All of this has been done with local people and limited resources.

India is half a world away. When it is midnight here, it is noon there. We can make a "good case" that it is not our responsibility to evangelize people so far away. What about the person next door however? They need the Lord just as much as the people of India!