

FOCUS ON INDIA



With a population of around one billion, India is home to about one-sixth of the world's population, making it the second most populous nation after China. It houses all those people in two percent of Earth's total land surface, an area of 1,222,559 square miles.

The population is predominantly young with about 63 percent of Indians being under 30 years old. But their cultural and social structures are still governed by ancient Hindu taboos.



Hindus make up 81 percent of India's population. Indeed, it was created as a Hindu state. Before the British gave up their Indian empire in 1947, in an effort to minimize religious conflict they created two nations out of it: Muslim Pakistan and Hindu India.

Nearly three-quarters of Indians live in rural areas where the development of their villages reflects the Hindu caste system. Even in many urban areas, especially in the older cities, this system is strictly

observed. A caste, designated by the term *jati* (meaning "birth"), is a fixed social class into which one is born. People are expected to marry within their caste and to treat others according to their caste's place in the social pecking order. The five main caste clusters are, in descending order of social stature, Brahmins (priests), Ksatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (originally peasants but later merchants), Shadras (serfs), and Panchamas or Scheduled Castes (formerly known as the Untouchables).

Scheduled Castes are people whose occupations and ways of life put them in contact with things that Hindus believe cause ritual defilement—things such as blood, saliva, dung, leather, dirt, and hair.

About one-sixth of India's population falls into these Scheduled Castes. They are usually landless people who perform most of the nation's agricultural

work. Since in most places one or more of the dominant castes own almost all the land and wield most political, economic, and cultural influence, these landless classes are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation.

For Christians in India the dominant Hindu culture defines both the nation's need and the peculiar challenges its evangelism presents. The gospel of Christ stands in direct opposi-

tion to all that Hinduism teaches. Hinduism is polytheistic and idol-ridden. Christianity proclaims "one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Hinduism's social structure is the very antithesis of the gospel that tells men of their terrible equality of guilt (Romans 1:18-3:20) and of the grace of God in Christ that makes all believers, whatever their social status, brothers to each other and joint heirs with Christ. It is clear that such a message is bound to arouse the opposition of entrenched Hindu interests.

India has no official state religion, but the fact that Hinduism with its caste system provides politicians with ready-made voting blocs ensures that militant Hindus will wield extensive political influence.



They have not been slow to exert that influence to stop the work of Christian missionaries on behalf of low caste victims of high caste greed. In some areas, militant Hindu groups whose aim is to reclaim ex-Hindus from Christianity have launched violent attacks against several evangelical gatherings.

Official statistics put the Christian population at 2.3 million, slightly more than half of them Protestant and the rest Roman Catholic. Evangelical missions have laboured under great difficulty in their efforts to spread the gospel. In addition to Hindu opposition, they face the difficulty of the sheer size of the land and the multiplicity of languages and dialects it contains. However, ever since William Carey arrived in 1793, missionaries have laboured long and hard for the conversion of souls. Most of their success has

been among poor people of low caste and in territories such as Nagaland, where in the 1920s American Baptists baptized over 100,000 converts and laid the foundation for a fruitful work. Burdened by widespread

Hindu discrimination, the Nagas have sought independence. The response of the central government has been to suppress all such ideas with armed might. The conflict

between the Nagas and the central government's forces continues but is almost never reported in the West, while rumours of Communist Chinese support for the Nagas further confuse an already unclear picture.

Christians cannot be unmoved by the spiritual need

Free Presbyterian Church has supported both foreign missionaries and Indian nationals who have laboured faithfully to preach Christ. We have rejoiced in the work of men such as the late Jordan Khan and Dr. Jacob Chelli. We have also had the joy of commissioning brother Ravi

Radio Sri Lanka, and our correspondence shows that our signal reaches most of the subcontinent. Our potential audience is huge, for some 200 million Indians speak English, and the number is growing all the time.

We have maintained our radio witness to India for over



Pasupuleti, a member of our Greenville church, as a missionary to his own people in Visag, in southeast India. We need to pray that the Lord will send forth more labourers into this needy field.

But we need to do something more. We need to make use of the opportunity modern technology presents to cover India with the gospel. Since 1974 *Let the Bible Speak* has broadcast the gospel over

a quarter of a century. The Lord has blessed it. One of the first converts through our radio ministry was an old soldier from India, a man who described himself as a hardened and uninterested sinner, but who kept listening to the gospel and was won for Christ. We must continue our witness and even increase it. The opportunity is almost endless. We must try to reach as many of India's millions as we can and pray the Lord to make our witness abundantly fruitful. ■

of India. We must make every effort to reach her millions with the gospel. But how? Nothing can replace the work of the missionary who lives and works among the people. The