

Introduction

It is estimated that by the year 2020 India will be the most populated country in the world with nearly 1.3 billion people. A country of enormous diversity, India's rich culture and well-developed industrial base live alongside great poverty.



History

Dating back 5,000 years, India's civilisation is one of the oldest in the world. During the 16th century when the Moghul Empire was firmly established in India, the British traders formed the East India Company. When the Moghul Empire began to lose power in the 18th century the British East India Company extended its economic and political power. By 1858 Britain was governing India.

Opposition to colonial rule began in 1917 when Mahatma Gandhi launched his non-violent movement for independence. Independence came in 1947 and with it the creation of East and West Pakistan, now known as Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Relationships with Pakistan have traditionally been strained with each country accusing the other of war-like actions. This hostility increased with both countries developing nuclear capabilities. The dispute over Kashmir has led to times of conflict. However, the relationship between Pakistan and India has dramatically improved in recent times after more than two decades of tension.

Current challenges

- ▶ Basic education remains a major challenge with around 300 million Indians unable to read or write.
- ▶ Poverty is widespread with 350 – 400 million people living below the poverty line, of whom very few earn more than 52 pence per day.

- ▶ Unable to escape the cycle of poverty and ill health poor people are more likely to succumb to disease. HIV infection is rapidly spreading placing increased strain on an already fragile health system.

BMS involvement in India

Involved in India since the days of William Carey, BMS World Mission is today linked with a number of partners, including the Baptist Church of Mizoram, the Baptist Union of North India and the Bengal Baptist Union.

Since 1947, when India gained independence from Britain, the number of BMS personnel in India has decreased drastically. This decrease is partly due to the difficulty in obtaining visas for Christian mission workers but also the continued development of the Indian church.

BMS regularly sends Action Teams to Kolkata and Delhi, and recently sent its first ever Action Team to Mizoram. Summer Teams and Ministers' Teams are also sent to Kolkata and have been involved in a number of outreach projects including working with street children and evangelism in the surrounding villages. An expansion of the mission centre in Kolkata will enable more teams to be based there in the future. Many short-term placements are also based in the mission centre in Kolkata, enabling participation in a wide variety of social action projects.

At present there is one long-term mission worker in the country. BMS nurse Ann Bothamley, who will retire in November 2008, is involved in pastoral care for leukaemia and transplant patients in one of the largest haematology units in the country. Having started in Vellore in 1967, Ann is one BMS' longest-serving mission workers, and has made a significant contribution over the years through nursing and, more recently, overseeing the hostel in Vellore for children of national mission workers based across India.

Background Information

The land

The nation comprises the Himalaya foothills in the north, out of which flow the great Ganges and the Brahmaputra rivers, giving rise to a very fertile northern crescent; the central Deccan plateau,

dominating much of the rest of the country; and the deserts of Rajasthan to the west. The climate is influenced by the monsoon with hot, dry weather for eight months and heavy rain in the summer. Rice farming is widespread. India has one of the fastest growing economies in the world. The agricultural sector constitutes 25 per cent of the GDP and 18 per cent of India's exports. As a world player in information technology (IT), India is a major exporter of software services and software workers.

Religion

The majority religion is Hinduism (81.3 per cent) although there is a large Muslim community (12 per cent) and a number of other small faith communities, including Christianity (2.3 per cent). The oldest Indian churches trace their origins to St Thomas, the first century apostle. Christian missionaries had a great influence on Indian life with many of the Indian political leaders having attended church-based schools. In one state in India, Mizoram, it is estimated that 85 per cent of the population are Christian. Since 1970 the growth in numbers of new Christians in the established churches has slowed down, partly due to state harassment, and partly to the fact that many of the Christian community come from the lowest castes. This causes a problem when witnessing to higher caste Hindus. However, there has been a rapid growth of Indian cross-cultural outreach agencies and 44,000 national missionaries have been trained in church planting and evangelism.

Prayer points

- ▶ Pray for the millions caught in the ruthless cycle of poverty and lack of education. Pray that God would give the Church a heart of love and compassion.
- ▶ Pray for Ann Bothamley in her pastoral care work in Vellore.
- ▶ Pray for continued progress as the India government seeks to improve relations with Pakistan.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Keep up-to-date with BMS World Mission's work across the globe by visiting

www.bmsworldmission.org

- ▶ sign up for our weekly e-mail updates and mission personnel prayer letters
- ▶ find out more about the resources we have to offer
- ▶ discover how you can get involved in BMS World Mission

BMS World Mission
PO Box 49 Didcot OX11 8XA
T: 01235 517700
E-mail: mail@bmsworldmission.org

Registered as a charity in England & Wales (number 233782)
and in Scotland (number SC037767)

