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# MISSION PATHWAY

PRAY FOR THE UNREACHED

"REEL" INDIA



MISSION PATHWAY  
PUBLICATIONS

# "REEL" INDIA

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## Discovering India Through Film

When it comes to learning about the unreachable, cultural differences, or pressing social issues, films can sometimes be a better entry point than academic articles or news reports. What makes film so valuable is that it's accessible and immersive. Through moving images and sound, stories unfold in a way that allows us, in just a couple of hours, to step into another cultural world and even experience the emotions and struggles of its characters.

Delhi Crime takes a starkly realistic approach to expose the 2012 Delhi bus gang rape that shocked the world, laying bare the violence and oppression faced by Indian women. In contrast, Pad Man tells the story of a husband fighting for his wife's right to use sanitary pads, shedding light on women's health issues in rural India and the cost of breaking cultural taboos.

Beyond women's issues, Article 15 confronts India's entrenched caste system. Based on a constitutional clause, the film shows how laws alone cannot dismantle caste discrimination, which continues to marginalize Dalits and permeates political and policing structures.

Then there's 3 Idiots, which, with humor and wit, critiques India's education system. Beneath the comedy lies a painful reality: countless students caught up in the race for elite institutions lose their identity, their direction in life, and sometimes even their lives.

## Hope Beyond the Screen

For Christians, watching films is not just entertainment. As we follow the director's lens and glimpse the brokenness, struggles, and injustices of Indian society, a deeper question inevitably arises: What hope can the gospel bring here?

When Jesus became flesh and entered this world, He did not conform to the dominant culture. He stood up for the oppressed, drew near to those deemed "less than"—women and lepers—and disrupted the suffocating rules of His society, unsettling the Pharisees while offering true freedom to others. We believe that even today, Jesus longs to walk into Indian society, sit with the marginalized, and proclaim a love that knows no caste.

This issue of Mission Pathway features 15 carefully selected Indian films that highlight different facets of this complex and diverse nation. We invite you to set aside a weekend, pick a few from the list, and let film become a window into both the needs of India and the hope of the gospel.



## Playlists

**Delhi Crime**

**Toilet: Ek Prem Katha**

**Pad Man**

**Pink**

**Maharaja**

**Article 15**

**Secret Superstar**

**The Crow's Egg (Kaaka Muttai)**

**The Lunchbox**

**PK**

**2 States**

**3 Idiots**

**Gangubai Kathiawadi**

**Laal Singh Chaddha**

**Monkey Man**



"REEL" INDIA

November 1 • Saturday

# A Country Unchanged

Sexual Violence in India



Photo by Netflix on Wikimedia Commons

The Netflix series *Delhi Crime* is based on a true story—the 2012 Delhi bus gang rape case. Six men brutally assaulted 23-year-old student Jyoti Singh, who later died from her injuries. Nearly ten thousand people took to the streets in protest, prompting the Indian government to revise its laws in 2013. The reforms introduced harsher penalties for sexual crimes, including the death penalty for rape, and established fast-track courts.

Yet despite stricter laws, sexual violence has not declined. Most victims are women, often from Dalit communities excluded from the caste system. In India's deeply entrenched patriarchal order, men hold economic, educational, and religious power, while women are seen as subordinate—and low-caste women are especially vulnerable. Survivors who report crimes face police indifference, a lack of legal resources, social stigma, and even blame from their own families. These barriers keep cases hidden and justice out of reach. Without deep cultural change, harsher punishments alone are unlikely to stem the tide of sexual violence.



Further reading: The Caste System and the "Original Sin" of Women (in Chinese)

*Heavenly Father, You are the hope of victims of sex crimes and their families; You are the source of peace and justice. Lord, be near to the wounded—weep with them. The pain they bear is beyond what we can imagine. Stretch out Your healing hand to soothe the wounds deep within, and renew their strength in You. We also pray for the perpetrators: though they have committed crimes, they are still children You love. By the blood of Jesus Christ, cleanse them from all unrighteousness, that they repent of their sins and return to You. May the Holy Spirit lead them onto the path of righteousness, that by encountering Christ their lives may be renewed and changed. Raise up Christians in India to confront the issue of sexual violence with courage and compassion, serving this land with Your mercy. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

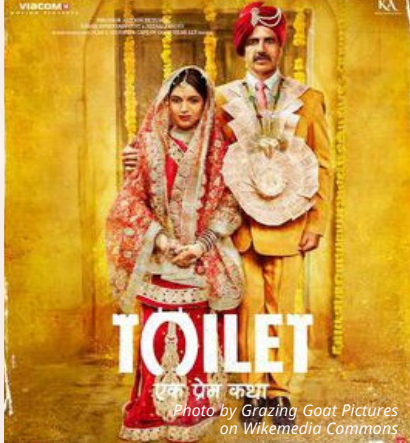


"REEL" INDIA

November 2 • Sunday

# Clean and Unclean

India's Sanitation Movement



Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal for his beloved wife—can't I at least build a toilet in my backyard for mine?" This witty, slightly exaggerated line from the Indian film *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha* highlights the fierce resistance in Indian society toward toilet construction.

In Hindu belief, human waste is considered impure, and toilets are seen as symbols of defilement. For many families, the home is sacred space—where household gods are worshiped. To build a toilet inside the home is considered an offense against the divine. As a result, most households have no toilets, and open defecation has long been viewed as a way of maintaining “purity.”

For men, the absence of toilets is often just an inconvenience—they can relieve themselves almost anywhere. But for women, it brings both heavy burdens and grave danger. Many must endure long hours of discomfort, waiting until nightfall to go out together into the fields, hoping to reduce the risk of being spied on, assaulted, or even raped.



## Social Lens

- ★ The rate of open defecation in India dropped from 70% in 1993 to 19% in 2021, showing that resistance toward toilets is gradually diminishing.
- ★ In 2021, 26% of rural residents still did not use toilets, compared to 6% in urban areas. More than half of those who still avoid toilets live in states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu.

*Heavenly Father, Lord Jesus, You are holy, and You alone have the power to make people clean. We pray that the people of India would encounter You, the One who truly purifies, and no longer rely on their own efforts to achieve holiness. Lord, move the government and nonprofits to bring education that dismantles deep-seated resistance to toilets, improving public health. Protect women who must venture out at night—provide safe facilities and measures for their dignity and security. May toilets no longer be seen as “unclean,” but as good and necessary structures that safeguard lives and bless the land. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*



"REEL" INDIA

November 3 • Monday

# Something So Small, Yet So Out of Reach

## The Sanitary Pad Revolution

"Four grams of cotton, two grams of cloth—and they became the greatest challenge of my life." This line from the film *Pad Man*, based on a true story, tells of one Indian man's struggle to improve women's well-being.

In the past, because imported sanitary pads were prohibitively expensive, many Indian women had no choice but to use rags, newspapers, or even dried leaves during menstruation. Since menstrual blood contains large amounts of bacteria, lingering on such unhygienic materials not only increased the risk of urinary tract infections but could, in severe cases, become life-threatening.

Arunachalam began his work simply out of concern for his wife and sisters. He set out to design affordable, locally made sanitary pads so that women could maintain health during their monthly cycle without suffering financial strain. In 2006, he succeeded in inventing a sanitary pad-making machine and began distributing it in rural India, helping women gain access to essential hygiene products and reclaim dignity in managing their health.



### Social Impact

- ★ Pad Man made skillful use of digital marketing, expanding its reach online. Producers, the government, NGOs, and local theaters collaborated to promote the film, even hosting special screenings in schools to highlight the importance of sanitary pads for women.
- ★ Two young girls, inspired by the movie, learned from gynecologists how to make reusable cloth pads. They distributed their creations to more than 1,000 women and hoped to pass on the skill to many others in need.
- ★ In 2017, MP Sushmita Dev launched a petition against the government's 12–14% tax on sanitary pads, pointing out that 70% of Indian women could not afford these basic necessities. The petition gained 400,000 signatures, and the following year the government abolished the tax.

*Heavenly Father, may women in India no longer have to rely on rags, newspapers, or dried leaves during their monthly cycles, but have access to clean and reliable sanitary pads that safeguard their health and meet their most basic needs. Thank You for the impact of Pad Man—continue to use filmmakers, advocates, and lawmakers to advance the spread of affordable hygiene products, so that women may be freed from the risk of infection and the weight of shame. Bless the two young girls who shared handmade cloth pads and taught others to do the same; may their initiative multiply throughout rural villages. Use the power of media and education to break the stigma surrounding menstruation in India, that women may be granted the dignity and respect they deserve as bearers of Your image. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*



"REEL" INDIA

November 4 • Tuesday

# She Said No— Then What?

India's #MeToo Wave

The film *Pink* portrays an attempted sexual assault: three men tried to attack three women, who fought back in self-defense, only to be charged with attempted murder. In court, the defense lawyer emphasized that the women had clearly said “no” multiple times, yet the men refused to stop—exposing the unequal power dynamics women face. In the end, the judge acquitted the women and convicted the men of “outraging the modesty of a woman.” But does this onscreen victory reflect the reality for women in India?

In 2019, Bollywood actress Tanushree Dutta accused actor Nana Patekar of sexually harassing her a decade earlier, igniting the #MeTooIndia movement. Within a month, more than 30 high-profile figures in politics, business, and entertainment faced allegations. Yet commentators note that the impact of #MeTooIndia has been limited for most women—especially in conservative rural areas, where shame and silence around sexual issues keep many cases hidden.



## After #MeTooIndia

- ★ Foreign Minister M. J. Akbar resigned over harassment allegations, then countersued journalist Priya Ramani, the first to accuse him. Outrage followed, with more than 20 lawyers volunteering pro bono to defend her.
- ★ Bollywood introduced the role of the “intimacy coordinator,” responsible for ensuring safe communication and respectful filming of intimate scenes, creating a more secure workspace for actors.
- ★ Several female directors and actresses publicly refused to work with men accused of harassment, signaling a zero-tolerance stance within the industry.

*Heavenly Father, every woman in India is precious in Your sight. You hear the hidden fears and cries of those who have faced harassment, whether or not their stories are spoken aloud, and You grieve with them in their pain. We ask for Your healing and protection over victims of sexual harassment—be their refuge in every moment of need. Raise up churches and Christians in India who will listen with compassion, offer comfort, and walk alongside the wounded. May the #MeTooIndia movement become a catalyst for transformation in society. Holy Spirit, shine Your light into the hidden darkness of families, schools, workplaces, and religious spaces, exposing truth and bringing justice. Stir the government to confront this issue earnestly and pursue solutions through laws, education, and reform. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*





"REEL" INDIA

November 5 • Wednesday

## Want to File a Report? Pay Up First!

Police Abuse of Power



Photo by Shiv Narayan Das on Unsplash

In the film *Maharaja*, the protagonist goes to the police to file a report but is told to pay a bribe before officers will take action. During the investigation, the police even protect the criminal, ultimately pushing the protagonist toward vigilante justice. This isn't just fiction—it mirrors reality in India, where corruption and police brutality are rampant, from bribe-taking and case-dismissing to violence in custody. According to India's National Campaign Against Torture (NCAT), between 2005 and 2018 at least 500 people died from torture while in custody—yet not a single officer was held accountable.

The roots of police abuse are complex. Meager salaries push many officers to rely on bribes for income. Severe understaffing leaves each officer responsible for more than 600 people's safety, working up to 14 hours a day under crushing stress. The police force is also steeped in machismo, where violence is often seen as proof of masculinity and authority.

India's sluggish judicial process and low conviction rates further drive officers to use torture as a shortcut to solve cases. Meanwhile, a public appetite for extrajudicial justice emboldens the culture of brutality and disregard for suspects' rights. One officer admitted in an interview: "What people don't realize is that the police themselves are disillusioned with the entire system."



*Heavenly Father, remember those wounded by police abuse—wipe away their tears and heal their hearts. Reveal Your justice to Indian society, that people may abandon violence for peace and learn to forgive one another. We pray for the government to act decisively: protect the rights of citizens, restrain unlawful policing, and transform the culture of the police force. Lord, have mercy on officers crushed by overwork and disillusioned with a broken system; may they encounter the power of the gospel, turning from violence and authority to become peacemakers in Your kingdom. Raise up advocacy groups that pursue judicial reform, working to rebuild a fractured and wounded society. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*





"REEL" INDIA

November 6 • Thursday

# Beneath the Blue Sky, All Are Equal

Caste Inequality



Photo by ActionAid India Campaigns on Flickr

The caste system in India was originally designed to maintain social order, ensuring that everyone had a role to play. Over time, however, it became tied to birth, stripping away any possibility of mobility. What began as a system of division of labor hardened into a rigid hierarchy, where one's status justified both oppression and subjugation. After independence in 1947, India legally abolished caste and enshrined equality in its constitution. Yet millennia of tradition remain like a mountain that cannot easily be moved.

The film Article 15 depicts the brutal reality: two Dalit (so-called "untouchable") girls request a raise of just three rupees (about 3 cents) and are murdered by upper-caste employers as a warning not to cross caste boundaries. Statistics in 2024 reveal that, on average, a crime against Dalits occurs every 18 minutes in India. Even in religious spaces, the shadow of caste remains—many Hindu temples forbid Dalits from entering, and Christians themselves often worship in caste-segregated congregations.

Still, there are voices for justice. The Dalit Lives Matter Global Alliance (DLMGA) has launched a movement to draw attention to marginalized communities. The magazine All That Blue\* gathers creative works from Dalits and other lower-caste groups, offering society a fresh and non-mainstream artistic perspective.

\* Blue is a symbol of Dalit resistance, representing the hope of equality for all under the same sky.

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*Heavenly Father, restore to Indian society the love, respect, inclusiveness, and diversity lost through a system that assigns worth by birth. We know every person is made in Your image, with dignity and value that cannot be replaced. May the gospel reach every caste group—including the Dalits, so often despised as "untouchables"—revealing Your purpose in creation and their true worth as Your handiwork. We lift up the Dalits in particular: continue to use every effort being made on their behalf to bring justice and attention to their rights. Stir believers around the world to follow the example of Jesus Christ, offering their skills, lives, and time to stand with the oppressed, to speak for them, and to walk beside them—helping them recover the beauty of the image of God in which they were created. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

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"REEL" INDIA

November 7 • Friday

# India's Struggles and Breakthroughs for Women

## Gender Inequality

The film *Secret Superstar* exposes the deep-rooted gender inequality in Indian society. Its heroine, Insia, and her mother endure low status within their household. Yet young Insia firmly believes that having dreams is every person's birthright. She courageously pursues her dream of becoming a singer, standing in stark contrast to her tradition-bound mother, and reflecting the broader challenges faced by women in India today.

According to the 2023 Global Gender Gap Report, India ranked 127th out of 146 countries, showing that gender inequality remains an ongoing reality. Women's labor force participation is only 33%, and men on average earn four times more than women. In politics, while women hold half of local representative seats, their real influence is often undermined by the entrenched practice of "Sarpanch-Pati,"\* where male relatives informally wield power on behalf of elected women.

\* "Sarpanch-Pati" refers to the practice of male family members unofficially exercising authority in place of elected women.



## India's Policy Developments

- ★ In 2024, the central government significantly increased its "gender budget" for the first time, aiming to improve women's safety, education, healthcare, housing, and retirement security.
- ★ In 2025, to curb the dominance of male relatives over elected women, the government launched its first training program to build women's leadership and decision-making capacity at the local level.

*Heavenly Father, transform the atmosphere of Indian society so that people may recognize the precious value of women—not as lesser beings, but as bearers of Your beautiful image. We pray for women raised in traditional cultures, that through faith in Christ they may discover their God-given worth. We lift up the younger generation of Indian women: may the digital age become a blessing to them, giving courage to break free from social constraints and pursue their God-given potential. Move the Indian government to advance gender equality, safeguard women's rights in work and daily life, and expand their influence across every sector. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*



"REEL" INDIA

November 8 • Saturday

# The Taste of Poverty

Child Poverty in India

The film *The Crow's Egg* (Kaaka Muttai) was inspired by conversations the director had with children from the slums. The original Tamil title, which literally means "crow's egg," alludes to the two young brothers at the heart of the story—boys so poor they could not afford chicken eggs and instead stole crow's eggs to survive. They long for just one taste of pizza, yet their journey is marked by repeated setbacks and stinging discrimination. The film poignantly portrays how poverty robs children of their basic needs and dignity.

Despite India's rapid economic growth in recent years, poverty remains a pressing challenge. According to the 2021 Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative report, while India's poverty rate has halved compared to a decade earlier, around 229 million people still live below the poverty line. More than 20% of India's children live in poverty—the largest number in the world. These children face grim realities: poor sanitation, malnutrition, lack of schooling, child labor, trafficking, and threats to both physical and mental health. Their futures are shrouded in the heavy shadow of deprivation.



## Social Response

- ★ The Sunshine Project is a nonprofit dedicated to improving the living conditions of children in the slums. Education is a central focus, as they hope it will help break the cycle of generational poverty.
- ★ Balaknama ("voice of the children") is a newspaper launched in 2003 by children from Delhi's slums. Even as minors facing hardship, its young reporters persist in speaking out for children—documenting sexual abuse, police violence, child labor, addiction, and other issues society ignores. Their stories have drawn national attention to injustices against India's most vulnerable.

*Heavenly Father, You hear the cries of the poor, and You never despise their prayers. We lift before You the children of India's slums and streets. Grant that the government would enact and enforce effective poverty-alleviation policies, protecting children from exploitation in matters of health, education, and labor. Bless and use nonprofits that serve as a last safety net, improving children's daily lives where the state falls short. Lord, stir high-caste churches and believers to cross social barriers and enter the world of impoverished children—serving them with Christ's love through practical aid, training, emotional support, and companionship, and sharing with them the hope of the gospel. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



"REEL" INDIA

November 9 • Sunday

## 99.99% Delivery Miracles

### The Dabbawala Service

Food delivery may seem like a modern trend, but in Mumbai it's nothing new—the Dabbawala service has been running for more than a century. These deliverymen weave tirelessly through Mumbai's streets and alleys, and even when Prince Charles visited, he had to book in advance to see them in action. With an error rate of "one in six million," their system has become a classic case study at Harvard Business School.

The word "dabba" refers to the stacked metal lunchboxes, while "wala" means carrier. Originating under British colonial rule, the Dabbawala service has since become part of Mumbai's cultural identity. So trusted are they that their work sometimes extends beyond lunchboxes to services like transferring salaries.

Some 5,000 Dabbawalas work six days a week, rain or shine, delivering more than 200,000 meals a day in what looks like a relay race against the clock. Using trains, bicycles, and their own feet, each lunchbox typically passes through at least ten hands before arriving—accurately and on time.

Though most Dabbawalas have little formal education, their dedication commands deep respect. The majority belong to the Hindu Varkari sect, known for its 21-day barefoot pilgrimages in scorching heat to temple shrines. They live by convictions such as "work is worship," "feeding others is the highest charity," and "every person is a manifestation of Brahman." Perhaps it is these values that make the Dabbawala's work not just a job, but an expression of faith.



### Recommended Viewing

- ★ Want to see the rare moment when a Dabbawala makes a mistake? Watch the film *The Lunchbox*.

*Heavenly Father, the Dabbawalas honor their work in a way that challenges a society driven by profit, reminding us that labor is meant as a response to Your call—to steward creation and to share in the joy of what You made. Remember their diligence and long hours, Lord, and lead them to know the One who created the world and gave the gift of rest. In this digital age, may Your Spirit use technology to reach this tightly knit community and awaken their hearts to the gospel. Lord Jesus, reveal Yourself along the Varkari pilgrimage roads, just as You walked with travelers on the road to Emmaus, that they might come to know You as Messiah. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



"REEL" INDIA

November 10 • Monday

# Shadows in a Spiritual Land

Religious Corruption in India



Photo by Government of India on Wikimedia Commons

The film PK tells the story of India's religious landscape through the eyes of an alien who asks a seemingly naïve yet deeply profound question: "Where is God?"

India is steeped in spirituality, with countless revered prophets and gurus drawing millions of seekers. Yet beneath this fervent religious devotion lurks a darker reality—charismatic leaders who exploit faith for profit and power.

One example is yoga guru Baba Ramdev, whose \$4 billion brand has drawn legions of followers. At the height of India's COVID-19 crisis, he publicly claimed his herbal products could cure the virus. Another case is Asaram, a guru with millions of global devotees, who was convicted of repeatedly sexually assaulting and illegally confining a 16-year-old girl. He is now serving a life sentence. These cases are just the tip of the iceberg of religious exploitation in India.



## Social Impact

- ★ PK ignited lively debate on social media, where many users shared reflections on religion and expressed opposing views through hashtags such as #BoycottPK and #WeSupportPK.
- ★ Dr. Narendra, a physician devoted to combating religious superstition, traveled across Maharashtra to expose fraudulent miracles. Despite repeated threats, he was eventually assassinated. His death prompted the government to pass an anti-superstition law.

*Heavenly Father, India's deep reverence for spirituality and religious leaders reveals a profound longing for peace and guidance. May Your true peace fill the hearts of its people and draw them to You, the one source of truth. Holy Spirit, shine Your light upon India's gurus—turn their hearts from using followers to satisfy selfish desires, and lead them to offer themselves instead as vessels of Your righteousness. Strengthen the government to confront and restrain wrongdoing carried out in the name of religion, and to establish systems of justice and care for victims. Lord, raise up more voices like Dr. Narendra, who courageously exposed darkness and gave his life for truth. May others continue his work, bringing light and transformation to society. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*



"REEL" INDIA

November 11 • Tuesday

# One India, Two Worlds

North-South Divide



Photo by Raman on Unsplash

The film *2 States* tells the story of a couple from northern and southern India who, while in love, must navigate differences in skin tone, food, and wedding traditions—capturing the cross-cultural tensions that mark this vast country.

Geographically, India is often divided by the Vindhya mountain range. In the north, where the climate is cooler, curries tend to be rich and often flavored with dairy products. In the south, curries are lighter, more liquid, and commonly poured over rice. Language differences are even starker: India has 22 official languages, and Hindi—the lingua franca of the north—can feel like a foreign tongue in the south. Communication often requires translation.

These differences are a double-edged sword. On one hand, they reflect India's extraordinary cultural diversity; on the other, they fuel prejudice and division. Some South Indians, for example, report repeated discrimination for their background—teachers mocking their accents in school, or peers refusing to accept them as “insiders” even when they speak fluent Hindi. As a result, some refuse to learn Hindi altogether. Politically, the imbalance is just as sharp: the north holds far more seats in parliament, giving it greater influence. In 2024, a southern legislator protested that although the south contributes more in taxes, resources are disproportionately allocated to the north. While southerners see this as unfair, the reality is that the north remains less developed in infrastructure and social progress, prompting the central government to channel more resources there in hopes of narrowing the gap.

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*Heavenly Father, thank You for the land of India, rich in culture and diversity. Yet deep divisions between north and south often give rise to conflict and prejudice. Lord, we pray for unity in India—that people would see beyond their differences to recognize that all are made in Your image and belong to You. We especially lift up Indian Christians, that they would live out the words of Scripture: “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” May they be peacemakers amid division, bringing hope and blessing. Grant leaders wisdom in allocating resources and fostering dialogue, that the nation may grow in understanding and reconciliation. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

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"REEL" INDIA

November 12 • Wednesday

# When Failing Feels Like Losing Life Itself

## The Crushing Weight of Exams

Education has long been a popular theme in Indian cinema. Films such as *3 Idiots*, *Hindi Medium*, and *Chhichhore* each shed light from different angles on the challenges of India's education system.

For Indian students, the road to higher education is long and grueling, marked by an endless series of exams. University admissions are particularly demanding—every institution holds its own entrance test, and some applicants sit for as many as twenty different exams in hopes of increasing their chances. Admission to the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) is considered among the toughest in the world, with an acceptance rate of less than 2%. By comparison, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the United States admits about 7% of applicants, making it seem far more attainable.

In northern India, the city of Kota has earned the reputation of being the nation's "coaching capital." Every year, roughly 200,000 students flock there to endure more than 15 hours of intense study and test prep each day. Parents pour enormous sums of money and energy into this pursuit, while students bear the crushing weight of both personal ambition and family expectations. The relentless pressure often proves unbearable: over the past decade, 127 students preparing in Kota have taken their own lives—and the number continues to rise.



## Government Response

- ★ 2018: In Delhi, the government introduced a daily "happiness class" in public schools, incorporating group activities and storytelling to help students explore emotional needs and learn stress management.
- ★ 2024: The Kota administration launched the Kota Cares initiative, providing counseling services and building a safety net for students overwhelmed by academic pressure.

*Heavenly Father, You know the fear and anxiety Indian students experience as they face entrance exams, and You see the heavy pressure they endure day after day. We pray for those who have lost themselves in the relentless pursuit of grades and rankings—may they be restored to the image in which You first created them. They are children redeemed at great cost by the blood of Jesus, whose worth far surpasses any score or school name. We ask that You use the government's current measures to provide real, practical help to students on their academic journey. Stir the hearts of churches across India to recognize the challenges within the education system and to develop creative ministries that reflect the values of Your kingdom. May young people break free from the bondage of academic pressure and, guided by the gifts and passions You have given them, enter their vocations as channels of blessing to society. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*





"REEL" INDIA

November 13 • Thursday

# Lives on the Margins

## Sex Workers

In the film *Gangubai Kathiawadi*, the heroine Gangu is betrayed by her lover, trafficked into a brothel, and forced to survive alongside other sex workers. From within this brutal reality, she rises to protect her "sisters." The story reflects the complex realities behind India's sex trade.

Research shows that the paths leading women into sex work are multifaceted. While extreme poverty is one factor, others include low levels of education, family financial pressure, fleeing domestic violence, lack of economic independence, and workplace harassment. As in the film, where Gangu is deceived and sold by her boyfriend, many women in real life are tricked or coerced into prostitution by acquaintances or strangers.

Sex workers in India have long been marginalized, left to bear disease, violence, and exploitation alone. One woman lamented, "Whether government officials, local leaders, or charities, none of them care about us. Society treats us as a stain." It was not until 2022 that India's Supreme Court ruled for the first time that sex workers are entitled to legal protection, and that their children must be guaranteed access to basic healthcare and education. Even so, sex work remains a deeply controversial and structurally complex issue in India, requiring broad collaboration across society for meaningful change.



### NGO Support

- ★ Prayas is an organization that works to help sex workers care for their children.
- ★ Kat-Katha provides basic education, vocational training, and economic and legal aid to thousands of women trapped in the sex trade.

*Heavenly Father, You see the plight of India's sex workers—women crushed by poverty, discrimination, and oppression, struggling to survive in despair. Though people may ignore them, You are the God who lifts up the lowly and cares for the needy. Pour out Your abundant love on these women, that their forgotten lives may bloom again in Christ. We pray that You would stir churches, brothers and sisters, and missionaries across India to develop creative ministries that improve their lives and bring them the transforming power of the gospel. May Your gospel renew Indian society's view of sex workers, restoring their dignity and protecting their rights. Raise up advocates in law, education, and healthcare who will keep pressing for reform, so that these women may live with heads held high. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*



"REEL" INDIA

November 14 • Friday

# Believers Amid the Flames

Sikhism



The film *Laal Singh Chaddha* portrays a boy raised in a Sikh family during the anti-Sikh riots of his childhood. For the sake of her child's safety, his mother cut off his unshorn hair—breaking a sacred commandment of the faith. This painful act of maternal love prompted audiences to reflect on India's religious conflicts.

Sikhism was founded in the 16th century in Punjab, aiming to reconcile tensions between Hinduism and Islam. Today, Sikhs make up about 2% of India's population. Abroad, Canada is home to the largest Sikh community. Sikhs believe in one God, reject the caste system and gender discrimination, affirm the cycle of karma and rebirth, and hold that true liberation comes only through God and the guidance of the Gurus\*.

During the premiership of Indira Gandhi, clashes between Hindus and Sikhs intensified. In 1984, she ordered the army to storm the Golden Temple—Sikhism's holiest shrine—and was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. Her death sparked nationwide anti-Sikh riots, in which thousands of believers suffered.

Decades later, Sikh separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar, exiled in Canada, advocated for an independent Khalistan in India. In 2023, he was shot dead in Canada. The Canadian prime minister accused India of involvement, further straining diplomatic ties between the two nations.

\* "Guru" comes from Sanskrit, meaning "teacher." Sikh traditions and philosophy were established by ten Gurus.

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*Heavenly Father, we thank You that some Sikhs in India have already turned to You. May Your Spirit continue to move, softening many more hearts to receive Your unconditional love. We pray for Sikh believers who follow Christ—strengthen their faith and grant them true peace when they face rejection or attack from their communities, that they may stand firm in You. We also lift up the long history of conflict between Hindus and Sikhs: Lord, bring healing through the power of perfect love. Raise up Indian churches and Christians to embody the gospel of reconciliation, becoming peacemakers between faiths. We pray for India as a whole: make this nation more open, where people may enjoy genuine freedom of faith, and where Sikhs may dwell securely in the land. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

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"REEL" INDIA

November 15 • Saturday

# Fallen from Divine Status

Hijra



Photo by Mgorten at English Wikipedia on Wikimedia Commons

A Hijra in Goa, India

One writer recalls that a childhood shadow was cast by the Bollywood film Sangharsh, in which the villainous “Hijra” (a transgender person) abducts children and sacrifices them to demons. For years, Bollywood often portrayed Hijras as predators or comic caricatures, reinforcing negative stereotypes in society.

In contrast, the 2024 film *Monkey Man*, directed by an Indian-born filmmaker, offered a different portrayal. In the story, Hijras—rejected by their families and society—form their own household community (gharana) in a temple. Far from being outcasts, they become a powerful and courageous force, playing a pivotal role in the hero’s struggle against evil.

Most Hijras are biologically male but live as women, wearing makeup and traditional Indian saris. The term Hijra comes from Indian epic tradition, where a eunuch servant of Rama (a deity in Hinduism) was honored for his loyalty. Within Hindu belief, Hijras are thought to carry powers of blessing and curse. But during British colonial rule, they were branded as criminals, and their once-honored status collapsed. Many were forced into begging or sex work to survive. Not until 2014 did the Indian government officially recognize their rights, providing protections in education, employment, and other spheres.

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*Heavenly Father, You see the Hijra community—their sorrow, their loneliness, and every tear they shed. With Your perfect love, draw them into Your embrace. May the Indian government faithfully enforce laws that protect their rights to education and employment, so they may use their gifts and talents to become a blessing in every sphere of society. Inspire more filmmakers and storytellers to depict their lives with honesty and dignity, helping the public grow in understanding and acceptance. Lord, prepare and raise up churches and believers in India with wisdom and compassion to serve among the Hijra, welcoming them into Your household. For those who have already come to Christ, grant courage and discernment amid every struggle and doubt. Teach them to recognize the gentle yet true voice of the Holy Spirit, and to walk faithfully with You each day. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

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# On the Path of Hope

Perna People



Seema was married at seventeen. Two years later, her husband became her pimp, and she entered prostitution as her family's main source of income. "I knew this would happen," she says quietly. "I do it to feed my family." Seema earns less than fifteen dollars a day—sometimes nothing at all. She works from midnight until six in the morning, then returns home to cook for her husband and children and to clean the house, snatching only a brief nap before heading out again. This endless cycle has long been the shared experience of Perna women across generations.

The Perna live in northern India and belong to one of the country's Denotified Tribes (DNTs)\*, groups that remain deeply marginalized in society. During British rule, the government outlawed traditional Perna occupations such as snake charming and juggling, labeling them "uncivilized." Deprived of their livelihood, Perna women turned to sex work to survive, while many men sank into unemployment, alcohol, and gambling. Within this social order, girls often marry young and are pushed into prostitution, losing any chance for education or independence—and their children often inherit the same fate.

Yet change has begun. Several NGOs now work among the Perna, and some girls have received scholarships that allow them to study. These young women, together with their mothers, are beginning to walk a new and different path in life.

\*Under British colonial rule, certain communities—including the Perna—were classified as "criminal tribes." Though that label has since been repealed, the stigma remains. Today, they are officially referred to as "Denotified Tribes" (DNTs).

*Heavenly Father, You know the Perna people, and they are deeply loved by You. We lift up the women trapped in sex work, who face violence, exploitation, sickness, and hunger as they struggle to survive. May Your perfect love and sufficient grace sustain them through each difficult day. Tear down the barriers of caste and class, and move churches in India to open their doors to Perna women—to wash their feet as Jesus did, to honor them, and to listen to their stories. Use the efforts of NGOs working in healthcare, counseling, and education, and raise up local Christians equipped to serve with skill and compassion. May their combined efforts help break the generational cycle of prostitution and lead the Perna people onto a new path of hope and freedom. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

# A Life in Salt

Agri People



Modern life depends on salt—and in India, an estimated 76% of it is produced by the Agri people. These workers, who have harvested salt for generations, migrate each year from October to June to the Thar Desert in northwestern India. There, under the scorching sun by day—reaching nearly 40°C—and in the biting cold by night, dropping to around 4°C, they labor in harsh conditions, living in makeshift huts along the salt flats.

In the past, a ton of salt painstakingly produced by Agri workers sold for just four U.S. dollars, while traders profited sixty times more. The government has since intervened, seeking to improve the workers' wages and living conditions.

Experts warn that the Agri's salt production relies heavily on groundwater, which could be depleted within the next twenty years if current practices continue. When that happens, the Agri—lacking alternative skills—will lose their only source of livelihood. The average lifespan of a salt worker is just sixty years; many suffer blindness caused by sunlight reflecting off the salt pans, and prolonged exposure to salt leads to severe skin diseases. In these remote regions, access to basic healthcare remains limited.

Thankfully, some have taken notice. The Agri Human Rights Movement (AHRM) serves over 6,000 Agri families, providing medical care, education, and vocational training while helping them access government subsidies. Through its efforts, AHRM continues to advocate for the dignity and rights of the Agri people.

*Heavenly Father, the Agri people have lived for generations in poverty, illness, and isolation, wandering from place to place in search of work. Yet we know You have never forgotten them. Raise up more organizations like the Agri Human Rights Movement to defend their rights and provide medical care, education, and training—helping them develop new livelihoods before the salt trade disappears. We pray that the church in India would also take part in serving the Agri, welcoming them with compassion and love so they might encounter the Savior. Send missionaries into the salt fields and humble dwellings, using creative and fitting ways to share the gospel of the cross, that the Agri people may come to know the hope found in Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, Amen.*

# Monotheism in Hinduism

Lingayats



Photo by Mankalmadhu on Wikimedia Commons

A Hijra in Goa, India

In the 8th century, India saw the rise of a major religious and social reform movement—the Bhakti Movement. Saints and poets across the land composed hymns in praise of Shiva, teaching that anyone—regardless of caste, gender, or social status—could directly worship God. Their message broke through rigid rituals and caste hierarchies, spreading from South India throughout the subcontinent. This movement disrupted the traditional order and attracted followers from all walks of life. It was in this context, in the 12th century, that reformer Basava founded the Lingayat tradition, putting the ideal of equality into practice.

Today, Lingayats come from various castes and form a large community concentrated mainly in South India, especially in Karnataka, where they make up about 17% of the state’s population. In polytheistic India, the Lingayats stand apart for their exclusive devotion to Shiva and their rejection of idol worship. Most followers wear a small linga pendant\* around their necks—a symbol of Shiva—to remind themselves to remain devout, believing that after death, they will be united with Him.

The Lingayats’ political influence has grown in recent years. They have actively sought greater access to education and employment opportunities and have petitioned the government to include them in the list of disadvantaged groups eligible for affirmative action. However, this move has sparked debate, as others question whether a community with established social standing should still receive special benefits.

\*The linga pendant is typically made of gold, silver, or copper and contains an oval stone representing Shiva’s creative and regenerative power.

*Heavenly Father, may the wind of Your Spirit breathe upon the Lingayat people. Turn their hearts from the belief that devotion can earn salvation, and lead them to receive the free gift of grace given through the cross of Jesus Christ. May they come to know You personally and walk in close fellowship with You all their days. Stir the church in India to be a vessel of Your truth—ready to serve the Lingayat community through love, intercession, and faithful witness. Grant the Lingayat believers wisdom and compassion, that they may act justly, love mercy, and use their influence not only to seek the good of their own people but also to care for those who are weak and oppressed. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*



# Festivals for Shiva

Kirar People



The Kirar, also known as the Dhakad (“fearless ones” or “those who face all things bravely”), are a community of over one million people primarily living in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. They are officially classified by the government as part of the Other Backward Classes (OBC)\*. Historically, the Kirar belonged to the Shudra caste and have been farmers for generations. They claim descent from Balarama, the agricultural guardian god and elder brother of Krishna, who is revered as a bringer of wisdom. According to legend, Balarama introduced farming tools, brought prosperity, and dug irrigation channels that revived orchards, farmlands, and forests.

In the village of Khedi in Madhya Pradesh, the Kirar form the second-largest community. They host a seven-day festival honoring Shiva, featuring dramatic performances of the Ramayana in the temple courtyard. Offerings of roasted corn, ghee, and barley oil are presented to Shiva, followed by a communal meal shared by the villagers. The Kirar also participate in local celebrations of Krishna Janmashtami, Krishna’s birthday festival. The community primarily speaks Hindi, and according to the Joshua Project, the Hindi Bible translation was completed in 2022.

\*“Other Backward Classes” (OBC) refers to groups officially recognized by the Indian government as socially and educationally disadvantaged, eligible for reserved quotas in public sector employment and higher education.

*Heavenly Father, You are the Lord who gives wisdom to steward the earth and causes all things to grow in their season. The Kirar have tilled the land for generations, looking to the god of agriculture for blessing, yet we know that You alone—the Creator of heaven and earth—are the true giver of land, rain, and harvest. May the Kirar come to know You as the source of all life and abundance through their farming and festivals. Holy Spirit, awaken in them a hunger for truth and draw them to the Lord Jesus Christ, the giver of life and hope. We pray especially for gospel work among the Kirar—that You would prepare missionaries with wisdom to reach them, and that the Hindi Bible and faith resources would clearly proclaim the good news of Your kingdom. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

# Brilliant in Black and White

Dusadh People



Photo by Shivangi Lokras on Wikimedia Commons

Godna tattoos

In India, the high-caste Brahmins have long monopolized the world of sacred art—vivid forms like Mithila painting, rich with color and mythology. By contrast, the Dusadh, a Dalit community, were historically barred from depicting mainstream Hindu deities. In response, Dusadh women cultivated their own distinctive art form: Godna, or black-and-white tattoo painting, portraying local deities, daily scenes, and the beauty of nature.

Originally a traditional tattoo practice, Godna took on a painful stigma under British colonial rule, when tattooing was used to mark criminals. This deepened the social prejudice already faced by Dalit communities. In recent years, however, the cultural and artistic value of Godna has begun to gain recognition. Vimla, a Dusadh artist, observes, “Once our paintings start to sell, people stop caring about caste or the label of ‘untouchable.’”

Yet challenges persist. Artist and researcher Rinku has revealed that while Godna is largely created by women, the art market and its profits remain dominated by men—leaving many female artists unaware of the true worth of their work. Even under the weight of caste, gender, and class oppression, Dusadh women continue to create—transforming Godna into a living expression of identity and cultural pride.

The Dusadh are concentrated in eastern India, numbering around seven million. They speak Hindi and are listed among India’s Scheduled Castes. Most are Hindus, with smaller numbers of Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists among them.

*Heavenly Father, You see the Dusadh people—those long marginalized and rejected—and yet You call them precious and honored in Your sight. With arms ever open, You wait to welcome them home. You are the Master Artist, the source of all beauty and creativity. May Dusadh women come to know You and recognize that their artistry is a gift from Your hand, cherished by You. Move governments, advocates, and professionals to defend their rights, that they might receive fair wages and continue to flourish in their creative calling. In a society divided by caste, may Indian Christians embody the compassion of Christ—crossing barriers through mercy, art, and service—to walk alongside the Dusadh and share the good news of Your redeeming love. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

# Papa, When Will You Come Home?

Gadaria People



“Every time I return home, my daughters cling to me, unwilling to let me leave again,” said one Gadaria shepherd, voicing the ache of separation familiar to many in his community.

In eastern India today, some Gadaria families still maintain a semi-nomadic lifestyle, herding sheep across distant grazing lands. Typically, only adult men travel with their flocks for months at a time, while their families remain in the village tending small farms.

One shepherd, who has tended flocks for more than thirty years since his youth, shared that because he never learned any other skills, he gradually came to see how his lack of education limited his opportunities—and even grew to regret it. Now, he places great importance on his children’s education. As more of the younger generation pursue schooling and take up other lines of work, the ancient tradition of herding is slowly fading away.

Beyond herding, Gadaria families also rely on the sale of wool for income. Yet as temperatures rise and demand for wool drops, sustaining a livelihood grows increasingly difficult.

The Gadaria derive their name from the ancient Hindi word gadar, meaning “sheep.” Traditionally a pastoral caste, they have long been sheep breeders and herders. Most are Hindus, and many wear amulets of Hanuman, the monkey god, for protection from danger while herding in remote regions.

*Heavenly Father, You are the Shepherd of the Gadaria, and they are Your beloved flock. As herders, they may grasp—if only dimly—the depth of Your love for each sheep: that You would leave the ninety-nine to search for the one who is lost. May they come to know this love through the rhythms of their daily labor. We lift up the next generation of Gadaria children. May education broaden their horizons and open doors for them to encounter the gospel and know Jesus Christ. As their traditional livelihood fades and their communities face hardship, grant the Indian government wisdom and compassion to provide effective vocational training and the support needed to sustain their families. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

# God's Craftsmen on Earth

Badhai People



The Badhai trace their origins to Vishwakarma, the divine architect and engineer of the Hindu pantheon. In Hindu mythology, Vishwakarma created the universe, building palaces, flying chariots, and weapons for the gods, and served as the master planner of cities. He had five sons—each an artisan devoted to serving the gods through creativity and craftsmanship. They vowed lifelong celibacy to preserve their spiritual power, yet were ultimately deceived by enemies through temptation, leading their family line to scatter and live among humans as craftsmen.

In ancient times, the Badhai were responsible for crafting idols and paintings of Hindu deities, as well as designing temple architecture. As the demand for traditional religious art has declined, most Badhai today work in engineering, carpentry, or construction.

Although the Badhai identify themselves as belonging to the Brahmin caste, society at large does not recognize this claim. Beyond their traditional roles in architecture and religious art, the Badhai community is also engaged in various crafts involving gold, silver, copper, iron, and stone. Across India, their population exceeds seven million—most are Hindus, with more than 600,000 Muslims and smaller numbers of Buddhists and Christians.

*Heavenly Father, You are the Creator who formed the Badhai with gifts of skill and creativity. May they come to know You—the true Master Craftsman who made them in Your image. Holy Spirit, reveal to the Badhai the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, that they may be reconciled to the Father and receive eternal life. Fill them with wisdom, knowledge, and understanding from You, as You did with Bezalel in Scripture, so that they may become holy vessels for Your purposes—creating works that reflect Your beauty and goodness. We also pray that You would raise up mature believers among them—mentors who can walk with the Badhai in their daily lives and workplaces, teaching them to follow and depend on You. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

# Grassroots Guardians of Ecology

Koli People



*Photo by Anonymous on Wikimedia Commons*

The Koli people make their home in India's Western Ghats, a region ranked eighth in the world for its biodiversity. In recent years, researchers have been amazed to discover that the Koli possess remarkable ecological insight—able to detect subtle shifts in plant growth cycles caused by climate change. Their observations provide real-time, localized data often missing from conventional monitoring systems, offering valuable information for global climate response. In addition, the Koli practice sustainable land use and have deep knowledge of medicinal plants, preserving traditional wisdom with genuine scientific worth. Scholars now advocate recognizing the Koli as a vital ecological asset and partnering with them in collaborative research.

Traditionally, the Koli have been both farmers and fishers, engaged in inland and deep-sea fishing. Long before the British arrived, they had already settled along the Mumbai coast, sustaining their communities for generations through small-scale, sustainable fishing practices. Yet as cities expanded and industrial fishing advanced, overfishing, bycatch\*, and habitat destruction have taken a heavy toll—depleting marine life and undermining the Kolis' livelihood.

This loss is more than economic; it has fractured a way of life that bound people to the sea—a relationship shaped by reverence for nature, attachment to the land, and the continuity of history and culture. The Koli long to take part in urban planning and to speak into policies that affect their future, yet their voices are too often ignored by the elites and bureaucrats who hold power.

\*Bycatch refers to the capture of non-target species, such as juvenile fish.

*Heavenly Father, we see Your goodness reflected in the Koli people—in their careful observation of nature and faithful stewardship of the sea. Thank You for the wisdom You have woven into their way of life. Guide partnerships between the Koli and researchers, that their generations of traditional knowledge may become a vital resource for humanity as we face climate change. We pray that Koli Christians would embrace their calling as caretakers of creation, living out the fragrance of Christ in harmony with the earth You made. May India's leaders act with reverence before You, managing marine resources wisely and listening to the Kolis' ecological wisdom in city planning. Lord, bring together government agencies, NGOs, and the Indian church to safeguard the Kolis' livelihood and culture through fair policies, training, and compassionate outreach. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

# Keepers of India's Sweet Traditions

Halwai People



Photo by Eric Parker on Wikimedia Commons

A store selling Halwai treats

For anyone with a sweet tooth, halwa is a familiar delight—a confection found across South Asia, the Middle East, West Asia, and North Africa. The dessert also lends its name to India's traditional community of confectioners, the Halwai. They are also known as the Kandu, and live primarily in western and northern India, with smaller communities in Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Historically, the Halwai held a special role in religious and social ceremonies, preparing sweets for weddings, funerals, and festivals. But in recent years, their craft has faced major challenges—rising ingredient costs, labor shortages, and insufficient technical training have made it harder to sustain traditional businesses. As a result, some Halwai have left their ancestral trade for work in other industries.

In Bihar, the Halwai are classified as an Extremely Backward Class (EBC). In recent years, they have organized gatherings to strengthen community identity and to petition for Scheduled Caste (SC) status, which would grant them greater access to government subsidies, parliamentary representation, and constitutional protections.

Most Halwai are Hindus, while a smaller number have converted to Sunni Islam, following the teachings of Islamic scholars. Some Muslim Halwai have even abandoned their caste-based surnames, adopting instead the names of their religious mentors—a symbolic step away from the caste system and toward a new spiritual identity.

*Heavenly Father, may the gospel satisfy the spiritual hunger of the Halwai people, that they may taste and see Your goodness. We pray for the government of Bihar—grant them wisdom and compassion to recognize and improve the conditions of the Halwai community. For those still working in the confectionery trade, we ask that You move government officials and professionals to establish training programs, knowledge-sharing platforms, and sound policies to help this traditional craft thrive again. And for Halwai who have transitioned into new professions, may they encounter Christians whose lives reflect Your love, and through their witness, be drawn to worship You at Your throne. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*



# Who Will Remove My Shame?

Ezhava People



*Photo by Hans A. Rosbach on Wikimedia Commons*

A scene from Kerala

The Ezhava people live mainly in the southern Indian state of Kerala, with a national population of about 8 million as of 2018. Once considered untouchables, the Ezhava endured generations of humiliation and discrimination. For instance, Ezhava women were forbidden to cover their chests, as wearing an upper garment was viewed as a privilege reserved for higher castes. Some Ezhava families sought freedom from caste oppression by converting to Christianity or Islam, yet India's deeply entrenched social hierarchy continued to marginalize them.

During British colonial rule, many Ezhava families found opportunities for advancement through new economic activities, including trade with the British East India Company, allowing them to accumulate wealth. The British, unconstrained by caste restrictions and in need of affordable labor, also employed Ezhava workers in the colonial bureaucracy. Around the same period, the Basel Mission<sup>\*</sup> arrived in India, establishing schools that provided the Ezhava access to education—a key turning point in their social mobility.

Today, some Ezhava have risen to prominence across various sectors, while others still struggle under the lingering shadow of caste discrimination. Though information about their current situation is limited, we can continue to pray for them with faith and hope.

<sup>\*</sup>A Protestant mission founded in Switzerland in 1815, the Basel Mission began overseas work in 1828 and entered India in 1834.

*Heavenly Father, the label of "untouchable" has long marked the Ezhava people with shame and pain. Yet You are the God who lifts the poor from the dust and raises the needy from the ash heap. Reveal Yourself to the Ezhava—that You are the defender of the oppressed and the Savior who delights to redeem. May they encounter Your love and find a new identity in You, boldly declaring that they are Your beloved children and heirs of Your glory. We also pray that You would raise up influential advocates to stand on their behalf, working to remove the stigma and inequality they have endured for generations. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

# Who Says I Am Lowly?

Jat People



Photo by Ministry of Defence on Wikimedia Commons

The Jats' long search for identity has been marked by both struggle and resilience. The name Jat itself carries connotations of "lowly" or "common," and for centuries they were classified among the lowest caste—the Shudras, despised by the Brahmins. During the British colonial period, many Jats gained wealth through farming and even joined the British Indian Army, yet they could not escape the stigma of being labeled "inferior" by the colonial rulers. Every attempt at progress seemed to meet the same verdict: they were still considered lesser.

Amid this social tension, the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement, emerged with a call to reject the caste system. The Jats seized this opportunity to reshape their image, boldly reclassifying themselves as Kshatriyas (the warrior caste). In the early 20th century, they began forming associations, founding schools, and publishing newspapers, gradually securing their place in India's economic, political, and social landscape.

Today, the Jats are concentrated in Punjab and Haryana, numbering around 12 million nationwide as of 2009. They include Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, and primarily speak Hindi and Punjabi—both of which have full Bible translations and digital Christian resources. In the past, ministries among Jat Sikhs sought to build bridges for the gospel through culturally familiar forms of fellowship, though little is known about their current state.

*Heavenly Father, the Jat people have carried generations of shame, striving to prove their worth and secure a place of belonging. May the Holy Spirit set them free to find true identity, value, and rest in Jesus Christ. Strengthen the small number of Jat believers to stand firm in their faith and become radiant witnesses among their families and communities. Provide them with sufficient spiritual nourishment and resources to grow in maturity. We pray that You would call and equip missionaries with divine wisdom and cultural understanding to reach Jat Hindus and Muslims, building bridges for the gospel. Remember also those laboring among Jat Sikhs—guard and sustain their ministry so that it may continue to flourish, bringing many Sikhs to know and follow Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

# The Professional Exorcists

Jogi People



A scene in Sikkim

The Jogi people live primarily in Sikkim and West Bengal. Locals in Sikkim say that visitors unfamiliar with the region might be startled by strange sounds at night—but there is no need for alarm. Those chants and incantations belong to the Jogi, who are often called upon after dark to use supernatural powers to free others from suffering. The Jogi believe that battling evil spirits is a sacred mission given by Shiva. When malevolent forces drive people into chaos and misfortune, they see it as their duty to intervene and protect the world from harm.

According to community elders, the Jogi once survived by begging and performing rituals, though many now work in a variety of professions. Still, they hold firm to their belief in the spirit world. While primarily Hindu, their faith blends elements of animism, shamanism, and Tantric mysticism\*. They also revere ancestral spirits, whom they believe bestow prosperity on the household. In many homes, a sacred space called a Kul is set apart to honor their ancestors through offerings and ritual prayers, seeking guidance and protection.

\*A mystical form of yoga that emerged in India in the 11th century.

*Heavenly Father, the Jogi long to deliver others from dark powers. In their search for victory over evil, may they come to see that Jesus Christ alone is the true Savior who conquered the enemy through His death and resurrection. You are the Lord who performs miracles; reveal Your glory among the Jogi and draw them to worship You—the one true God. We pray that You would raise up missionaries to reach the Jogi and that the Holy Spirit would go before them, displaying Your power and presence even in the unseen spiritual realm. Use the believers and churches in West Bengal, as well as Christians in every profession, to become good neighbors to the Jogi and to share the gospel of Christ with love and wisdom. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

# The Tension of Low-Caste Christian Identity

Nadar People



Most shops along the commercial streets of Tamil Nadu are owned by members of the Nadar community

The Nadar people, numbering over 3 million, live mainly in Tamil Nadu and Kerala in southern India. Traditionally, they cultivated palm trees, producing palm sugar and, in some cases, trading palm wine.

Historically, the Nadars belonged to the lowest Hindu caste—the Shudras. Although India has officially abolished the caste system, the mentality of social hierarchy continues to shape Nadar life—and even extends into the Indian church. While faith in Christ signifies new birth, old caste identities do not always disappear. Some believers still identify themselves as “Nadar Christians,” maintaining distinctions from other believers, and some pastors emphasize ethnic history and suffering more than the new identity and unity found in Christ.

From the 19th century onward, large numbers of Nadars came to faith—some drawn by the Holy Spirit, others seeking access to Christian education. Today, around 40% of the Nadar population are Christians, while most of the rest remain Hindu. Recently, the Kerala state government included Christian Nadars in the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category, granting them improved access to education and social development opportunities.

*Heavenly Father, we thank You for raising up many Christians among the Nadar people. Grant the Indian church rich spiritual resources so that believers may grow in understanding their true identity as Your children. Teach them to accept one another in love and to display the transforming power and unity of the gospel to the watching world. We also pray for Nadars who do not yet know You—may Christian neighbors bear witness to Christ with both love and truth, finding ways to connect the gospel with their people's history and pain. May many come to know You through this bridge of grace. Lord, we ask Your favor upon the government of Kerala. Give them wisdom and compassion as they design social policies that serve the needs of Christian communities and uplift their living conditions. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

# The Palanquin Bearers of the Past

Tahar People



Every profession has its own jargon—a language of precision and efficiency that allows workers to communicate smoothly, even if outsiders can barely make sense of it. The Kahar of India are a vivid example.

The name Kahar literally means “one who carries on the shoulder.” Traditionally, the Kahar were palanquin bearers, transporting Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas across India in an era when roads were poor and horseback travel difficult. Known for their straightforward nature, they developed a distinctive coded speech—marked by tonal shifts and clever wordplay—that only fellow Kahars could understand. This secret “occupational language” allowed them to coordinate while carrying passengers, talk about terrain and weather, and even share a few inside jokes at their riders’ expense—a small way to lighten the strain of their demanding labor.

Their work extended beyond carrying palanquins. The Kahar also served in high-caste households, assisting with domestic chores and religious rituals in exchange for food, clothing, gifts, or limited land rights.

Today, the Kahars—composed of multiple castes and ethnic subgroups—are a diverse and multi-faith community, including Hindus, Sunni Muslims, and Sikhs. They number over 10 million, primarily in northern India. The days of palanquin bearing are long gone; most Kahars now work as farmers or daily wage laborers, earning a living one day at a time.

*Heavenly Father, though the Kahar’s work as palanquin bearers has long passed into history, You have never forgotten them. Among India’s vast population, You know where each of Your beloved children dwells. May the gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit become a sacred language shared only between You and the Kahar—calling them to lay down every burden and bow before the living God. Lord, send missionaries to live among them, to proclaim Your truth with wisdom and grace, that Your Word may illuminate their hearts and open their eyes to see that You alone are their true rest and eternal home. Bless the Kahar as they labor in the fields; may they come to know You as the Creator who sustains the earth and gives life to all things. For those struggling with the uncertainty of daily wages, grant them faith to trust in Your generous provision. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

# Scribes and Epicures

Kayastha People



In a culture where vegetarianism is often celebrated as a Hindu ideal, the Kayastha people are famously known for their love of meat. Influenced by the Muslim Mughals, under whom many of them served, they developed a deep appreciation for mutton dishes—so much so that they are sometimes jokingly called “the Muslims among Hindus.” Historically, Kayasthas were scribes and administrators fluent in Persian, serving in Mughal courts. They were also known for their refined taste and culinary passion, with their rich meat recipes still cherished today.

While Kayastha men are known for their hearty appetites, Kayastha women, often vegetarian themselves, are renowned for their ability to prepare exquisite non-vegetarian meals for their families.

The Kayasthas traditionally do not belong to any of the four main Hindu castes. They trace their lineage to Chitrugupta, the divine scribe of the underworld (Yamlok) in Hindu mythology. According to legend, after Brahma created the four castes, he brought forth Chitrugupta from his navel, giving him a pen and ink to record the deeds of humankind as the basis for judgment after death.

In modern India, the Kayasthas are often regarded as a highly educated, professional class, contributing to Persian, Urdu, and Hindi literature. They live across India, Pakistan, and Nepal, with minorities among them embracing Islam, Buddhism, or Christianity.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for blessing the Kayastha people with refined palates and creative minds, and for weaving their love of food and artistry into the fabric of their culture. We ask that You not only satisfy their appetite for good things, but also stir within them a deeper hunger for truth—a desire to know You, the Creator and generous Provider of every gift. May they encounter followers of Christ in their workplaces who reflect Your love and hope, and through them come to see that reconciliation with You is the greatest treasure of all. Lord, as the Kayasthas once served as scribes and mediators between rulers and the people, set apart their gifts of communication and wisdom for Your purpose. May they become vessels of peace, truth, and the gospel, bringing transformation and renewal to Indian society. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*



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