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insight

A Journal for International Student Ministry in the UK

Holistic Care for International Students

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We welcome your comments and responses to the articles featured in this edition of *Insight*. Please address all correspondence to: **insight@friendsinternational.org.uk**

a word from the editor

The few moments of quiet in the early evening gave me time to reflect on the Bible study with my Vietnamese student friend which had just ended. A very new Christian, she had been describing the ways in which her perception of self, family and her role in the wider world had been transformed since she had become a believer. "I realise now that Jesus wants me to see deeply, to care deeply, even more than before, for my family and friends, for people who need His love! It's so much bigger than just me and what I believe. That's so exciting!"

Her simple words sum up in a nutshell how international student ministry must always be holistic in nature. We long to see our international student friends come to know and believe the good news of Jesus Christ, of course; but we do so in the midst of Christian community, getting to know individuals in the entirety of who they are (including their family members!), seeking to understand their dreams, hopes, wishes, fears, so that we might share the love of a God who seeks and saves the lost. We do so through all possible means – whether spiritual, emotional, practical or, in some cases, psychological.

As Henri Nouwen reminds us, "In our world full of strangers, estranged from their own past, culture and country, from their neighbours, friends and family, from their deepest self and their God, we witness a painful search for a hospitable place where life can be lived without fear and where community can be found… it is possible for men and women, and obligatory for Christians to offer an open and hospitable space where strangers can cast off their strangeness and become our fellow human beings."[1]

I hope that this issue of *Insight* will encourage us to look more deeply at some rarely discussed, yet very real and urgent, pastoral needs which international students face. I am deeply grateful to Kumar Rajagopalan for writing on key issues which we must take to heart if we are to disciple converts from other faith backgrounds well. Sharing from his own journey of faith from Hinduism to Christianity, his article describes how discipleship for new believers turning from other faiths will include many difficult decisions, while urging compassion and pastoral care for parents bewildered and hurt at their child's conversion.

When Ruth Farquhar emailed in the early summer asking our staff about their experiences in helping international students with financial needs, she little realised where the ensuing research would lead! In the resulting article she looks beyond the common portrayal of wealthy students spending their parents' cash on gadgets and travel, and highlights the plight of those who find themselves, sometimes unwittingly, in situations of poverty and economic hardship.

Finally, Bekah Callow rounds off this issue by examining pastoral care through a cross-cultural lens, describing some of the reasons why identifying and accessing help for pastoral concerns might be more tricky and sensitive across the different cultures than we realise.

May the presence of our Lord Jesus in our own lives continue to help us to bring His light, life and wholeness to every student we encounter and draw into community.

In Christ,
Lynette

1. Nouwen, H.J.M., Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life, HarperCollins, London, 1976, p63.

Pastoral Care and Discipleship of Converts from Hinduism and Other Faiths

By Kumar Rajagopalan

Introduction

As we share the Gospel, we are prayerfully expectant that the hearer will accept Christ as their Saviour and Lord. When this occurs it is undoubtedly a moment of joy for the new believer, the one who shares and the angelic host in Heaven. Yet for some new Christians, it can also be a moment of profound anxiety and fear, and this is particularly the case when they have left another faith to follow Christ.

It is therefore important to consider how we offer pastoral care and discipleship for those who embrace Christ from other faiths. Whilst the observations and suggestions in this article arise from my own experience of accepting Christ from a Hindu background, they are transferable to those seeking and embracing Christ from other faith backgrounds.

Understanding the background of Hindu international students

Most, if not all, Hindu international students will come from India. Whilst some may receive scholarships, for most their family will be paying their tuition fees and living costs. In all circumstances there will be a very high expectation that the returnee will secure a well-paid job to support the immediate and wider family. There is also the possibility that the family will have made marriage arrangements for the returnee.

Therefore, as an individual explores and contemplates following Christ, they will be acutely aware of the hopes and expectations of their family and the considerable ramifications for themselves of embracing Christ.

Given these circumstances, what emotions will a new believer feel? Initially there will be elation and joy when they embrace the Lord and receive the Holy Spirit. The love and warmth of the Christian community will make them feel very special and deeply valued. But very soon, if not immediately, their thoughts will turn to their family. The care and discipleship training that is offered must nurture and equip the believer to develop and grow in their faith, but additionally they must also be given the tools to care for, support, and be an effective witness to their family. This calls for holistic pastoral care and discipleship. What does that look like?

Holistic pastoral care and discipleship

The Christian community may need to become a new believer's only family if their family disowns them. Whilst others might not be disowned, their new faith will cause considerable tensions and problems within the family. Since they will face innumerable known and unknown challenges, it is of vital importance that those who are seeking to pastor and disciple new believers can:

1. *Prayerfully advise and discern how and when the new believer should inform their family of their decision to follow Christ.*

This will be a difficult and painful conversation, and in prayer with the new believer you will need to help them decide various aspects of this.

When should they inform their family? Should they be informed soon after coming to faith, whilst still in the UK? Should they tell them in person when they return home? If this takes place during their course, would their family prevent them from returning to complete their course?

Who will they first tell? Both parents, one parent, a sibling, a close family friend? How will they do this? Should they do so by letter, phone or Skype call before they return? Unless considered suitable it is best not to inform them by e-mail.

In the midst of a considerable number of uncertainties, do pray that the Lord would go ahead and prepare their family to hear the news.

2. *Teach them to pray and study God's Word.*

The ability to study and learn from God's Word and to deepen one's relationship with God, are essential for the new believer, particularly as they may be cut off from the Christian community. Provide them with a wide range of methods to study God's word, such as journaling, *Lectio Divina*[1], study notes and online resources.

Encourage them to develop in their prayer life using different techniques such as Ignatian *Examen*, the Jesus prayer, the Lord's Prayer and

1. The ancient Benedictine practice of learning to hear God speak by engaging with Scripture using four main steps: reading, meditation, prayer, contemplation.

include the discipline of learning to hear the Lord's voice.

Some of these methods may resonate with Hindu spirituality; encourage them to see such things as helpful in overturning the belief that Christianity is alien to Asian spirituality and is a useful bridge to share the gospel.

3. *Train them to be pastors to their family and community.*

If a young adult from a Christian family became a Hindu or Muslim, their family would be deeply hurt. It is no different for any family of another faith when their son/daughter becomes a Christian. Whilst the Christian family may turn to their pastor and the Christian community for support, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs may not tell anyone because of the shame and dishonour that it would bring on the family.

Therefore while they will be deeply hurt, they will suffer in silence. The new believer needs to learn that the family's reactions, except when physically violent, are understandable. It is imperative that the anticipated response does not cause us to demonise their unsaved family and make them into enemies in the eyes of the new believer.

Ask the new believer about the key concerns that they have for their parents and family and commit these things to God in prayer. Encourage and train them to show concern for their family's needs and to think of how to alleviate some of their turmoil, when they return home.

Emphasise the biblical truth that their family members are made in the image of God, deeply loved by God and need their love and support at a difficult time.

The new believer is the one person who can demonstrate the love of God to their families, so equip them to do so.

4. *Encourage new believers to be incarnational.*

If a returnee is allowed to attend church when they return home, they need to ensure that they are not drawn into a Christian bubble, which cuts them off from all family and community activity. This is especially so if they begin to face difficulties at home; it is surprisingly easy to turn them into aliens and foreigners in their own culture, and actually blunt their ability to share the gospel.

Before they return, it would be helpful to prayerfully consider the following aspects:

Should they take part in family activities?

In the Hindu world so many family activities have religious elements that it can be quite hard to know what to do and what not to do. The following questions need to be explored with a new believer:

- In what activities were you involved before?
- What was your understanding of these activities and what is it now?
- How could you either refuse to be involved, or how could you find an acceptable compromise?

Some families may not want the person to take part because they have become defiled through conversion. Others will want continued involvement to present the right image to the outside world.

Should they attend the temple?

This really depends on the individual. It is important to make an effort to get to know the new believer in order to discern and advise what is appropriate for them and their family. In my opinion, unless there is a threat to one's physical wellbeing, a new believer should not totally stop participating in family activities including temple attendance. There is, however, a balance to be struck as highlighted by the following questions:

- If you attend having told your family that you are a Christian, then what message does that give?
- If you never attend then what message does that give to one's family and community?

Some parents and family will definitely want the returnee to attend the temple to offer prayers for successful completion of their course and safe return to India.

One new believer cut himself off from all family activities including temple attendance and would not eat any of the offerings (*prasad*) they brought

back from the temple. His brother challenged him, saying: "Mum and Dad love you unconditionally. We know you are not going to give up your Christian faith. When they give you *prasad* they are expressing love and seeking to bless you in the only way they know. When you refuse, you think you are standing up for your faith, but in reality you are trampling all over their love."

The young man reflected on this and in the light of 1 Corinthians 8, began to eat the offerings that he was given.

After many years, he ventured into the temple for his father's 70th birthday celebration and even took part in a small way. His father was delighted that he attended. Before this he had shared the gospel with his father once, but since then he has had innumerable opportunities to share with his parents and pray for them.

Each individual needs to find what is right for them, conscious that it may change with time and personal and family circumstances.

5. *Permit new believers to express doubt, and to ask difficult or 'heretical' questions.*

It is inevitable that questions will arise in the new believer's mind, some of which will be difficult for established believers to understand and answer. It is important to listen, seek to understand, and try to answer their questions. Critically, do not question the veracity of their faith because they ask difficult questions.

When I asked questions regarding the exclusive claims of Christ, those I spoke to were unable to help me because they had never questioned it themselves. I had to wrestle through my questions on my own, but would have valued someone with a non-judgmental attitude who was willing to prayerfully walk with me as I struggled and eventually came to my own understanding regarding the uniqueness of Christ.

6. *Teach believers from Hindu backgrounds to study Scripture in order to affirm and critique their culture.*

When I embraced Christ, I was called a 'coconut', brown on the outside but white on the inside, because I had embraced the 'white man's religion'. I struggled with two conflicting factors. I wanted to be an Indian follower of Christ, but the message of the Church suggested that I did have to become a 'coconut' to follow Christ. This was done in two ways.

First, there was a drip, drip negativity towards other cultures. Some of the unhelpful things I heard as an Indian and ex-Hindu included:

- The need to convert the idolatrous Hindus.
- Criticism of arranged marriages and strong extended family.
- Whenever the Two-thirds World, including India, featured in intercessory prayer, it was always about their woes and needs.
- Unqualified praise of the missionary endeavours and achievements of the great men and women of God who had gone out to darkest Africa and Asia.
- Disparaging remarks about South Indian classical music, because it was based on Hindu worship and insulted as 'squeaky bongo.'

Conversely, I heard positive statements about Western culture.

- At the University Christian Union I heard praise of Western classical music, though some of the composers led lifestyles contrary to the gospel.
- The emphasis on personal faith and relationship with God led to an affirmation of individual freedom and choice, over and above community loyalty.
- Similarly, the nuclear family was hailed as being both Western and Christian.
- The benign civilising influence of the Christian West on the rest of the world. Certain mission organisations still display a patronising colonial mentality.

I was thus hearing a negative portrayal of my culture, which was considered to be "un-Christian", in contrast with a positive portrayal of Western culture, considered to be "Christian". For those

embracing Christ, such portrayals and stereotypes cause a dilemma as they are faced with having to jettison their culture and embrace white Western culture, *i.e. become coconuts.*

Yet the truth is that no one culture is more biblical than another. In every culture there is both good and bad. What we need to do is to allow the Bible to evaluate different aspects of our culture, and either affirm or reject those aspects. Sometimes we will discover that the Bible has nothing to say about an aspect of culture and we need to exercise biblical common sense.
Not only did the Church not provide me with any tools to explore my identity as an Indian Christian, it also did not appear to critically evaluate society or itself in the light of Scripture.

Critiquing our culture: a helpful exercise
Whilst attending an Asian Christian support group for former Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs, we spent several months looking at what the Bible had to say about aspects of our culture.

We discovered some deeply positive aspects within our culture:

- An emphasis on community rather than the individual, including a community of faith. (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4)
- Respect for authority and leadership. (Hebrews 13: 17)
- Respect and care for the elderly by the family. (1 Timothy 5: 4)
- High regard and support for the immediate and extended family. (1 Timothy 5: 8)
- Great emphasis on sacrificial hospitality. (Genesis 18; Hebrews 13: 2)
- Emphasis on hard work. (2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13)
- No secular / sacred divide. (1 Corinthians 8:6)
- Strong moral values. (Ephesians 4: 25-32)

We were pleasantly surprised and greatly encouraged to discover that the Bible affirms many aspects of our culture. But I had never heard about these positive Asian/Indian values in any sermon or teaching.

If a person embracing Christ from another faith/ cultural background doesn't hear the positive facets of his or her culture, they will quickly begin to feel that their new faith teaches a completely different set of cultural values.

In our Asian Christian support group, we were also honest about the errors and shortcomings that the Bible drew attention to in our culture:

- There is a very unhealthy emphasis on honour, particularly family honour within Asian culture.
- Whilst consumerism and affluence are global phenomena, there is a greater critique of it in the West, than within Asian culture.
- The idolatrous pursuit of success, status and fame are ungodly and unhealthy.

In the Indian context other issues may include:

- How to deal with corruption and bribes.
- How to address nepotism.

This exercise helped me and other Asian Christians to affirm and critique aspects of our culture, from a biblical perspective. Consequently when sharing the faith with Asians, and Hindus in particular, I can draw attention to biblical aspects of their culture and reassure them that becoming a Christian does not mean one has to fully accept Western ways.

To demonstrate credibility as you teach these things, consider and share how the Bible affirms and critiques aspects of your culture.

New believers must be taught how to critique their culture from a biblical perspective, and abandon ungodly practices, just as Westerners and those of other cultures should learn how to critique their culture from a biblical perspective.

7. E*ncourage them to develop and sustain an Indian spirituality.*

Steps to do so should include:

- Encouraging them to pray in their mother tongue.
- Obtaining and encouraging them to read the Bible in their mother tongue.
- Encouraging them to read non-Western Christian authors.
- Introducing them to 'Hindu'/Indian style Christian worship.

8. Be aware of the spiritual opposition they will face.

Spiritual opposition is a reality before and as you share the Gospel, as they hear the Word, embrace Christ and on through their lives. There is a need for wise and sensitive preparation to face this.

These issues can only be addressed through prayer and obedience to God's word.

- Fear will be a critical issue. There will be fear of parents, siblings, wider family, friends and community. The enemy will use fear to undermine new believers, both in their exploration of the faith and their walk with God.
- Emotional blackmail might be used. The new believer may be told that their faith is driving their parents and others to an early grave or that it jeopardises the marriage prospects of their siblings.
- Attempts may be made to undermine the strength of their character. For example, they may be told that they lacked the mental and emotional strength to resist Christian pressure to convert.
- New believers need to be helped to prayerfully discern what their boundaries should be. When visiting the temple, I never bow or fall prostrate in front of any of the idols. In one temple there used to be a room dedicated to the Sai Baba cult, which I always avoided.
- Pray for release from past practices. Ask about and pray through anything from their past Hindu life they discern is a hindrance or is a spiritual block in their walk with God.
- There is a need to equip all new believers to exercise discernment regarding spiritually dangerous situations. For example, on certain occasions it might be appropriate to eat foods from the temple. But it would not be appropriate for Christians to accept offerings from the death anniversary of relatives, for example, as these have strong connotations of fear and reverence for departed spirits.

Conclusion

As you seek to pastor, support and disciple believers from Hindu and other faith backgrounds, it is thus vital to do so:

- In order that they can reach and support their own community. It will not be easy for them, but discipleship is always costly.
- To enable them to develop a spirituality that resonates with their culture. Some Indian churches can support such efforts.
- To prepare them for spiritual opposition, without frightening them. "He who is in you is greater than he that is in the world." (1 John 4:4)

Gandhi, the father of Indian independence, is reported to have said, "If Christians had come to India with the Spirit of Christ, Hinduism would no longer exist." It was a stinging critique because he was saying that the Christians arriving in India lacked such an attitude. This is challenging, because it begs the question whether we will now go with a Christ-like attitude to share the Gospel with Hindus.

With the Spirit of Christ, let's prayerfully love and serve international students studying in Britain, that through the Holy Spirit's conviction they may embrace Christ as their Saviour and Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

Poverty Among International Students: The Hidden Challenges

By Ruth Farquhar

Not long ago we were discussing the cost of taking students on a weekend away, asking ourselves how much international students could afford. After all, we reasoned, we usually meet wealthy students with money for extras, such as completing their stay with a tour of Europe.

This was not always the case, however. In the past, committed Chinese scholars made great sacrifices to study here. Now we are familiar with the young undergraduate with all the resources of a wealthy family poured into their education.

While international students may not typically be described as "living in poverty", we have over the years encountered students struggling to make ends meet in one form or another. This article seeks to identify some of these groups and suggests some of the ways in which international student workers and local Christians might be of assistance.

The resourceful family

The wealthy young international undergrad is now a familiar sight on British campuses, brandishing the latest technology and clothed entirely in designer fashion. But occasionally we still find mature students operating independently, and supporting a family. Students who are breadwinners may struggle, particularly if they have brought the family with them. In particular, those with families may find the cost of living here or the cost of supporting a family at home a great strain, having given up their regular income to study.

A Chinese academic left his job as a University lecturer to study for a PhD, bringing his wife and children with him. His wife's poor English meant she couldn't easily obtain employment.. To keep living costs as low as possible, they moved from University accommodation to a cheaper flat with a dangerously rotten floor. They kept windows open to reduce condensation but couldn't afford to use the heating. The children made their own toys using origami, finger knitting, and discarded packaging. They shopped in the cheapest supermarkets and wholesalers, and made delicious meals from cheap vegetables, outdated food and things that others threw away.

How did we help? We shared economical recipes. We provided English conversation for the wife and proof-read her job applications. We invited them for meals, shared fruit from our own gardens and passed on good second-hand furniture, clothes and toys, introducing the children to low-cost church activities. None of this changed the economic problems of the family, but meant that they were occasionally less hungry. The sacrifices the family made benefitted the eldest daughter educationally and the PhD advanced this student's university career. He can now publish his work in English as well as Chinese.

The lone ranger

Many students these days come with the resources of their family or company sponsorship behind them. In contrast, students operating alone - 'mavericks' who do things their own way - may have no community and little funding behind them. These people have imaginatively seized a good opportunity without realising the cost until they are in dire need.

A Muslim-background Christian minister realised that in his African country, Islam was in the ascendency, but Christians were still free to express their faith and share their beliefs with Muslim people. Sensing a window of opportunity to reach Muslims, he accepted a scholarship to come to Dundee alone to study Islam, giving up paid work as a minister. Even his wife's family and his new church community were suspicious of his motives. His plan was to live cheaply and send money home to support his family, but financial estimations were difficult to make from overseas. The

scholarship proved inadequate to pay his rent for a small flat, to buy food or pay for heating through a long cold winter. With insufficient money to send home even for his son's school fees, his family had to move back to his wife's parents' home. Eventually, a local Christian family who rent out rooms took him in, sacrificing part of their income. When he returned home, the church placed him in a remote village where the family had to walk miles for water and had to begin by building their own home. He has since written encouragingly of the work in the church.

We meet a few students who have gone against the wishes of their family in their choice of subject, and attempt to live without family support. Sometimes, families try to influence their children's choices by withholding funds. Functioning outside a supportive network, such students also face difficulty.

Loss of funding partway through a course

Sometimes, in unusual circumstances, funding fails altogether. During the Libyan civil war, before the overthrow of Gaddafi, many Libyans found much-needed money had not arrived. There continue to be many countries in crisis today, and students are no longer arriving in the same numbers from these countries. Those already here may face a serious drop in income.

All of the PhD students in one college found mid-way that their funding had been withdrawn. Most returned home, but two remained. Local families contributed as much as they could, but the students were still faced with uncertainty and needed to live cheaply. There was intense pressure to complete their work quickly, yet the setbacks that occur in PhD projects afflicted them too. Anything Christian friends have done to help has been too little and any enquiries made on their behalf have been fruitless.

In this situation, all that we have been able to offer these students is friendship and the love of Christ Jesus. Like Peter and John at the temple gate, we are not able to meet the financial needs of our friends. We have had many opportunities, though, to share our faith with them.

When the cost of living has been underestimated

We are sometimes surprised when students from wealthy countries are not well funded. Two students who have made their needs known to us recently have been from a very wealthy European country but they had no family funding. It would also be fair to say that some students from European countries may originate from poorer parts of the world.

When Poland and Hungary joined the EU some years ago, large numbers of Polish and Hungarian students came to Scotland, tempted by free tuition, without realising the high cost of living. The snacks at our International Café were much appreciated by hungry students, to the extent that a Polish student cried when she saw someone throwing away surplus food at the end of the Café. In the weeks following, our café manager bought toasters and there was always a large pile of toast at each table so students could fill themselves up. At the end of every café the students were given any surplus food. We still keep food bags in the Café and give spare food to the students as they leave. Most students accept, so there is no embarrassment.

Other ways of helping those on a tight budget include a tour of second-hand shops or collecting household goods from departing students to give to new arrivals. These days, people coming from Europe are more aware of costs before they come. In any case, the recent recession has caused many to change their study plans, whether in their own country or abroad.

Help in setting budgets

UK immigration policy is intended to ensure that international students can fully pay their fees and support themselves without access to public funds. Before students come to the UK, this policy information is available to them from a number of sources[1]. Before international students are granted, a visa they must demonstrate that they have sufficient funds to support themselves.

Data on international and EU student poverty is elusive. Perhaps the climate of mistrust about people "coming into the country and draining our resources" disinclines universities and policy makers from speaking about the problem.

With little information available, it is important that we build close relationships with our international friends so that we are able to listen well, hear what is important to them and walk alongside them through any problems they face.

One very practical way to help is to offer assistance with budgeting. While information

1. Information available before students come to the UK:
- www.gov.uk/tier-4-general-visa
- www.ukcisa.org.uk/International-Students/Preparing--planning/Money-scholarships-cost-of-living/
- www.britishcouncil.org/learning-funding-your-studies.htm
- www.educationuk.org/global/articles/scholarships-financial-support/
- www.ukcisa.org.uk/International-Students/Study-work--more/Working-during-your-studies/

about budgeting can be found on the university website, many students think they can find cheaper accommodation, imagine that by prudent shopping and by cooking for themselves they can eat cheaply, and dismiss the part of the budget for social activities.

Another common error is to underestimate heating costs. Students might rent a private flat cheaply, not realising that the University rent looks expensive because it includes heating costs. But the cost of heating an old, poorly insulated flat, with single glazing and inefficient heaters, can run to hundreds of pounds. In addition, students from warmer or drier climates do n̲o̲'t know the signs that indicate a flat will be expensive to heat and many make costly mistakes. We make a habit of listening to conversations about accommodation plans and make sure students are well-informed about the hidden costs which they might not be aware of.

Some face bills they could never anticipate. Two Finnish students faced a large bill for Council Tax left unpaid by a wage-earning flatmate. An African girl with a sense of community responsibility lent a large sum of money to another student which he never repaid and could not pay for her accommodation. Sadly, none of these students intended to profit from or rely on others, but found themselves in difficulty.

The fact is, even students who have budgeted carefully can still be caught out. Local knowledge such as that offered by local churches and Christians can greatly help students living on a budget. It is thus a good idea to cultivate an atmosphere at international student gatherings in which students can feel free to talk about their plans and about daily living.

Health issues

We have encountered students for whom health issues, sometimes mental health issues, have meant they were unable to manage time and finances well. Some students are stressed by combining paid employment with study. Often they are unable to recognise the problem or take action. They may not realise they need to cut down their hours at work, take a break from their studies or return home. Anxiety over work and finance, combined with anxiety over studies, can quickly become an overwhelming burden. Sadly, while some seek advice, others disappear without the help they need. Apart from offering prayer, friendship and support, which are of great value, one of our roles has been to point students to those in the University and health service who can help.

When speaking with students who have financial needs, we thus need to consider whether other fundamental problems lie behind the money shortage. Broken family relationships, overwork, stress, tiredness and mental health issues can lead to poverty, and we may often find that we cannot solve all of these problems ourselves.

Cultural attitudes to giving and receiving

With all that has been suggested above, it is important to understand what goes on in the mind of a student when we offer help if we are to do so in appropriate ways. This includes being aware of:

1. Suspicion of hidden motives or manipulation

An Indian doctor decided not to come to the International Café, thinking that there would be a catch. He wrote, "When I heard about the Café, I knew either you would want money or you would be trying to convert me, so I didn't come. At Christmas I heard what you had done for my friends so I decided to come. Now I know that you didn't want money and you were not trying to convert me." For him it was important that there were no hidden motives.

An Indian lawyer told us, "When missionaries came to India they offered people health, wealth and education. The people were poor so they accepted this. When the doctors made people well using science and medicine, the people believed God had made them well by a miracle so they believed in God." This friend doesn't believe in God, so he thinks the people were unintentionally deceived. For him, it is important that we don't

manipulate people. He is also conscious of false motives on the part of the recipient, coming to God for what they can get. His remarks do a disservice to the genuine people who served as missionaries but give an insight into the way people view Christian mission.

2. Poor understandings of suffering and servanthood in the Christian life

A student arrived in Dundee as a new Christian. She believed that "everything will go well for me now I follow Jesus" and was unprepared for suffering and need. She has since gained a biblical understanding of what it is to follow Jesus, but at one time she may have expected that God would give her all that she asked for. There are Christians who have no expectation of facing want as they follow Jesus.

Sometimes we encounter students who are used to living with servants. Other students become demanding because of anxiety or a sense of inadequacy. We need to balance living and modelling the Christ-like life of a servant while encouraging the students to live responsibly.

3. The appearance of wealth when there is little to spend

"All my family gave me money to come here." Sometimes families have given generously to enable a student to come. The student is under pressure to do well academically and use the money wisely. They may owe a huge debt to family members. Occasionally this simply means that relatives have maintained a high level of funding in the student's bank account to convince UK immigration that the student has adequate funding. They are not expecting the student to use the money, and the student may thus have plenty of funds in hand but little to spend. These complex arrangements affect the student's daily life. To us, some arrangements seem unusual and contrived. We don't understand why students have walked into a trap but, for them, it may be the way things are always done. Thinking cross-culturally, these interlinked arrangements are typical of the normal way society functions. It would probably surprise the students to learn that anyone does things differently!

Each of these attitudes and examples demonstrate that behind the scenes, things are happening that we may never understand. Perhaps generosity is best expressed when we build a close friendship so that the students can share with us some of the underlying issues.

Who helps those who are in financial difficulty?

Universities have very helpful international advisors, counsellors and financial advisors, and these are identified on university websites, along with information about bursaries and hardship funds. University Chaplains help readily and can occasionally use discretionary funds.

As we help international students, we need to remember the advice of University advisory staff is an important resource. University staff tend to be realistic and objective. They know employment and visa regulations accurately. This doesn't mean that they can provide for students who are in impossible situations where the sums will never add up, but it is certainly helpful when we know and trust University staff.

So what is our role?

What we have learnt in all these situations is that the giving of time, local knowledge and an understanding of the system and who to contact are all invaluable. Yet having received the best help, students still need friendship. For many, their problems persist, but we may bring encouragement or perspective. The simple question, "Can I pray for you?" may lead to unexpected blessing and the joy of answered prayer.

We work to build a strong, caring, praying community. People regularly meet, eat together, invite students home, listen to one another's needs, pray and share the Gospel. We find Christian international students within the community also naturally, serve and care for other international students.

Both wealthy and poor students find friends; the hungry student is fed; the anxious student is heard; the homeless student may find a home; the student living in the cold has a warm home to visit. This is the kind of community Jesus taught us: God's Kingdom.[2] In such a community, Jesus' disciples love one another and also extend that love to others. Poverty is not addressed on its own in some sort of welfare scheme. Instead,as friends, we relate to the whole person, "sharing not only the whole Gospel of God but our lives as well."[3]

2. Matthew 25:35–40, Luke 4:18-19, Luke 6:36-38, Mark 12:31, John 13:34-35
3. 1 Thessalonians 2:1-9

Lifting the Lid on Pastoral Care for International Students

By Bekah Callow

The hidden problem

International student ministry is full of variety, from cultural activities and Bible studies, to trips and sharing cups of coffee with students. However, there also exists a sometimes overlooked challenge of how best to identify and care for those students who, whilst studying in the UK, struggle with a range of problems, from common anxieties to specific mental health issues. Training and equipping in both cross-cultural awareness, and the more specific knowledge-base required to recognise mental health issues, are growing areas of need.

With the rise of e-communication, ease of travel and a growing multicultural society in Britain, the number of students coming from overseas to study in UK has risen. Perhaps as tuition fees increase for British students, universities are seeking to fill places with international students who pay higher fees and bring cultural diversity and hence a better international academic profile.

Many of these international students come to study on postgraduate courses, often one-year Masters courses. An already overstretched system responding to the needs of British students means that some internationals who are really struggling fall through the cracks and struggle on alone.

As anyone who has lived overseas will understand, living in another culture is hard work. Although it comes with lots of opportunities and adventures, there is almost always a time when the "honeymoon period" wears off and reality kicks in. When a person moves to another country, it is possible to move through this difficult patch to establish a new home, a new "norm" and new foundations to work from. For the international student however, their new reality is neither their old home nor is it yet their new home. Many will never make the UK their "home" and have to struggle with high levels of pressure to succeed in their studies, often isolated from both peers and local community, before returning to their home country where they then struggle to readjust.

The challenges that international students face include many of the same issues as British students: pressure to succeed; learning to live outside the family home for the first time, including managing money, shopping and cooking for themselves; studying a new subject; and finding ways to manage unfamiliar social situations. Additional challenges that international students face may include the need to learn a new language, a new culture, new money and new systems. Academic pressure, loneliness, homesickness, isolation from British course-mates, and not wanting to let family down (many of whom have saved up for this opportunity for their child) often lead to higher stress levels as well as ill health and, in some, growing struggles with their mental health and wellbeing.

One size doesn't fit all

Of course, GP practices and University counselling services are available to all students, but international students may not be aware that these services are available to them. Additionally, they may be put off by the thought that they might need to pay and, perhaps more fundamentally, many would not necessarily think of using these services.

Cultures around the world approach emotional struggles and mental health issues in different ways. It is tempting to apply a Western model of counselling and mental wellbeing to all people and cultures, when some would not feel it appropriate to use this model as a starting point. Emmanuel Lartey writes in his book, *In Living Color*:

"…questions have been raised about the appropriateness of counselling as a model for pastoral care in societies that do not share some of the major anthropological assumptions of Western culture."[1]

1. Lartey, E.Y., *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counselling (2nd ed.),* Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2003, p16.

The individualistic nature of Western culture, shown in one way by how we treat depression through private appointments in a one-to-one setting, can leave many international students feeling more isolated than before they sought out help. Many cultures would want to approach support and pastoral care from within a community, but many international students operate outside of a supportive community group whilst studying in UK. An example of this corporate way of thinking can be found in a journal called *Therapy Today:*
"We-ness – that is, the predominance of collectivism in daily life – is [a] very important concept in Korea. In Korean language 'I' or 'you' are rarely used because of the lack of importance placed on the individual. Differentiating me from you is not important as we are in the same group. There is no such thing as my car; it is our car, even though I drive the car and use it for the family only at weekends. Revealingly, the Korean symbol for 'human' is two sticks leaning against each other."[2]

Whilst GP practices and University counselling services are on the frontline for assisting students in need, many international students will only approach those they know when in need of help. They may ask their tutors or lecturers for support, but are often referred on to others due to a lack of time, inclination or ability to help. Many contact their families back home, but this may stop in case they worry the family and, besides, the support offered only has a limited effect when receiving care from so far away. Sadly, many do not ask for help at all, perhaps because it seems too "shameful" to admit weakness or too embarrassing to be shown up in front of course-mates as someone who is not coping. One student commented:
"In Greece counselling is not very popular and people are hesitant about trying it. I think that generally they consider it a taboo. Many students believe that you must be ill, crazy or deficient to seek counselling help, and they are afraid of being seen as such by others. Even though confidentiality is guaranteed, students still do not seek help."[3]

It is often friends of international students who notice changes in behaviour or appearance, health issues or comments made, and are then in the best place to identify that an issue exists, as well as to have the trust of friendship to offer support. But knowing that an issue exists and knowing what it means are two different things, and bringing our own cultural norms and perceptions to any relationship means that some important warning signs can be missed.

'A peppery feeling in the head' – the challenges of verbalising and processing feelings
An article by Ed Welch from CCEF (*Christian Counselling & Educational Foundation*), illustrates that depression doesn't necessarily look the same in different cultures. Some cultures might explain the feeling of depression in a physical way ("a peppery feeling in the head" or a "burning in the stomach" or a "tightness in the chest") whereas others might describe it in an emotional way.[4] When asking a group of Japanese and Hawaiian students to give words associated with depression, researchers discovered that whilst the Caucasian-Americans looked inwards to the emotions for the words they used ("unhappy," "down," "low" etc), the Japanese students looked outward to the external factors ("rain," "exams", "solitude" etc).[5]

It is also notable that different cultures *respond* to struggles differently - some may see struggle as character-building, others may see it as something that needs dealing with before it gets any worse. Some cultures may approach "treatment" in a group setting (such as within the Church or family), others may turn to individual professionals (such as doctors or therapists). Of course, there is also the added complication that stereotypes don't fit everyone! One cannot assume that someone from one culture will always respond in one way and someone from another will respond consistently in another way. International student ministry is full of the need for flexibility, intuitive thinking and sensitivity to the needs of others. This is a difficult thing to do in any situation, but in the midst of activities, programmes and people, it becomes all the harder.

Not experts, but accessible
It is worth stating here that most of those who know and work with international students are not necessarily professionally qualified to offer counselling or give medical advice; in fact, I would go so far as to say that they are often not trained in this way. University counselling centres have highly trained practitioners and GPs who are equipped in how to care for those struggling with depression and stress, yet international students may need help *accessing* these facilities and we may need to recognise that the help offered might not "fit" their cultural backgrounds and needs.

Enabling students to cross that cultural gap and speak "cross-culturally," as it were, is a key part of

2. Ieehyok Woo, p. 19-20, *Therapy Today*, September 2013.
3. A student called Dimitra, quoted in *Therapy Today,* September 2013 on p. 9
4. Quoted by Ed Welch from Ethan Watters, *Crazy Like Us: The Globalization of the American Psyche*, New York: Free Press, 2010.
5. *Does Depression Look the Same Around the World?* (Ed Welch, May 19th, 2011, CCEF website)

international student ministry. It is part of our caring for others, of hearing where they're coming from and caring in a way that they can understand and respond to. Of course that is also what God did through Jesus - crossing the gap between God and humanity by the Word become flesh (John 1:14). The skill of listening cross-culturally in response to what is said is really important, before then finding a way of walking forward together.

Identifying key hurdles

When we think about cross-cultural communication, what are some of the barriers which prevent conversation and listening being open and fluid?

Language is one issue – some students have commented that they don't have "words" in their home language to explain their feelings, but their English isn't strong enough to express what they're going through, requiring some students to speak through translators in order to find some other way of expressing their struggles.

"A Cantonese patient told me that it was impossible to speak about anything emotional in Cantonese as it is not an interpersonal language. English was the only language where she could find words for feelings."[6]

Culture is another hurdle – some students from shame/honour backgrounds struggle to admit weakness because it would bring shame on their family or bring shame on themselves. They may not want to ask for help because it not only puts someone to trouble on their behalf, but also makes them somehow beholden to that person. Whilst a group setting might make peer support more normalised and less like putting a burden on one individual, it might make it harder for a student to show weakness in front of others.

Family can be a very prominent part of students' struggles – many students do not want to let their family down, since they have sacrificed much to enable them to be in the UK. Conversely, while their family understandably want them to do better than they are doing, students also feel a lot of pressure from their family and experience frustration that they don't understand how hard it is to study here.

"In East Asia children are expected to feel indebted toward their parents for all the devotion, indulgence, sacrifice and love that they have received from them. It is not unusual for Korean young people to feel guilty if they fail exams, thinking they have let their mother down…"[7]

One international student recently expressed the frustration that she was letting her family down by not getting a job in UK after her course. Usually a quiet person, her outburst seemed all the more vehement: "They haven't lived here! They don't know how hard it is to get a job here!" This gap between parents and children can increase a sense of helplessness and isolation.

Pressure from course-mates and peers is another issue which seems to have a greater effect on students from overseas than on their British counterparts. Western cultures are, on the whole,

6. From Ali Zarbafi, p.9, *University & College Counselling* magazine
7. Ieehyok Woo, p. 20-21, *Therapy Today*, September 2013

more individualistic in outlook, which perhaps leads many students to press on, doing the "best" they can. Whilst this is a stereotype and there are many exceptions to the rule, we shouldn't underestimate the group pressure that international students feel. Despite English being a second language to most (therefore making their studies in the UK all the more impressive), the feelings of failure and not being good enough become all-consuming to many, who then spend more and more time working and feeling progressively lower or more ill as they push themselves harder than they are capable. A tutor may see a prolific output of work and excellent achievement, but the student may well be saying, "Help!"

What might be missing in our international outreach?

This article has not attempted to answer these questions, only to raise them as initial ones that need addressing. It could be summarised that what may be missing in our international student work is:

- people who can accurately spot the signs and symptoms of struggles, which may present differently in different cultures;
- cross-cultural awareness of how problems are handled in other countries;
- a practical guide for Christians on how to approach the struggles that international students face and how to support students through them; and
- an in-depth look at how those from a Christian faith background can approach this cross-cultural hurdle of helping students in their wellbeing.

Hands-on experience and a heart for helping international students are invaluable tools for showing God's love and care for internationals. Not many of us may be trained professionals in counselling or mental health care, nor are those roles we can necessarily step into, but we are willing to give time, draw students into supportive Christian communities, and point people in the right direction to get necessary help. Perhaps most importantly, our role is to walk along with students through their struggles without judging struggles, ignoring issues or belittling cultural differences.

In order to do this, though, we need to be aware of our own cultural biases and our own needs - to "hear" our own voices of need. We also need to learn the skill of listening cross-culturally and enabling others to speak cross-culturally - crossing the communication gap so that both expressed needs and practical steps forward can be discussed, understood and be of benefit to those in need.

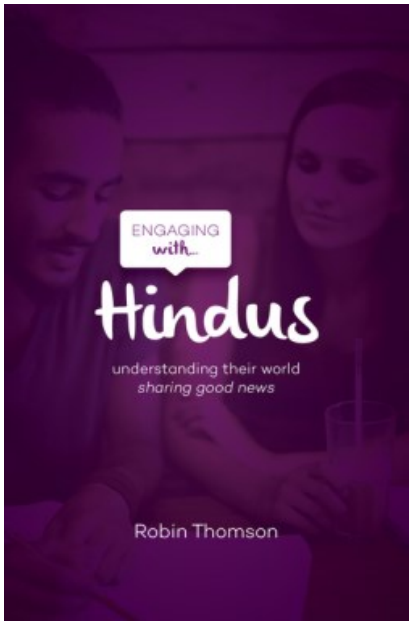
Book Review

By Pete Edwards, Friends International Edinburgh

ENGAGING WITH HINDUS: UNDERSTANDING THEIR WORLD, SHARING GOOD NEWS

By Robin Thomson
The Good Book Company, 2014, 120 pp.

This excellent short book is a gracious response to the presence of Hindu people in the UK and a helpful introduction to engagement with them. Its aim is to remove the fear that we may feel when meeting people who come from very different cultural backgrounds to ourselves or who hold very different beliefs. It addresses the kind of fear that might mean that we fail to relate to these "strangers" entirely, in case we say the wrong thing, or the fear that would cause us to start unhelpful arguments. Helping the reader to know more about Hindus, it encourages us to interact with them and build genuine friendship. While it is written with a resident UK Hindu population in mind, many of the lessons are of equal relevance for engagement with more transient Hindu international students.



Robin Thomson writes with the practical wisdom and missiological insight of someone who has lived in India and engaged with Hindu people for 20 years. It is a simple guide, but is far from simplistic. For example, this is a book about building relationships and seeking to share Jesus with real Hindu people with real beliefs and practise, rather than seeking to provide a theoretical understanding of Hinduism. The beliefs and practise of real people rarely match all the generalisations of theory. A practical book with each chapter ending with questions for reflection, it is full of illustrations from the lives of real people and there are encouraging stories of people from Hindu backgrounds who have come to know and follow Jesus.

The book is split into two sections. The first focuses on the task of understanding Hindu people. Other books (including those Thomson lists under resources) provide a more comprehensive study of Hindu beliefs and practise. However, this is a very helpful introduction into the way of life that we might describe as Hinduism, the diversity of people who might refer to themselves as Hindu and some common themes among their beliefs and devotional practise that we might encounter as we get to know them.

In addition there is a helpful chapter looking at what Hindus might think of Christians and Christianity. These include clear misconceptions, for example that "Western culture is the same as Christianity", or relate to the history of missionary activity in India, for instance the perception that Christians exploit the poor to achieve conversions.

The second section considers missional engagement and Thomson's approach is gracious and contextual. He suggests seeking to love Hindus, to listen and learn, to present Jesus positively (building on beliefs and practise that we share, to talk about Jesus and all that he has done for us), and to pray for ourselves and our friends. Through this process, opportunities arise for relationship building and, when we interact with Hindu friends, we will discover what their practice looks like and genuine discussion will take place, such that we begin to learn what they believe. In chapters 10 and 11, Thomson suggests a gentle approach to challenging misconceptions and our friends' ideas where there is genuine difference. He suggests doing this through asking questions, listening well, praying, and studying the Bible carefully in preparation to respond. In particular in chapter 11 he helpfully considers some of the common points of difference that arise and how to engage with them sensitively, including the frequently occurring, "It's all the same. We believe the same as you. All ways lead to God."

This book challenges the reader (and in the last chapter, our churches) to face our fear of the Hindu stranger, to seek to understand them, to build relationship and to share Jesus with them. This is a book that I wholeheartedly recommend to anyone who is serious about engaging with Hindu international students in a culturally sensitive and respectful way. In addition, I think there is much to be recommended in terms of ethos and approach when considering missional engagement with people from cultural backgrounds different to ourselves.

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