



MY VISIT AND WORK WITH BONTHA ESUDAS IN INDIA

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Bontha Esudas and I have been friends on Facebook for many years. This is how I learned of his effective work with orphans, teaching the illiterates, and preaching the gospel in the Narasaraopet, India area. In 2011 I learned of his forth coming visit to the USA to speak in a series of gospel meetings. I invited him to visit with me in my home in Henderson, Tennessee, because I wanted to know more about him and his work in India. He spent two days and nights with me. The talk was non-stop, because it was difficult for me to understand how one man could be involved in such a wonderful array of good works for the Lord. 1. He is keeping 50 orphans in his home, feeding and clothing them; 2. He operates the Indian Christian School in his home with 170 students with qualified teachers; 3. He provides food for the elderly in two different congregational locations; 4. He preaches the gospel of Christ in every tribal village or regular village or city that will allow him to come and do so; 5. He has a training program for those who would like to preach.

From our discussions I learned of his steadfast love for the souls of the lost, particularly his own people, and of his fervent love for the truth of God, the Bible, and his personal life's commitment to preaching the gospel to his people. His grandfather and his father were preachers of the gospel and he has a son who preaches – four generations of gospel preachers in his family.

In 2012 I learned of another proposed visit to the USA, so I invited him to stay in my home a longer part of this visit. He lived in my home nearly a week, and I was able to arrange visits with congregations that could help financially. During this visit he shared with me his dream of helping the illiterates, about 67 percent in his area, by building a large school building, to be called the Indian Christian School to teach them to read and write so he or someone could teach them the gospel. His

vision was so clear and meaningful. One must have a proper understanding of the Untouchable Culture in India to fully understand. My eyes have been opened to many opportunities through this great work for the Lord through this man.

The Bontha family consists of Esudas and Vijaya, father and mother, both Christians, two daughters, Nani and Nyna, who is married to Munna, and a son, Bharath Bhushan, all Christians. This entire family is involved in the work of keeping 50 orphans healthy and studying 24/7, and having 170 students in the Indian Christian School, with qualified instructors, during the day. I have never found a family more dedicated to the work of caring for so many children. Each one truly believes that education is important. Even though he and his family come from the Untouchable Class, each is well educated. Esudas holds the BABED degree; Nani holds the Masters degree in Technology; Chanti is about to earn the Masters degree in Technology; and Nyna holds the Doctorate in Education. Esudas' grandfather encouraged education as the sure way out of the Untouchable Class.

During my visit to Narasaraopet in March, on different occasions I would awake early and go outside just to observe. I usually found Vijaya around the two big pots, probably as much as 20 gallons per pot, giving orders to some of the older kids on building a wood fire under each pot which were set on stone blocks outside the house. While the kids built the fire, Vijaya and a helper were preparing the rice and curry for cooking. I was amazed at how quickly the fires began and the food got into each pot. The kids continued to feed wood to the fires under the pots until the food was ready to eat. On Vijaya's word the fires ceased, and the cooling process began. She was teaching them to work and to follow instructions.

Soon Nani and Nyna were involved in getting food into plates of the children and helping them find a place to eat. There were no eating tables for the kids to assemble around, nor was there one in the house for the family, but wherever a place to sit was found and even sometimes the children stood to eat. No forks, spoons or chopsticks were available to assist in their eating. They used the fingers to mix the rice and curry and to lift the food to their mouths. It was all very sanitary. They use the forks and spoons God has given to them. The children were well nourished, but the eating habits there were much different from what I was accustomed. They observed breakfast, lunch and dinner, but it seemed to me their big meal was dinner about 9:00-10:00pm. Several times I went to tell the family goodnight and found all of them eating a big plate of rice and curry.

Being very impressed with his work for the Lord, particular the evangelization of the area, I had a strong desire to visit him to see for myself what was going on. This desire became reality on March 22, 2015 when I arrived in Hyderabad, India with a visit with the Bontha family on the agenda. After preaching four times in Hyderabad, once in Mangala Giri, and once at Pedambadi Pudi, early on March 25, I was delivered to Bontha and his wife in Guntur, with whom I would spend the rest of my visit in India. It was my happy privilege to stay in the Bontha home until April 3, 2015. No greater hospitality could have been found or enjoyed more. Not only did they give me their room, they gave me their hearts. My sincere thanks to Vijaya, Nani, Nyna

(Munna, Nyna's husband), Bharath Bhushan (called Chanti, also) and Esudas, who nearly worked me to death. It was my great pleasure to visit the apartment of Munna and Nyna and to study a brief time with them in the presence of Esudas. Munna is involved in the informational technology and has promised Esudas to do a professional video of his work. I felt very welcomed while in their presence. I appreciate Munna.

After an hour's drive from Guntur we were at the Bontha home, a very modest setting, in Narasaraopet, an enclosed area, filled with kids. I was overwhelmed with their curiosity and friendliness. I intermingled with them and soon we were friends. I also met Nani, Chanti, Nyna, who made me feel at home. I was placed in Bontha's and Vijaya's air conditioned bedroom and found places to put my belongings. The big question in the ladies mind was, What does he eat? So what do my wondering eyes behold but bread, peanut butter and jelly, some of my favorite foods. I fixed me a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and the girls stood by watching every move I made and realize that they had made a hit. There was rice and curry, soup, and many other delicious morsels. They really made sure that I was well fed. The fried chicken was good. They even had milk and cereal for me at breakfast. Usually it was Nani or Nyna who brought my meals, but occasionally Vijaya. This became a fun thing for them and it gave me an opportunity to visit with them. A cousin came to visit while I was there and she got in on it as well. She was about Chanti's age. They eventually gave me a drink called Sadam milk that I really enjoyed. Bottled water was kept every where. The ladies made doubly sure that I did not go hungry. A part of my packing was two boxes of granola bars which came in handy a couple of times as my blood sugar went low.

And soon Esudas and I were off to the new school grounds of the Indian Christian School for me to speak to a group of preachers and want-to-be preachers. Before the day ended, we, Esudas, Chanti, and I, were at Makkenavaripalem Church of Christ where I spoke on the subject, "A life Worth Living," and two precious souls responded and requested baptism. It was very tender, too tender, in fact, to walk barefoot, even in the water, to do the baptizing. I was provided a large black pair of plastic or rubberized flip-flops that protected my feet.

On the 26th, we were on the road again visiting Ramanjaneyapuram Church of Christ where we strengthened the church and two more wanted to complete their obedience by being baptized for the forgiveness of sins. It was my happy privilege to baptize them into Christ. From there we visited Jashuva, a young man who had been badly injured in a bicycle accident. After a brief visit, we prayed with him to have a speedy and complete recovery. He and His family seemed very grateful for our coming to visit Jashuva.

On the 27th we rested some and worked with the orphans and school children, meeting with the faculty of the school. Bonding with the children at school was one of the great pleasures while there. These kids stole my heart, so open, so teachable, so valuable to the future.

Oh, they were so friendly and most of them desired attention. So I would sit among them and teach them songs in English. If I could get a few of them doing something, then others would join in, particularly in singing or games. I taught them a friendship game. I would hold out my hand and ask someone to pat the end of my fingers. Keep patting until something happens. After a few pats, I would flip my hand over and hit the back of theirs. The object was to keep me from flipping over to their hand. As we left the house or came back to the house, there were several that wanted to play. In singing, "Jesus Love me" and "Jesus Loves the Little Children" were favorites. I also taught them "Row, Row, Row Your Boat. During this time how I wished many times that I could speak Telugu, their native language.

On the 28th we were back on the road again near Jamison Nagar, where I preached, resulting in five wanting to be baptized into Christ. Bharath interpreted for me and assisted me in the baptisms. It was a good gathering, as was most places.

Since most of the responses came during the evening services, it was useful to find places suitable to baptize. There was a very good place near where Bontha lived and many came there to be baptized. It seemed strange that they wanted me to baptize them, so it became my pleasure to teach and to baptize them. Limestone rock and mountains are everywhere. On one mountain there was no vegetation, as it loomed beautifully off-white (with a yellowish gleam) into the sky. Small pebbles and rocks, some with sharp edges, seem to be every where. Since I did not bring shoes suitable for baptizing, Bontha's family provide me with a pair of flip-flops, and I was doing great with them until about the 20th baptism. The little strip of plastic between the big toe and the next one had rubbed a blister between my toes and it really began to bother me. However, before the blister occurred, I was baptizing one day and I stepped back with my right foot to go down under water with the obedient subject and my right foot land on a fairly large lime rock and threw me off balance and I went down as well into the water getting wet from my shoulders down. Bharath Bhushan was close by and pulled both of us out of the water. He assisted me in most of the baptisms. That was the big joke of my trip, my second baptism. We all had a big laugh and continued with the baptisms. Above us ladies were washing clothes, while below we were washing souls.

On Sunday the 29th we traveled more than two hours, to worship with the Kacharagunta Church of Christ who had a modest building and where I preached. Met the friendly preacher there and from there we visited a tribal village where I preached. The illiteracy, I understand, is almost 100% in that village. At this stop I met a teenage boy who spoke very good English. It was very difficult to have a continuous conversation so many were coming to meet me. However, we did talk long enough for me to challenge him to be a leader in finding ways to improve conditions in his tribe. From here we went to Durgivillage where I spoke again.

During those eight day, I traveled many miles with Esudas Bontha, going to speaking engagements far and wide. About all the roads were paved but were in great need of repair. The main thorough fares were usually in good shape with Hindu shrines spotted ornately along the way. The farm land is impressive, rich soil with an intricate irrigation system. Rice was one of the major crops, as was corn and grains of various kinds. I saw many cotton fields as well. On the roads we would meet vehicles with straw stacked so high and wide that we had to pull off the road to pass as we met. And it was not unusual to meet herds of goats, cows and other animals. Animals had free use of the highways. Ox carts were very prevalent there, and about every household had one or two cow in their yards.

It was on the 31th, that we visited a nearby village, Challgunula, with an attendance of about 50 where I spoke and two precious souls requested baptism. They came the next day to Narasaraopet to be baptized. A great part of this day was taken up baptizing people. It is now nearing the time when I must return home. However, there was another tribal village where it had be set up for me to speak, so off we go to Adeiahpala where I spoke about the Life of Christ and three individuals requested baptism.

About this time, Esudas visited a television station in Narasaraopet to ask about the possibility of recording some programs and getting the prices. It was inexpensive, but the audiences were not that big either. Nevertheless, it was arranged to tape five programs with Chanti as the interpreter. So the last two or three days were a little hectic trying to find the time to record the programs while to tape and run these programs after my departure. Chanti had never done this kind of interpreting, so it took several tries to get the job done. He did a good job. Three of the lessons were about the creation and the last two about God's plan for man. It was a very primitive setup, but the man in charge of taping was most helpful and understanding. Photographs were made during the taping these programs. We usually taped two programs on one visit to the studio

On April 1 we visited Subbaiahplem congregation, one of the places where Bontha feeds a group of elderly people. It was my privilege to assist in serving the food on this occasion. It was a humbling experience to be involved in this process and to understand the depth of the work of this good man. He provides food for the elderly at two different congregational places.

On this date three souls were added to Makkenavaripalem congregations. The good results continues and the possibilities unlimited. On this date we met also at the new grounds for the Indian Christian School and played and had fun and made photographs with the school children. What a fitting climax to the visit to Narasaraopet and the Indian Christian School. It deserves our financial support.

By this time I am an exhausted 93 year old preacher of the gospel but a happy one. We had places to go, but I asked Esudas to cancel these appearances. So the next day was spent in preparing to leave for the USA and visiting with the Kids and family. What a joy, seeing kids lifted up to be an assets to their nation and the church of our Lord rather than a financial burden.

He and his family are taking care of 50 orphans in their home. During the day he operates the Indian Christian School in his home and the land has been purchased nearby and the foundation completed to build a large school building to help eradicate illiteracy. He awaits the raising of \$200,000 (\$125,000 has already been raised) to free a long-range loan of his sponsoring congregation – Sunset Church of Christ, Nashville, Arkansas - to have the funds to complete the building of the Indian Christian School. He feeds the elderly in two congregational locations. He preaches to one or many as the situation may dictate, and he is involved in training of young men to preach the gospel. What a great load of work for this family, headed by Bontha Esudas. He needs our prayers and support in every way.

On April 3, I sadly left his home for the five-hour drive to Hyderabad, along with his family, where I would catch my flight to Dubai, to Atlanta, to Memphis. We arrived at his brother's house in Hyderabad and had lunch with them. Their hospitality was gracious. The men absented themselves and bought me a native Indian costume which I treasure. Esudas and family took me to the airport, and the family went with me as far as they could go waving and saying "good bye."

This is a great work of our lord carried on by a deserving Christian family. THIS WORK TRULY DESERVES OUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT.

J. Walker Whittle, PhD,

Retired Professor

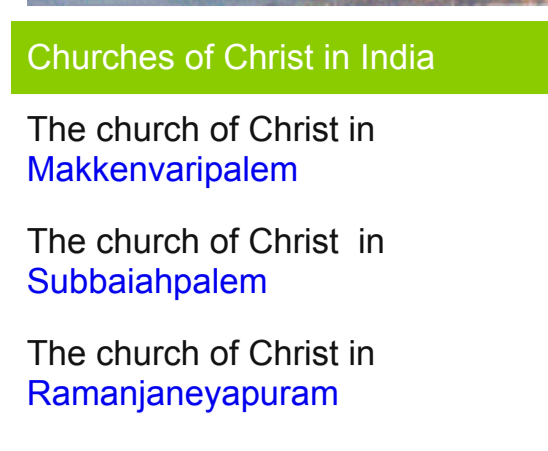
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[The Aged and Widowed](#)

[Preaching The Gospel in India](#)



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[The church of Christ in Ramanjaneyapuram](#)

[The church of Christ in Rajanagararam](#)

[The church of Christ in Boggoram](#)

[The church of Christ in Massad Manyam](#)

[The church of Christ in Kacharagunta](#)

[The church of Christ in Ganesupalem Thanda](#)

[Projects](#)

[The Christian School for children](#)

[Aged, I Infirm and Widowed Christians](#)

[Challenges in India](#)

[Caste System](#)

[Poverty](#)

[Denominations](#)

[Educating the Poor](#)

[Supporting the work](#)

[How to send support](#)

"Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest."
John 4:35