



WORLD DAY OF PRAYER – 4th MARCH 2022

“I Know the Plans I Have For You”

Service from England, Wales and Northern Ireland



PROJECTS TO BE SUPPORTED

Each year World Day of Prayer offerings throughout the world go to projects chosen by the National Committees. World Day of Prayer Aotearoa New Zealand worked with the following organisations when selecting projects: Christian World Service, the Bible Society and the Interchurch Council for Hospital Chaplaincy

Christian World Service – Human Rights Advocacy and Research Foundation (HRF).

The *Human Rights Advocacy and Research Foundation* (HRF) is based in Chennai (India), but works in the wider district. It runs a programme (which is funded by CWS) to encourage Dalit (untouchables) Women and Adivasi (Hill Tribes people – indigenous people of India) to stand for the panchayat elections, particularly for the position of panchayat president. This involves a significant programme of awareness raising in the communities, training (in running an organisation, managing panchayat budgets, dealing with district authorities, etc) and advocacy. They have been very successful, and the programme has been replicated in other areas.

Background

The Panchayat are a system of self-government. They have authority over Education, Health, Water, Common property, taxation and some financial functions that have been devolved from the State Government. Enshrined in the Indian Constitution are reserved places on the Panchayat for Women, Dalit and Adivasi peoples. In 2016, 33% of the elected places were reserved for Women and in 2017 this was increased to 50%.

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Interchurch Council for Hospital Chaplaincy in New Zealand

Chaplains are available for all patients, their families or whanau and members of staff, for people of all faiths and none,

- to offer time to listen
- to encourage
- to support
- to help in looking at life issues
- for prayer
- for sacramental ministry
- for blessings

www.ichc.org.nz/chaplaincy.htm

The Bible Society – Empowering Widows and Suffering Women of India.

Background and Beneficiaries

India is a country of 1.3 billion people with an estimated 40 million widows. In the early 19th century, missionaries such as William Carey campaigned to abolish the practice of sati or burning widows alive on their husband's funeral pyre.

Today, although widows do not suffer that cruel fate their lot is still very harsh. “Widowhood is a state of social death, even among the higher castes,” says Dr V. Mohini Giri, an activist who has dedicated her life to improving conditions for women in India.

Unfortunately, many women become widows at a young age because they marry young and then their husbands die from causes such as workplace accidents or alcoholism. Widows are frequently rejected by their families. They are subjected to a lifetime of abuse, humiliation, and poverty.

The reasons for this include superstition, inheritance laws and the fact there is no welfare system in India. Without any means of earning a living, widows are forced to beg on the streets or turn to prostitution for survival. Others make their way north to the city of Vrindavan or the City of Widows in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh where 20,000 widows live.

“I have been in this temple for more than 60 years. It is a lifelong sentence of humiliation and struggle. I do not remember anything about my hometown. I wait for death every day so that I can get some relief,” says an 82-year-old widow.

Project Summary

Working through its' 17 auxiliaries and partnering with churches and Christian organisations, the Bible Society of India (BSI) is reaching out to widows through Bible engagement workshops where they learn that God loves and cares for them. The women receive Bibles in their heart languages.

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However there has been push back, because HRF have been so successful in helping Women, Dalit and Adivasi to get elected to the Panchayat and take leadership positions those who had always assumed they would be in power have been trying to subvert the reserved places for Women, Dalit and Adivasi's. The dominant castes are calling for consensus candidates instead of holding Panchayat elections – which would favour them. There has been intimidation, including murder, and death threats to Women, Dalit and Adivasi Panchayat Leaders and deliberate attempts to undermine their authority by concentrating power in the hands of functionaries and paid officials.

HRF has been successful in using the courts to uphold what is a Constitution right. The Federal Indian Government has frustrated these legal challenges by postponing and elongating court hearings and this is costing organisations like HRF. Although the high powered legal persons they engage to take these cases to the Federal Court, they do so pro bono, HRF have to pay their costs which includes airfares to and from Chennai to New Delhi. It is a deliberate strategy by the central government because they know that organisations like HRF do not have unlimited resources!

In 2017 the then National Director of Christian World Service, Pauline McKay, met Suyatha Kamesh a Dalit Women Panchayat President in Chennai, India. When asked how she learnt to organise she said her involvement in her Church had taught her leadership and organisational skills. Suyatha Kamesh a widow lives with her daughter and sister, who she said were her campaign team. Her opponents had a lot more resources than her; however, she was re-elected as President of her local Panchayat.

Like the rest of India Tamil Nadu was in lock down earlier this year when a second wave of COVID 19 spread throughout the community and HRF worked with elected representatives in local government to collectively demand proper relief. Throughout the pandemic HRF programmes have continued online and through help lines.

<https://cws.org.nz/>

The project also provides personal visits, counselling, health check-ups, legal assistance, and vocational training, etc. It encourages the women to lead meaningful Christ-centred lives and to share the Word of God with others. In 2022, BSI aims to reach 3,000 widows through the project.

* In 2021, the number of women reached out to was 1,500 due to Covid restrictions.

"I thank God for BSI's vision for widows. Everybody knows about this. Widows are empowered through with love and care through God's Word." Mrs Sheela Isaac, a retired School Principal.

Testimonies

"I am 24 years old. I became a widow at the age of 19. My husband died young due to drinking alcohol. I have two children. We live in a small room. My husband's people do not like me because they believe that he died because of me. They do not want to see my children. My siblings also believe that I am a very unlucky woman and that my children are unlucky. They do not want to associate with us."

"Thanks for giving me this free copy of the Bible in my language." Kannada.

"The message of hope given at the workshop has created hope in me. I read the Bible daily for my peace and comfort. I gather my neighbours outside my house once a week and read Bible portions of comfort and solace to them." Sita.

"I am 24 years old. I was married at the age of 15. My husband was ten years older than me. He used to beat me up because I could not bear any children and especially a boy for him. My husband died of drinking alcohol. I was widowed at the age of 19."

"I live alone in a small house. There is no toilet. I attended a Bible workshop for poor widows. I was given a copy of a Tamil Bible. Over three months the pastor taught me and other poor widows about the Lord Jesus Christ. I surrendered my life to Him."

"My health was poor, and I suffered a lot, but the pastor arranged for me to use the toilet of a Christian family. My health is better now."

"Thank you, Bible Society for giving free widows like me free Bibles. God's Word helps us to smile." Vijaya.

www.biblesoc.org.nz