
A CHRISTIAN IN INDIA

**Lessons from a Seminarian
who Discovers Jesus
in Hindu Temples**

Cescilio Chavez, Ph.D.



Bladensburg, MD

A Christian in India

Published by
Inscript Books
a division of Dove Christian Publishers
P.O. Box 611
Bladensburg, MD 20710-0611
www.dovechristianpublishers.com

Copyright © 2020 by Cescilio Chavez

Cover Design by Nadia Chatsworth

ISBN: 978-1-7348625-6-0

Library of Congress Control No. 2020943807

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be used or reproduced without permission of the publisher, except for brief quotes for scholarly use, reviews or articles.

Published in the United States of America

25 24 23 22 21 20 1 2 3 4 5

Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction.....	ix
I	
Arrival — New Delhi Neighborhood.....	3
II	
Exploring the Neighborhood.....	5
III	
The Taj Mahal.....	10
IV	
Birla Temple.....	14
V	
Gurudwara Bangla Sahib Temple, Lotus Temple.....	19
VI	
ISKCON Temple, Swaminarayan Akshardham Temple	24
VII	
Tera Manzil, The Himalayas, Haridwar: The Holy Ganges.....	29
VIII	
Mathura.....	39
IX	
St. Anthony's Secondary School.....	53
X	
Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity Jeevan Jyoti Home.....	56
Conclusion.....	59
About the Author.....	64
Works Consulted.....	65

**A Christian in India:
Lessons from a Seminarian Who Discovers Jesus in
Hindu Temples**

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all
your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13 AKJV)

“fides quaerens intellectum”

I

Arrival — New Delhi Neighborhood

“The most terrible loneliness is the feeling of being unloved”
(Mother Teresa).

Day 1

One a.m., as my taxi driver passed littered neighborhoods strewn with beggars sleeping in tuk-tuks and cardboard on the sidewalks next to cows and buffalo, I began to pray that he was lost. He appeared lost, looking back and forth at scribbling on a paper with directions that a friendly Indian man wrote down for me at the Indira Gandhi International Airport. I prayed and prayed that my taxi driver was lost. I thought, “My hotel cannot possibly be in these horrible neighborhoods.”

My taxi driver turned a corner; the neighborhood became a bit better, but not by much. Now, mostly stray dogs littered the streets. I had never witnessed so many stray dogs in one block. I counted eighteen of them. Street vendors stoked fires in pits, in which they cooked their food, and shooed the stray dogs away.

On the next corner were more streetlights and a movie theatre. My hotel stood at the end of this block. I had to walk one block; as I walked on the littered street, I noticed cow dung everywhere; the horrible pungent smell of raw sewage permeated

the streets. Never had I smelled anything so bad. The Prime Balaji Deluxe Hotel on 8574 Arakashan Road, Paharganj, and New Delhi awaited my arrival.

As soon as I entered my hotel room at the Prime Balaji Deluxe Hotel, I took a cold shower. I was dirty after a nine-hour flight from Amsterdam (and a connecting twelve-hour flight from Chicago). I 'felt' even dirtier after walking down this block.

After my shower, I hopped on my clean bed. I said to myself, "I'm not leaving my hotel." Then I got up and looked out the huge window. As I looked out the window, I asked, "My God, what in the world did I get myself into by coming to India?" The smell, the poverty. "I'm never coming out of my hotel room." I thought. I could not erase the many negative images that abounded of poor, almost naked, people, including children, sleeping on dirty sidewalks in the sweltering heat. After a good sleep, I awoke and drank a hot cup of Kapi (coffee). I returned to sleep for another five hours.

"I laid me down and slept; I awakened; for the Lord sustained me" (Psalm 3:5 AKJV).

When I awoke, I felt great. I thought, "I'll check out the neighborhood." I had in mind to venture out a bit but stay close to my hotel; I had no particular sights in mind to visit until the next day, as I had already made arrangements with the hotel's tourist office. I was on my way to self-discovery.

II

Exploring the Neighborhood

“He who sees all beings in his Self and his Self in all beings, never suffers because then he sees all creatures within his true self, then jealousy, grief and hatred vanish” (The Upanishads).

Day 2

Today was 109 degrees Fahrenheit (42.7 degrees Celsius). I ventured outside about 3 p.m. Thousands of people dodged each other as they briskly walked to and fro. Cars, tuk-tuks, and commercial trucks were bottle-necked and gridlocked in traffic jams. The temperature was very similar to Texas. So, I felt fine. As I walked, I marveled at all the paintings, billboards, posters, and statues of the many gods, goddesses, and swamis who were praised, lauded, and eulogized by their community and followers. I thought, “Christian territory does not exist here.” In my previous travels to Rome, Venice, and Paris, I took for granted Christianity’s effect on those communities.

The aroma coming from the street vendors who cooked food on open fires was exotic and delicious. Spicy smells to my American sense of smells, but not unusual to my Mexican heritage’s rich cuisine. Also catching my attention were the immense bright and



New Delhi Neighborhood

beautifully brilliant colors that decorated the streets of New Delhi. Just about every object for sale along the sidewalks, including fruits, vegetables and spices, shined: dazzling greens which symbolize new beginnings, harvest, fertility; glaring reds which symbolize purity and sensuality; saffron, the most sacred color of Hindus; vibrant yellows, the color of knowledge, and intense blues which symbolize water and sky.

Returning to the Prime Balaji Deluxe Hotel, I walked on broken and trash-littered sidewalks contrasting with the illuminated and beautiful hues of the environment. To my right, I suddenly noticed a half-naked, older, dark Indian man (wearing only a loincloth) literally rolling on the hot asphalt street. As the man tumbled on the hot street, he landed halfway under a parked commercial truck. I stopped and stared at this sight; I wondered if he was OK. Was I to offer him any help? Did he need water? However, I soon noticed that other people just jumped over him and minded their own business; pedestrians just kept walking, dodging, springing, darting—nothing unusual here, it seemed. Was he a Dalit, a person

from the untouchable caste? Was he a mendicant (monk) or sadhu (priest) who has renounced the worldly life? I could not tell, as I could not see his face; most sadhus adopt the appearance of Shiva by painting their faces and allowing their hair to grow long and worn in a knot or bun on top of their heads. Regardless of who this man was, I felt sad for him and helpless. He seemed as though he was in some kind of trance, his eyes tightly closed. I did not know what to do or whether I was even “allowed” to do anything, so I did nothing. I was in another world, after all. I could only make a mental note to pray for him upon my return to my hotel.



Indian Mendicant

As I walked the crowded and lively neighborhood, I recalled that I had previously seen a man cutting hair by a sidewalk stand, so I searched for him. About three blocks later, I found him and his assistant. I stopped at his haircut stand and pointed to my hair. I obviously needed a haircut. He sat me down and sprayed my hair with a dirty water bottle. He combed it with a filthy black comb. I didn't care because I needed a haircut. As I took in the neighborhood, I observed that many Indian men seemed to have good haircuts, so I wanted to fit in. As I was getting my haircut, I noticed that there were mostly men walking about. Some were holding hands (a custom in India). But women were, for the most part, absent. I believed the ratio to be fifty to one.

The barber asked me something in Hindi. But I didn't understand. So, I just nodded, "Yes." He began to perform karate chops on my head. I guess I had consented to a head massage of sorts. As my head violently jolted, popped, and twisted, I wished I spoke Hindi. I would have told him, "No, thanks." As I paid the hairdresser (Indian rupees proved easy to understand), he and his assistant swayed their head from left to right. I understood this represented a sign of endearment.

Approximately two blocks from the haircut stand stood a food vendor (one of hundreds); when the man asked for my order, I simply pointed to whatever a customer next to me was eating. I noticed he spoke to me in Hindi. Due to my dark skin, I assumed he thought I was Indian. The vendor gestured for me to have a seat at a dirty wooden table near the busy street. I sat and wondered if tuk-tuks or cars would hit my table as they quickly zipped by inches away from it. As I waited for my food, I enjoyed the immense commotion and noisy tumult which accompanied the heavy traffic and everyday pandemonium that comes with 21 million inhabitants.

When my plate of food arrived, it was absent any utensils, only a brown chapatti, flatbread; I quickly realized the chapatti would be my utensil. This reminded me of my upbringing of eating everything with Mexican tortillas. So, I felt like a natural. The dish consisted of a very small serving of lentils called dal makhani; it was very delicious and extremely spicy. I recognized the smell and taste of cumin, ginger, ajwain, and cardamom spices. After lunch, I headed back to my hotel and slept for the rest of the day. I still felt jetlagged, fatigued, malaise, and lacked concentration, but at least I was now full.

“Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith” (Proverbs 15:17 AKJV).