

Ministry Has PLAN FROM GOD to Restore BANJARAS

by JAMES S. EAGLES

ABOVE RIGHT:
Banjara women
in traditional
costumes sell fruit
in a marketplace.

Christopher Boda, leader of **Banjara Tribal Ministries**, has an active plan from God to save, educate and restore a people who have suffered as part of India's lowest caste for centuries.

Our journey took us onward to Hyderabad, another of India's fast-growing mega-cities located in the state of Andhra Pradesh. There, on the outskirts of the city, we met with Rev. Christopher Boda, the leader and founder of the BTM work. For 20 years now, he has laboured with his wife and co-workers and active board to reach out to one of the most neglected, low-caste Hindu groups in India, the Banjaras. Called "the gypsies of India," the Banjara people are also referred to by other not-so-flattering names, but they themselves prefer to be called "Banjara."

Boda's own life is a study in the miracles of God. Early in life as a student he was introduced to Christ, only to be persecuted by his family. His own father nearly ended Boda's life. He escaped near-death and fled. A missionary in a faraway city took him in and befriended him. Discipled and then later helped to attend a Bible College in Hyderabad, Boda made a decision then and there to devote the rest of his life to reaching the 30 million Banjaras of India with the Gospel.

ASTONISHING AND MIRACULOUS RISE OF BTM

Today the astonishing and miraculous rise of Boda's ministry can be attributed to God's willingness to bless the low estate of the Banjara people—to lift them out of animism, Hinduism,

poverty, illiteracy and despair. "Every valley shall be exalted"—beyond doubt this is true of the Banjara peoples—30 million of them scattered all over India. Seven million of these nomadic gypsy people are found in Andhra Pradesh state where the BTM centre is. All Banjaras speak the same language, although they go by different caste names in different states, such as Lombardi. These names denote the lowest of the castes—"the Untouchables of India"—in the eyes of the Hindus.

Banjaras were the original inhabitants of India for millennia and their ancient beliefs are rooted in a mixture of animism and Hinduism. They are extremely poor, often if working at all being paid less than 50 cents a day. They sweep, clean garbage off of roadways and do other menial tasks. Many beg. There are extremely high death rates and illiteracy rates among their children.

Boda's first plan of action was to demonstrate God's love to these neglected and despised people by giving them opportunities. And BTM is all about opportunities. While there I saw with my own eyes 1,900 students with teachers and staff living on three campuses on the outskirts of Hyderabad. More than 70 percent of these children ranging in age from six years to 18 years are true orphans. BTM, in addition to housing and feeding these children, provides these children with an education from Grades 1 to 12. BTM also hosts nursing training and other vocational training for young men and women on their campuses. It was absolutely



wonderful and so moving to see the devout and moving testimonies and singing of the children and youth—the power of their worship and their heart for the Lord. I remember remarking to my colleague, Richard Krawczyk, how it felt like we were in heaven just hearing the 1,500 children in attendance sing one Sunday morning.

Christopher Boda, himself a minister of the Gospel, has helped to bring a translation of the New Testament to the Banjara language and has written more than 300 hymns in the Banjara language.

In addition, BTM is actively involved in training and sending Banjara converts to be church planters. These workers have now planted several dozen churches.

IMMEDIATE AND URGENT NEED

On Campus #3 there are about 300 boys who live there and attend Grades 6 to 12. While I was there, I noticed that all the girls and the younger boys had proper latrines and septic systems, but these older boys are still without. They desperately need latrines and a septic tank system, at a cost of about \$3,000. This is a critical need. They also need another bore-well and a water storage tower, at a cost of about \$5,000. When these facilities are finished they will have a capacity for up to 1,000 boys.

Nearby, within a kilometre and in plain view of the Boys Campus #3 is a large Government of India initiative that has just been completed: a huge low-income housing project to accommodate up to 15,000 people. Rows and rows of apartment blocks can be seen and starting April 1, 2009 the preapproved people to live in these tenements began moving in. This huge influx of people to the barren, uninhabited areas outside

of Hyderabad is seen by Boda as a great opportunity to do Christian witness. Immediately, by faith, Boda is hoping to build on Campus #3 a simple yet large chapel area that will be able to accommodate up to 2,000 worshippers. He estimates the cost for such a building at around \$30,000.

Christopher Boda is a man of humility and great vision—a vision for a distinct and unreached people group: the Banjara tribe of India—his own people. He is a true indigenous missionary and has an active plan from God to save, educate and restore a people who up to recently have been “scattered and peeled” but are now in the process of seeing the “great light” of the Gospel. You and I can be fellow helpers to reach this scattered people with the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ.

For more information and quarterly Field Reports from this ministry, contact Intercede International mentioning this project code: 620BTM.

BELOW LEFT:
Banjara schoolgirls pray earnestly.

BELOW CENTRE:
Banjara schoolboys in the care of BTM worship the Lord.

BELOW RIGHT:
An assembly of all children in BTM's care.

