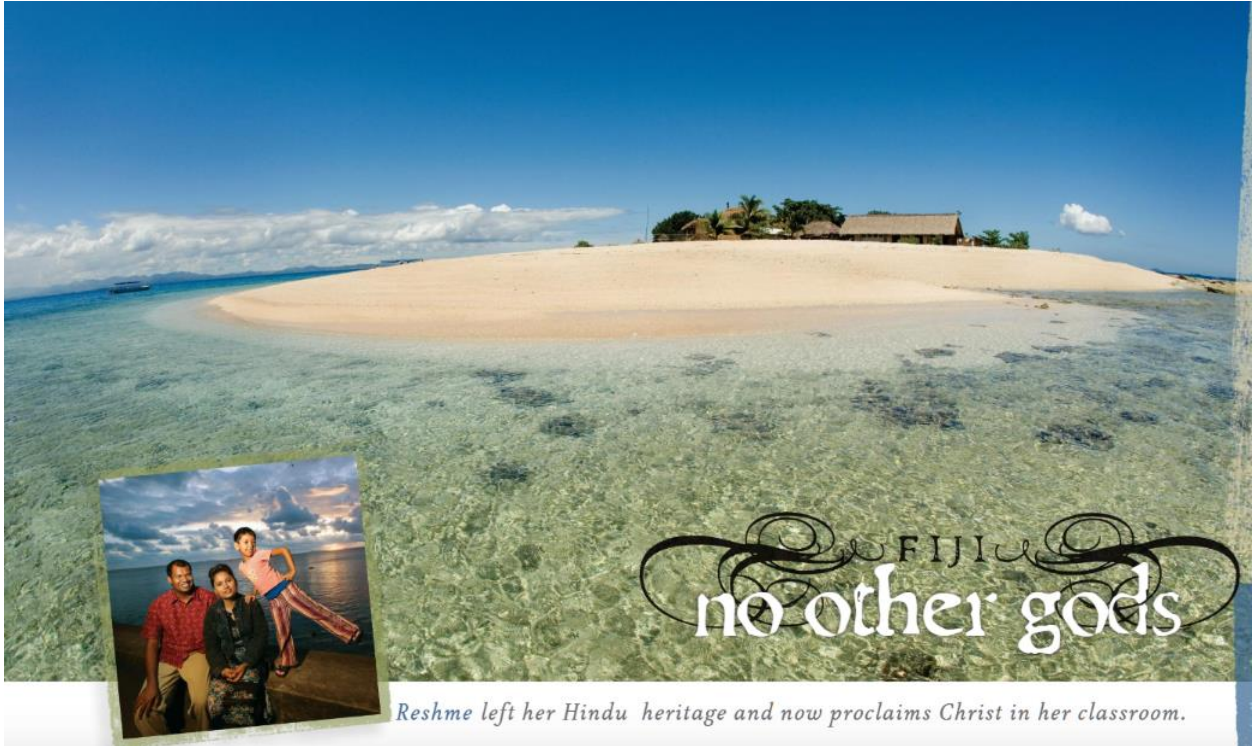


A PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF SISTER RESHME LATA



FIJI



Reshme Kumar (in green sweater) teaches the CrossRoads curriculum weekly in her classroom. "Don't just treat this as a class," she said during a lesson (below). "It prepares us for the heavenly goal." Reshme and her husband, Haron, are both teachers at Assemblies of God High School, which has more than 700 students. Away from school, they might spend time with their daughter, Zion, or go shopping (above).



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Reshme Kumar's Hindu heritage meant everything to her. Although she grew up in the primarily Christian country of Fiji, she came from a large Brahmin family, representing the highest caste among Indians. She regularly worshipped gods like Shiva the destroyer and Lakshmi, the goddess of money. ¶ Reshme ate and dressed like

a Hindu, abstaining from meat and wearing a *bindi*, a red dot on her forehead signifying the "divine eye." When she was 23 years old, Reshme married a fellow Hindu named Haren.

But three months into the marriage, her husband began telling her about his new faith in Jesus.

Reshme was irate. Her husband's Christian beliefs assaulted the way of life she knew so well. She had built her whole world on her family's Brahmin traditions, but that foundation was about to crumble.

In Fiji, more than 43 percent of the population is Indian—Reshme's ancestors were among those who migrated to work in the sugar industry. Brahmins are revered because they are the priestly caste, holding much of the social and political power in society. They are the least likely to convert to another faith.

Which explains why Reshme became so angry.

Haren would try and tell her stories from the Bible, but she responded by locking herself in the bedroom. "Just the sight of that Bible made me furious," Reshme says.

Christianity was not easy for Reshme to embrace. Across Fiji, only 6 percent of Indians are Christians, according to *Operation World*, an international mission almanac.

A few months later, Reshme grew incredibly sick. With intense back pain and a pounding headache, she stayed in bed for a week. Her parents took her to Hindu witch doctors for healing, but to no avail. Eventually, Haren brought a Christian pastor, who explained to Reshme how she could have a relationship with God. Then the pastor prayed against her sickness. "I was suddenly healed," she says. "I was normal."

But she quickly forgot the healing and continued to bristle at the mention of Christianity. Just a few days after Reshme was healed, she participated in Diwali, a popular Indian festival of lights. She also bought an idol of the elephant god Ganesha, as big as a footstool, and placed it in their home.

About six months later, sickness struck Reshme again, this time she couldn't walk or even eat with her own hands. She lost nearly 20



pounds in two weeks. Haren took her to the hospital, where doctors puzzled over the cause and considered an operation.

Reshme was again healed after a Christian pastor prayed for her, yet she reverted to her old ways. "I was so stubborn," she says.

Eventually, Reshme got a job as a social sciences teacher at Assemblies of God High School in Suva, Fiji's capital city. Though she felt a bit out of place considering her Hindu faith, she enjoyed the positive work environment.

One day her principal called her into the office. Out of the 40 teachers at the school, he chose her to attend a special weeklong conference put on by CrossRoads, a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. Reshme was excited; she loved gaining new knowledge and welcomed

the departure from her routine.

Surrounded by a pool of top educators, Reshme shared their enthusiasm for bettering the young minds of Fiji. She learned about Life Skills, a curriculum that equips teachers to help students learn character and values by using Jesus as a role model. She soaked up the training, despite it being biblically based.

A few days into the conference, the leaders showed the *JESUS* film, a movie about the life of Christ. Seeing Jesus perform miracles was a jarring reminder of how He had healed Reshme—twice. *There is so much peace in Jesus*, she thought, *unlike our gods and goddesses, who are full of revenge and curses.*

It was there that she committed to follow Jesus as her Savior, vowing to leave behind her Brahmin idols.

Not only did the conference give Reshme a new faith, but CrossRoads also gave her a powerful curriculum to teach the kids at her school (see "Life Skills" on page 25).

After the conference, Reshme told her husband she wanted to attend a Christian church. Haren stared at her, speechless. "I never expected a Brahmin's daughter to say that to me," says Haren. "I knew Jesus, but I didn't know He was that powerful." Soon they grew in their faith together, purging their house of Hindu idols and shrines.

Incensed at the news, Reshme's parents said she had be-

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trayed the family. Attending family weddings and funerals became awkward outings—Reshme and Haren were shunned or openly mocked for their Christian faith. “We’ll die before we’ll change,” Reshme’s uncle told her. Yet they continued to tell the family about Jesus, even bringing them copies of the *JESUS* film in Hindustani, the main Indian language.

Gradually, her family began to soften.

Reshme’s mother became incredibly sick and similarly was healed through prayer; she became a Christian. Her father, who served as a Brahmin priest, resisted for several years. But eventually he and many other members of Reshme’s family became believers. To date, 25 have become followers of Christ. Brick by brick, a new spiritual foundation is being built in Reshme’s family.

Reshme reflected on this one evening in her home, while stirring a simmering pot of goat curry, the smell hanging in the air like incense. “It must have been God’s plan to put us there to reach people,” Reshme said. “When you taste Jesus’ love, you want to

share it with others.” On the walls of the living room hang pictures of Jesus, along with plaques of Scripture, including Psalm 117:2 : “Great is His love for us.”

Reshme no longer wears a *bindi*, or other Hindu adornments; she has left the practices behind, along with any regret. “When we changed, we changed totally,” she says. “The idols are dead, and the rituals are only to satisfy the society.”

Today Reshme claims a new identity. “I’m a Christian,” she says. ■

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ACTION POINT

The Next Step

Reshme’s family background was a huge hindrance to her following Jesus. What roots or patterns might be holding you back from being all that God wants you to be?

life skills



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