

So what can I do?

Even when we recognise the appalling atrocities that many Dalits suffer, even when we understand the great social injustices, it is still easy for us to feel there is nothing we can do about the situation. The size and complexity of the issue is so vast.

- But remember the parable of the mustard seed (Luke 13:18-19).
- When one grain of sand moves, so will millions of others.
- All of us, wherever we live, can do something!

Prayer

The value of prayer can never be underestimated, whether the prayers are said quietly at home or with others in a larger group. You may find the various prayers in this pack useful. At your church, could you create a prayer station to be a powerful stimulus to prayer and action? Some helpful ideas of how to do this can be found in this pack.

Raising awareness

1. Talk about this pack and its various stories in your everyday conversations.
2. Write an article in your church or village magazine
3. Create a display at your church, in the library or village hall. Posters and leaflets are available from many of the organisations listed in the pack.
4. Run a bible study or house group discussion – perhaps ecumenically. Cards with suggested topics are provided in this pack.
5. Organise a worship service, perhaps with a visiting preacher. Contact details of available speakers are in the pack.
6. Form an interest group through your church/circuit, with Churches Together or with friends – support each other through extended learning, discussion and advocacy.
7. In a group, write and perform a sketch or drama.
8. Make a textile mural of a Dalit scene to support prayer, worship and discussion. Perhaps offer it to be used by other churches or groups.
9. Organise a simple meal with a presentation to follow. Perhaps download the Dalit PowerPoint from the MWiB website or have a speaker. There are various contact details of possible speakers in the pack.
10. Bake some gingerbread figures, putting a “For Sale” label around their neck. Sell them and give a leaflet about Dalit trafficking and slavery (available from Dalit Freedom Network)
11. Piggy back your display or activity onto an existing event e.g. during Fairtrade Fortnight, HIV/Aids Sunday or Dalit Solidarity Sunday.
12. Have a film night. Registered charity ‘Unchosen’ can offer a selection of films and guidance in having a panel and question and answer session. Look for Dalit related films on YouTube.
13. Many Dalit people end up trafficked. Along with other organisations listed, ‘Stop the Traffik’ www.stophetraffik.org and Anti-Slavery international www.antislavery.org can give guidance for events to counteract human trafficking.
14. Contact your local press and radio – write a letter or send an article, perhaps with a photo.

Lobbying politicians

We can try to encourage more ways that the UK government and the EU can get the Indian government to be pro-active in their support of Dalit people. Many Indian laws have been passed to protect Dalit people but they are often unknown or ignored. But in this country our government still needs to be reminded of equal opportunities and human rights. See the website of Dalit Solidarity Network UK www.dsnu.org for up-to-date news, videos and the press release which followed the House of Lords debate on Monday 4th March 2013.

1. Write to your MP; it is necessary to be specific in what issue you wish to raise.

MPs do take notice of letters. For every letter they receive there is an assumption that it represents a number of others with that view in their constituency. Always include your name and address so that the MP knows that you are one of his or her constituents. Be succinct, perhaps bullet points would help. Be constructive – offer solutions rather than just criticism. Be clear what you want your MP to do and ask for a reply.

2. Perhaps with a friend or group of others, arrange to meet your MP, possibly at their constituency office.

Be punctual, keep it short and to the point but make sure you ask your MP to take a specific action. Don't worry if you feel ill informed and not able to reply if your MP asks a question of you. Your MP will not be an expert in all fields either!

3. Contact your MEP to encourage more EU/Indian dialogue on human rights etc.

4. Respond when campaigning agencies request your help. This may be to sign a petition, send a postcard or attend a rally.

Many of the organisations listed give advice and ideas about composing letters concerning anti -trafficking and human slavery, and how best to attract your politicians' attention.

“Each time someone stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he/she sends forth a tiny ripple of hope” Robert F. Kennedy

Fundraising

From 2013-2016, **Methodist Women in Britain** is working in partnership with the Church in North India (see page 5.5). Donations can be sent via MWiB for CNI's work in the education of Dalit girls and in women's self-help groups. Please refer to page 5.6 for how to give.

MRDF also have various international partners working with Dalit and Tribal people in different countries. See pages 5.7-5.10 for more details.

Many other charities and Non Governmental Organisations who work with Dalits are listed in this pack and would welcome a donation.

Discussion starters

- This material provides negative statements which may be heard as we try to raise awareness of the Dalit situation.
- In conjunction with these, there are also comments to counteract unhelpful and crippling attitudes.
- The accompanying card could be photocopied and cut up as required, and the individual statements given out in a small group or in worship, with some time for discussion.
- There is much other material in this pack which can be brought into discussion and there are pointers to that as well in the following notes.
- The PowerPoint presentation which is available on the Dalit Solidarity pages of www.mwib.org.uk could be used in conjunction with this activity.

**“Dalit people have only themselves to blame for this situation;
they have not sought to better themselves by education.”**

Pointer for discussion: Dalit and Tribal people have this position by birth and not because they have chosen it. Education is either not available or is severely limited.

Have a look at 1.5-1.6 “An introduction to Dalit Theology” for more background on the situation.

“If they found a proper job they would escape a lot of their problems.”

Pointer for discussion: Work opportunities are not open for many. Those which are available are usually of a menial kind because of their lack of position in society.

Read some of the stories from Section 2: Dalit Voices, which describe employment prospects.

**“This is a problem for India and has nothing to do with us.
We have enough of our own problems.”**

Pointer for discussion: Although the majority of Dalits live in India, there are also many in Nepal and other countries, including the United Kingdom.

We live in a global society and have a responsibility to look after the weakest and most vulnerable as well as those who are successful and rich materially.

Follow up the links on the Resources pages (5.9) to the Dalit Solidarity Network UK to read about caste discrimination in the UK.

**“Dalits have been born into this layer of society
and there is little they can do to change it”**

Pointer for discussion: The caste system originates in a Hindu belief in reincarnation, which suggests that Dalit people “deserve” their humiliation and maltreatment. Such an attitude cannot be consistent with the Christian gospel’s affirmation of the worth of every human being.

Reading the meditation at 3.1 may make us think again about worth and status.

“They need to organise themselves and fight back.”

Pointer for discussion: Dalit and Tribal peoples are forced to live in such poverty and deprivation that they need to be empowered even to understand ideas of justice and human rights, and then to be able to find any ways possible to improve their situation. The empowerment they need is being encouraged through various means both nationally and at local levels.

Stories such as those at 4.3 and 4.7-4.8 or MRDF’s work in Section 5 may encourage us to see what empowerment can take place through various means.

**“If enough British people wrote to their MPs
then something would happen to improve the situation.”**

Certainly action at a political level is required in both Britain and India.

Look at the suggestions on page 5.1-5.2 “So what can I do?” to lend your voice to the cry for justice.

MWiB Partnership with the Church of North India (CNI)

Methodist Women in Britain (MWiB) is keen to work according to the partnership ethos of the British Methodist Church which, through its expert World Church Relationships team, is part of a strong worldwide network of partner churches, which includes Methodist and ecumenical national churches in over 60 countries.

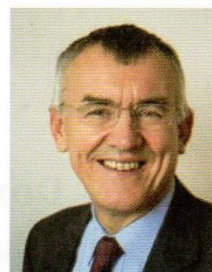
Partnership is built upon respect, upon listening to one another, upon mutual agenda-setting, upon a friendship which includes two-way prayer, learning and support. Some years ago, a church leader from Asia commented to a church leader in Britain, "I don't want to be your project, I want to be your partner" and this understanding is crucial in all our worldwide relationships.



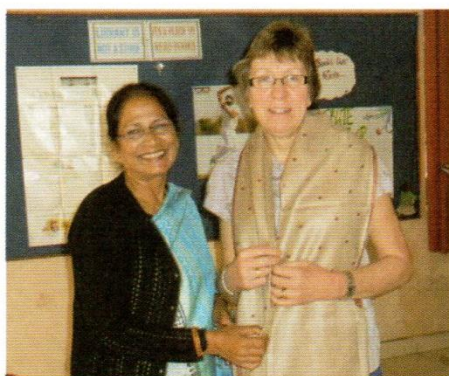
Partnership has been at the heart of the production of this resource pack. The MWiB Dalit Solidarity Task Group was delighted when, at one of our early meetings in Methodist Church House, we were visited by Alwan Masih, General Secretary of the Church of North India. Alwan himself

comes from a Dalit background and is passionate about the need for an end to caste discrimination. He shared moving stories from his own childhood and warmly encouraged us in the work we were just beginning.

Building upon this, Linda Crossley's visit to CNI in February 2013 was the opportunity to lay the foundations for a prayerful and practical partnership between MWiB and CNI. In this we were greatly helped and advised by Steve Pearce, MCB Partnership Co-ordinator for Asia and the Pacific. MWiB has therefore committed to raising **£50,000** during the three-year period 2013-2016 for CNI to use in their work supporting Dalits, and particularly for the education of Dalit girls and in the funding of self-help groups for adult women. Linda shares here some of what she learned in India and you can find details about how you can contribute at the end of this article.



Jill Baker, President MWiB 2011-2013



Linda with Mrs Poornima Lall, secretary of the Stewardship Ambassadors' Ministry, the CNI-wide committee leading on the re-establishment of the girls' hostels.

Self-help groups for adult women are a feature I found in both urban and rural areas of India, where Women's Empowerment Workers engage with groups of women via confidence-building, awareness-raising on the rights they do have, vocational or self-employment training, and more, to help move women from dependence and fear towards more independence and confidence.

Girls' hostels provide residential places to support girls' access to and retention in education. Currently, many girls drop out of education at an early age, for work or marriage. Another factor is that, particularly in the rural villages, secondary schools are an unfeasible travelling distance away. With a hostel place, not only do the girls live, in term-time, very close to their school but also

- they sleep in a bed not on the floor
- they brush their teeth with a toothbrush not a twig
- they have regular sufficient nutritious food.

All of this helps them to receive the most benefit from their education. Relationships with families are maintained by visits, phone calls and of course by going home in school holidays.



The Church in North India already operates hostels, such as this one in Aurangabad, which is shortly to be re-organised in their new "PDS" model, where the cost of the hostel place is shared between Parents, Diocese and Synod (national church). The girls here danced as part of an evening's entertainment to bid farewell to me in February 2013.

Linda Crossley, President MWiB from July 2013

Donations towards this partnership

Update June 2019: Please note that while we are still working in partnership with the Church of North India in relation to their work with Dalit communities, donations are no longer being accepted.

Money will be transferred to CNI via the World Mission Fund of the Methodist Church in Britain, who will take responsibility for accountability and reporting via their normal channels of communication with CNI. We appreciate this helpful arrangement.

MRDF's work in India and Nepal



Methodist Relief & Development Fund

Why India?

India has one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Last year its economy grew by 8%, ten times that of the UK. It is classed as a middle income country by the World Bank and provides poorer countries such as Niger and Libya with foreign aid. It even has its own space programme.

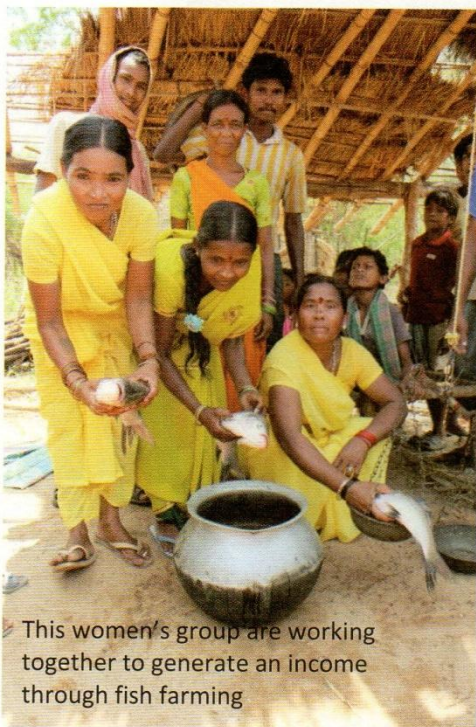
India's economic statistics are impressive but they have not translated into prosperity for its one billion people. Two in every five children are malnourished. A third of adults are underweight. More than 500 million Indians have no electricity, and less than a third have adequate toilets. India's economic boom may have led to a rich elite and growing middle class, however 450 million people continue to live in extreme poverty.

Amongst the poorest communities

Tribal people - the indigenous communities of the land - occupy an even lower status in society than Dalits and often experience greater prejudice. Tribal people often lack basic civil and political rights. They have little or no access to the legal support needed to secure land ownership and are discriminated against in the judicial system.

Tribal people live in rural communities across India. MRDF's partner, Rural Educational Activities for Development (READ), is working in the East Indian state of Odisha, formerly known as Orissa. This region is frequently affected by cyclones and floods and is poor in relation to the rest of India. There is a high population of tribal people in Orissa, who continue to be discriminated against as a result of long-standing cultural and traditional beliefs.

Empowering women



This women's group are working together to generate an income through fish farming

READ's mission is to empower people in Dalit and tribal communities in Odisha, especially women, so they may become educated, aware of their rights, and able to launch small-scale business enterprises to provide income for their families. With support from MRDF, READ is supporting tribal women to set up income-generating enterprises such as sustainable farming, sheep rearing and fishing to provide for their families. Women are able to take part in life skills training workshops which cover a range of areas including healthcare, leadership, sustainable agriculture, and business management skills. READ also uses street plays to raise awareness of issues that affect the communities it works with, such as women's rights, child trafficking, domestic violence, and advocacy.

Why Nepal?

Nepal is amongst the world's 30 poorest countries; over half of the population live on £1 a day or less. The average adult in Nepal has just over three years of schooling, and healthcare is extremely scarce, with only one doctor to every 5,000 people.



Methodist Relief & Development Fund

In isolated communities

MRDF supports a number of projects in Nepal, including one in the Pokhara region, where 40% of the community are Dalits. Women and girls in this area face a series of challenges and dangers, including preferential treatment of boys when it comes to education, forced and early marriage and domestic violence.

Breaking a cycle of prejudice

MRDF's partner Kopila takes a holistic approach to tackling these problems. It has set up child-rights clubs, where children learn about their right to education and perform dramas informing their communities about the importance of allowing both boys and girls to remain in school. Kopila also supports the most vulnerable families by providing basic school equipment to children who otherwise would be unable to attend school. School teachers and children receive training on providing a safer environment for girls in school, to help to reduce the drop-out rate for female students.



The project also arranges dramas, group work and radio broadcasts about the taboo issue of domestic violence and how it can be prevented. Women who are struggling financially have the opportunity to join a savings and loans group and are provided with the information that they need to start their own small enterprises and gain greater control over their lives.

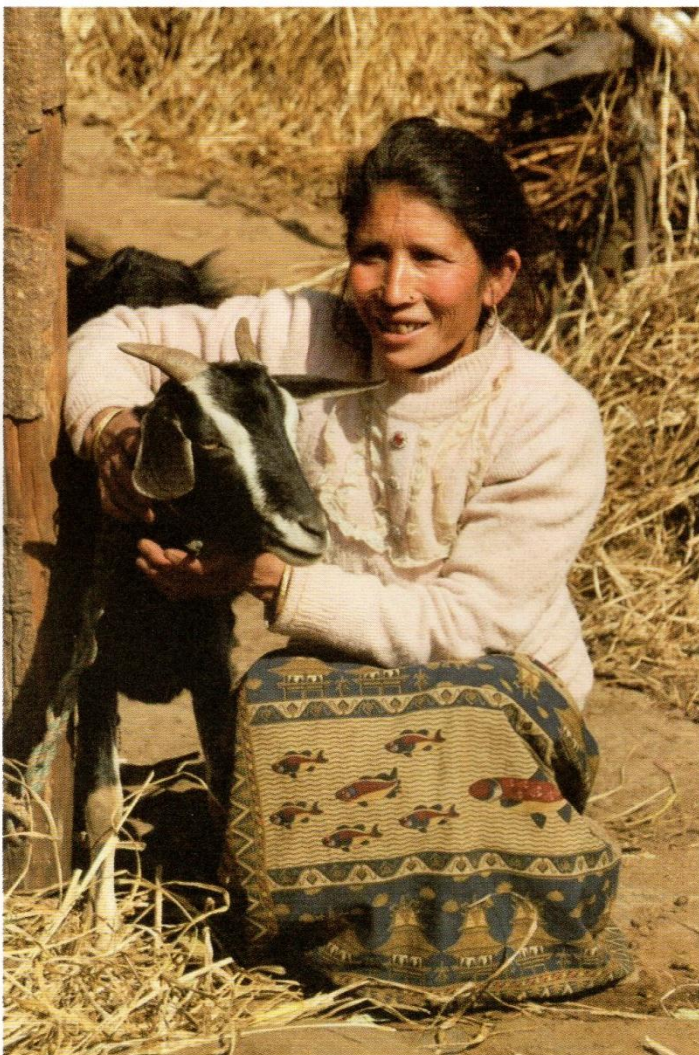
Real women: Ronamaya's story



Methodist Relief & Development Fund

Ronamaya Hitanga lives in the Pokhara district of Nepal. She has three daughters; her husband died 13 years ago. She told MRDF's Programme Manager, Nick Burn: 'The land can give around six to eight months' worth of food. The rest of the time I work for others, I get paid very little. My main challenge is to feed my children and send them to school. My eldest daughter got as far as grade ten and wanted to go to university, but I wasn't able to pay for it, so I arranged a marriage for her.'

Ronamaya's other two daughters are in school, in grades six and nine. MRDF's partner Kopila is helping to pay for their uniform, books, stationery and school bags. Ronamaya is also a member of a Kopila self-help group. Her group meets once a month and each member contributes 50 rupees (45p). The money is pooled to provide small loans to group members to allow them to start small businesses. The group members also participate in training. Ronamaya added: 'I have had training on goat rearing. I took out a loan from the group and now have four goats. I will keep breeding them and if necessary I can sell them to buy food or pay for medicines.'



Previously, if one of her children became ill Ronamaya took out a loan from a moneylender in order to pay for their treatment. Interest rates attached to these loans are typically between 36 and 50%, and keeping up with the repayments often pushes vulnerable families further into poverty. The option of selling a goat instead of taking out a high interest loan has provided Ronamaya with far greater financial security. She asked MRDF to convey a special message to women in the UK. 'You may be better off than us, but we know you face similar problems...we send you our love and thanks.'

Joining a self-help group run by an MRDF partner has enabled Ronamaya Hitanga to take out a small loan to buy goats, which she will breed and sell

How we support MRDF's work?



Methodist Relief & Development Fund

Get a taste of India

Not many people will be fortunate enough to visit India this year, but everyone can get a flavour of this incredible country through MRDF's new *Taste of India* resource. *Taste of India* contains everything that you need to hold an India-themed event for people of all ages in your local area. The pack includes Indian recipes, craft ideas, games, film and music suggestions and inspirational stories from MRDF's work with some of the poorest communities in India.

By taking part in *Taste of India* your group will help some of the most vulnerable people in India, and in other communities around the world, to overcome the obstacles that they face and provide a brighter future for their families.

Download or order your resources for free from www.mrdf.org.uk/taste (Resources will be available to download from mid-April 2013). Alternatively call 020 7467 5132.

Invite a speaker

We can offer workshop leaders or speakers to talk about MRDF's work in India or Nepal for your Methodist Women in Britain group, conference or training day. Hosting a speaker can help make MRDF's work come alive for your group, provide them with feedback and encouragement to continue supporting MRDF. Visit www.mrdf.org.uk for more details or call 020 7467 5132.

Partner a project

Partner a Project gives your group or church the chance to make a personal connection with local communities in India, Uganda or Mali. Through direct sponsorship and regular updates from the projects, you get the chance to see the lasting difference you are making and learn about a real community in another part of the world. You can partner with READ in India in their work to empower women living in tribal communities in Orissa.

You will receive:

- an introductory pack with information about your chosen project, interactive resources and fundraising ideas
- a CD-ROM with photos of the people and work you are supporting
- regular updates about the project with news of how your donations are making a difference
- the opportunity to invite an MRDF speaker to a service or event to talk about your project.



Your support could enable women in India to start a small scale enterprise, like this brick-making business

For more information about Partner a Project visit www.mrdf.org.uk/partner or call 020 7467 5132 to request a leaflet.