

C Hist Lit

The Conversion of Garib

Martha Burkhalter

Womens Missionary Society
First Mennonite Church
Bluffton, Ohio

1925

Missionary Literature
Womens Missionary Society
General Conference Mennonites
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One day (about two years ago) a man named Garib, of the grass-cutter caste, came to my bungalow and asked if I had any work for him to do. He was poor and had a family of four children to support. After a short conversation he expressed his desire of becoming a Christian. I wondered what his motive was, whether to gain merely physical blessings, which means food and clothing, or whether there was truly a repentant spirit in him which prompted him to come to us and seek the true way of salvation. Upon questioning as to when he first heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he said that many years ago he was a cart-driver and night-watchman for Rev. Kroeker, and it was then that he first heard that all men are sinners and that all need a Savior to obtain eternal life. Afterwards he moved away to a village several miles distant, and for some time was engaged in farming there. Time and again he felt the desire of hearing more of Jesus Christ and often realized his sinful state. But he was not brave enough to express his desire openly for fear of his caste brethren.

Now he was feeling the burden of his sins so keenly that he decided to confess Christ openly and accept him as his Savior, regardless of the persecution which he knew would surely follow. He was at present living with his cousin who was not a Christian. One great difficulty in the way for Garib

was the fact that he had married off his daughters, aged eight and ten, several years before as is the custom among these people to marry their children when they are very young. The husbands of these two girls and their relatives would naturally make it difficult for Garib and his family when they would hear of his intention of becoming a Christian.

I invited Garib to attend our church services, and asked Rufus Asna, our native evangelist, to instruct him from the Bible in the fundamentals of faith and the way of salvation. Nearly every night for several weeks he came for instruction and we were glad to see the progress he made. He not only memorized many Bible verses but learned to read the Bible as well. His wife came to my bungalow for instruction, but she was not so eager and showed much fear and doubt.

As soon as Rev. Penner came down from the hills, where he and Mrs. Penner had gone for a much needed rest, I spoke with him over the telephone about Garib and his desire of receiving baptism. He thought it best to baptize Garib the following Sunday. He came to Janjgir on Saturday and tested Garib as to his faith and knowledge of the Bible. Garib was very happy in his confession, but was worried about the land which he was trying to buy from the malgusar

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who is the owner of Janjgir village. He thought it would be difficult to buy land after it was known that he had become a Christian, because the malgusar is no friend of the Mission, and makes it very difficult for Christians to buy land. On the advice of Rufus Asna and several others, it was decided to put off the baptism until the land question was fully settled, which we hoped would be in a week or two. Who can tell whether it was God's leading? We believe it was, because all were praying very earnestly for Garib and his wife. (After all they were not able to buy the land.) Besides, they had to pass through a time of testing which proved later to be a blessing not only to him and his wife, but to all the Christians at Janjgir.

It was only a few days after this occurrence that Garib's wife ran away with all her children, induced by her relatives and caste people. Her faith in Christ had been too weak. They went away one afternoon while Garib was at work. It was reported that they had gone to the village where the husbands of the two daughters lived. In the evening when Garib came home he found the house empty; sadly he came and told me. At once we sent one of our servants to follow them up. Later he reported to us that he came to one village after another, and always they said that they had just left a

few hours before. Sometimes he would have a hard time to get any trace of them at all, and by giving a few pice (cents) to some village children, these would direct him through fields and byways over which they had seen them pass. Finally he found them in the home of one of the husbands of the girls. He returned and told us. Garib at once set out to bring them back if possible. When he came there the people were very angry with him and in their half-drunken state they threatened to kill him if he took his family home. For a week Garib remained in that village. We became alarmed, and sent out another man to investigate. After a few days Garib came back with his eldest son about six years old. A father may be compelled to give up his daughters but not his sons. However he thought it wise to leave his younger son with the mother hoping that she would return soon.

Garib returned to his work on the Compound as a mason. In this work he found a steady job, as we were doing building work at that time. In a week or two he came to us and said that he would wait no longer for baptism. Satan was tempting him hard and he felt that he wished to make an open confession before all Christians and Hindoos that he had accepted Jesus Christ. He felt that this would help him to become stronger in his faith. As long as he would

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not receive baptism his caste people would do their best in trying to persuade him to remain in caste.

Hardly a happier man could be found than Garib was on the day when Rev. Penner baptized him. Often he came during the next few days to express the joy he felt in his heart. "Now I can face any hardships and trials. I know Jesus will help me," he would say. Of course his caste rejected him, but our church brethren took him in. We gave him a small room in which to live. If we asked him concerning his wife he would say, "I have given up all for Jesus. But after all he felt lonesome for his children and hoped and prayed that by some means they might be given back to him. Special prayer-meetings were held by our church members in which we asked God to open some way by which the whole family would be reunited.

One day Garib came to the bungalow and complained of fever and headache. In a few days it developed into a severe case of pneumonia. For a week he lay very sick and the church brethren took turns staying by his bed-side day and night to give him medicine and proper care. Always he kept his Bible by his pillow, and often asked for passages to be read to him. One night his lungs filled up so that he was not able to talk above a whisper. He fell into a semi-

delirious state. We began to wonder whether God would call him home so soon and we watched for the crisis. O, how our Christians prayed that that some good might come through his sickness or through his death, as it pleased God. Always they remembered his wife and children in their prayers.

A few days afterwards he told us that he had seen Jesus and talked with him. He had told Jesus that he was ready to go home if only he might see his wife and children converted. Then he said that now he felt sure that they were coming back soon. We saw that the crisis had passed and Garib improved from that day on. The next day his wife's brother came from the village where the rest of the family were staying. Rumors of his sickness had reached them, and he came to say that his wife was worrying about him. Two days later one of the Christians came to my bungalow very much excited saying that Garib's wife had come, not to see her husband but to steal her eldest son, who was living with Garib. It proved to be true that while he was on his way home from school that afternoon, she induced him to go with her. At once we sent men after them and brought them back. The little boy was weeping and trembling for fear. The mother's heart seemed cold and hard. But the Holy Spirit was working

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within her, and although she was trying to resist yet she yielded so much that when we asked her to go and see her husband, she came with us to his house, but said that we could never keep her here.

During the next hour strange things happened. All our hearts beat fast and we prayed silently that all might turn out well. What was she saying to her husband, lying so sick on his bed, and what was he saying to his wife, who was causing him so much sorrow? We all wondered as we stood silently outside the door. We heard his gentle voice while he was speaking to the children, as one after the other came to his bedside. Our tears rolled down as we saw him holding their hands and stroking their heads. Three year old Juget jumped for joy to see his father again and tried to climb on the bed to get nearer to him. His wife with her three months old child in her arms looked on silently. That a struggle was going on within her could be plainly seen. After a while I asked her whether she did not wish to stay with her husband, instead of going back as she first intended. She said she must go back. Her people threatened to do all sorts of things to her if she did not bring the two girls back. She turned to leave and was going to take the children with her. Our hearts sank, and we thought the opportunity of winning her over to

Christianity was lost. We felt like forcing her to stay. But Garib said, "Let her go. When she really loves Jesus then she will want to stay and live with me. Let the children go with her and let all come back together." She said, "Ask the children if they wish to stay. They all want to come back with me." We asked the children whether they wanted to go back with their mother or stay with their father. The oldest girl with fear written on her face said, "I will go back. Those people want me to return." Little Judget hid himself in the folds of his mother's sari when we asked him. He did not realize the meaning of it all. The older boy wept and said nothing. Then little eight-year old Sanmihi went from her mother and taking her father's hand, said very sadly, "I want both." A more touching scene I have never experienced. A miracle happened in that moment. For the conversion of a soul is truly a miracle. The woman wept. She began to look around for something to do. Someone whispered, "She is going to stay". Although she had said nothing at that moment she had opened her heart and let Jesus come in. She was accepting Christianity and turning her back to heathendom no matter what the consequences might be. And yet some doubted. They said, "She will run away again when night comes. Let us test her." So some

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one cooked food for her and she sat down and ate with all her children. At once the news was spread among all the Christians, "Garib's wife has eaten of our food and she is really going to stay." Needless to say there was much rejoicing and prayers of thanksgiving were offered that night by many. I asked "Shall we baptize her at once so that she may not fall back so easily?" Garib said, "No, let her first learn of Jesus and what it means to be a Christian. I will teach her."

And so it was that Rev. Kliewer had the privilege of seeing this woman baptized with three others on December 19, 1920. She has remained faithful, and will never go back into heathendom. Garib soon regained sufficient strength to be back at his work. I have hardly ever seen a happier family. They have become outcasts before the heathen. But what have they become before God? Elect and chosen ones, to inherit eternal life.

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