

Indrani and Chandara, Ex-Hindu, Singapore (part 1 of 3)

Description: A Hindu girl marries a pious assistant of a swami, but one who later looks to other religions for enlightenment.

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Sister Nishani (previously known as Indrani) and her husband, Brother Rafiq (previously known as Chandara) shared with Sister Muneerah Al-Idros, their path toward embracing Islam.

Indrani was 6 years old when her father died. Her mother stopped praying as she felt that god had been unfair to make her a widow with 5 little children. Indrani and her brothers and sisters were brought up as nominal Hindus. They had neither an altar nor pictures of gods in their house, as many Hindus do.

When Indrani was 10 years old she began to love god. She collected pictures of Hindu gods and goddesses and worshipped them at home. She felt the need to pray and thought it was odd that, unlike other Hindu families, her family performed few Hindu rites.

During her teenage years, Indrani started going to temple thrice weekly. She encouraged some of her friends to go to the temple with her, as she quickly became more interested in Hinduism.

She participated in bhajanai (devotional singing) activities and became a committee member in Ayyapan Group in Perumal Temple for several years.

One day, Indrani became very ill. She consulted several doctors but was informed that there was nothing wrong with her. However, her illness persisted. She later consulted a Swami (a Hindu priest) so that he would clear the sevanai (evil spirits) that she suspected were dwelling inside her. The Swami and his assistant came to visit her. The assistant was Chandara, who was involved in her temple's religious rites, and who had also organized religious trips to Malaysia for Indrani and her friends.

Indrani was very impressed with the knowledge the young man demonstrated while assisting the swami.

After that visit, Chandara dreamt of his favorite goddess, Kaliaamma, telling him to take Indrani as his bride. After much persuasion, his family asked for Indrani's hand in marriage. Indrani and her family were pleasantly surprised by the marriage proposal. Indrani could not believe that her dreams of marrying a pious Hindu had come true.

Unlike Indrani, Chandara was brought up in a religious Hindu family. On top of that, Chandara was the most religious in his family. He would often slip into a trance, reciting the holy mantras in praise of the gods and goddesses who would [supposedly] possess him

and speak through him. In Hinduism, it is considered an honor to be possessed by the gods or goddesses.

Chandara and other members of the group often got together to listen to the teachings of the swami. They would also make house visits to chase evil spirits out of other people's houses and bodies. This is how Chandara was appointed to be the swami's assistant.

Indrani had never entered into a trance but had seen Chandara [supposedly] being possessed by the elephant god, Vinayagar. Chandara would behave exactly like an elephant, eating the fruits that the elephant ate.

When in a trance, Chandara would be approached to solve problems. Those who approached him would prostrate before him, for they regarded him as "God". The vibuthi (white ashes) used to anoint the forehead would be brought to Chandara to be blessed.

Despite all this, Chandara did not feel complete. Dissatisfied, he knew there was something not right in his life. He failed to see the light and always felt that his path was blocked by some kind of darkness which he wanted to clear so he could reach the light. He knew that there were 3360 Hindu gods and he prayed to several of them.

Whenever he felt confused, he would go to the library to find out more about Hinduism. He learned from the elders but knew there was still a lot more to learn. Many of the Hindu priests did not want to share everything that they knew; knowledge was their rice bowl, and they did not want their source to be taken away.

It was difficult to learn on your own about Hinduism, as most of the writings were in Sanskrit. Chandara could not find any holy books that satisfied his quest. All the books were written by different authors and each of them had different ideas about how and when Hinduism started. Even the Bhagavat Geeta (which emphasized more on Vishnu), Ramayana and Mahabrahma were very limited. These holy scriptures were more literature books, teaching that we should do good and pray to the gods. Above all these gods is the female god, who is the Aadhi Parasakhti. She controls the whole universe. The essence of Hinduism is to strive at getting a good reincarnation and to worship God and to pray to God through demigods.

During this search for enlightenment, Chandara was approached by a Christian missionary worker in Toa Payoh. He got involved in Christianity in the hope of enlightenment. However, he did not like Christianity, mainly due to the behavior of the people in the church; he noticed that young men and women were behaving indecently. Christianity was not what he was looking for and he withdrew.

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