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11-2011

### Former Andrews Professor Ministers to Eunuchs of India

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#### Recommended Citation

Jardine, Ashleigh, "Former Andrews Professor Ministers to Eunuchs of India" (2011). *Lake Union Herald*. 440.

<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/luh-pubs/440>

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know what to expect; and I've known him to take all the time necessary to explain test results. Am I surprised patients think highly of him? Not at all. God has blessed him, and he's passing on the blessing."

Barbara Weimer, office receptionist and member of the Naperville Church, Illinois Conference, as shared with Diane Thurber, assistant communication director, Lake Union Conference

## [WORLD CHURCH NEWS]



Mridul and Johnson Choppala felt impressed by God to begin a ministry for the eunuchs of India after reading Isaiah 56:4, 5. The Choppalas are committed to sharing God's love with the eunuchs, which they say are "the most marginalized and rejected people in India."

## Former Andrews professor ministers to eunuchs of India

Johnson Choppala, who worked in the Andrews University Department of Biology from 1967–1969, is a retired senior scientist with the federal government in the departments of Army and Veterans Affairs. He has served as a volunteer professor at universities and colleges in Kenya, Trinidad, Thailand, Roorkee and Pune, India, since retiring in 1999. In 2007, for the first time in Seventh-day Adventist Church history, Choppala began a unique service project—taking God's Word to the eunuchs of India.

When Sunith Das, senior pastor for the South Asia Church of Michiana\*, learned of Choppala's work, he invited him to be the featured speaker for the church's monthly worship service. The service took place on Sept. 4 in

Burman Hall at Andrews. The service focused primarily on Choppala's ministry in India.

Choppala began the sermon talking about his service as a professor at Spicer Memorial College, in Pune, India. He and his wife, Mridul, were having devotions one morning when they stumbled across two verses that would eventually "transform a biologist into a minister of the Lord." They began reading Isaiah 56:4, 5: "For thus says the Lord: 'To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant, Even to them I will give in My house and within My walls a place and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off'" (NKJV).

"For people with an Indian background, when we read this, we were floored," said Choppala. "It was profound. As soon as we read that, we knew that this was coming to us from the Lord."

Choppala explained that eunuchs are the most marginalized and rejected people in India, saying, "They are treated as outcasts by society. They are trans-genders—neither men nor women—who suffer from rejection. They have no rights; their parents put them out of their homes, and they are forced by society to beg, fall into prostitution and dance for a living."

After doing more research on the people, the Choppalas were shocked to find there are more than four million eunuchs in India alone. Though the church has been in the country for more than 116 years, no one has ever reached out to the group with Isaiah's message.

With one more year of contract teaching left at Spicer, the couple prayed every day for God's guidance, asking if it was His will for them to minister to the group. At the end of the school year, they say they felt they were hearing the Lord tell them, "Yes, I want you to go," so they packed up and left the college, not sure where they would end up.

On Feb. 7, 2008, the couple met Ammaji, the leader of a group of eunuchs in Bhimavaram, India.

"I went and talked to the eunuchs. That itself was unusual because no one talks to them with respect," says Choppala. To Ammaji's astonishment, the couple became friends with the group and invited a large number of them to attend Mridul's birthday party in November. It was the first time any of them had been invited to a party where they would be treated as guests.

As the Choppalas established relationships with eunuchs across Bhimavaram, Palakollu, Tanuku and in other cities nearby, the idea of OASIS was born. The Organization for the Advancement of Special-Gender Individuals through Education & Welfare Society (OASIS) was co-founded by the Choppalas in 2009 and aspires "to reach every eunuch in India with the message that God loves them." The organization's goal is to establish educational centers where eunuchs can learn trade skills such as tailoring, beauty cosmetology and hairstyling in order to give them "alternative ways of living" besides prostitution and dancing.

The Choppalas purchased two acres of land for the organization and are currently raising money for a school structure, dormitory and director's residence to be built. At the end of September, they will leave their home in Jackson, Miss., and return to India to continue their work.

"Through all of these experiences, we ask ourselves the question, 'If God loves these people so much, why don't we?' One of the greatest lessons we've learned is to love people," says the couple.

To learn more about OASIS International Eunuch Welfare, Inc., visit [www.oasisinternational.in](http://www.oasisinternational.in) or e-mail [johnsonchoppala@usa.net](mailto:johnsonchoppala@usa.net).

Ashleigh Jardine, student news writer, Office of Integrated Marketing & Communication, Andrews University

\*Michiana is a region in northern Indiana and southwestern Michigan centered on the city of South Bend, Ind.