

## Introduction

Many readers are aware of the changing picture of missions, and the growth in numbers of workers from new sending countries, alongside the decline in those from traditional senders. In this edition of Educare, we have the privilege of including a presentation on the subject of Indian mission kids, by Ragland Remo Paul. (There is some editing from the original presentation). Remo is the executive director of a charity called Reaching Hand Society.

## Exploring the opportunities for the education of Indian Mission Kids

*Presented at the IMA (Indian Missions Association) conference on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2022 at Bengaluru by Ragland Remo Paul. Remo also wishes to give credit to John Barclay for much of the content.*

*Remo prefers the term 'mission kids' to missionary kids, as he does not wish to imply that the children are expected to be missionaries. Therefore the abbreviation 'MKs' refers throughout to Mission Kids.*

## Introduction

It is with great joy that I stand here today as who I am. Now that is an interesting question: who am I? Being born to Tamil parents, I am ethnically a Tamilian. Having grown all my life in Odisha, I am culturally and emotionally an Odia person. My spouse is from the state of Telengana, and that makes me romantically a Telugu man. Finally, all my education has been in English schools with its roots in the British education system, so that makes me academically English. The question of identity is a very common issue for most Mission Kids, especially if they have lived cross-culturally. Many Mission Kids manage to figure out their multiple identities, but some struggle with it long term, affecting all facets of their lives.

While our focus this paper is on the educational opportunities for Indian Mission Kids, it is necessary for us to be aware that Indian MKs struggle with many other issues that are never discussed. Let us this day decide to intentionally care for Indian Mission Kids. I will a little later in the paper share the moral and spiritual reason as to why we must.

## Why care about the education of Indian Mission Kids?

I have had many well-meaning people, including mission leaders, on several occasions ask me why the mission organisation should care about the educational needs of Mission Kids? Depending on your perspective, you would either agree or disagree with the question. I am on the spectrum of disagreeing with the question. I believe that we have both physical (practical) and spiritual reasons as to why we must care about the education of Indian Mission Kids.

## Physical (Practical) Reasons

The physical reasons are many and to list a few:

- Remoteness of the location of the serving parent
- Salaries are not paid at levels that allow for the parent to take care of the educational needs of the child locally, or at a school of their choice.
- Lack of information for parents about options available locally or elsewhere.
- Parents' academic education is not at levels that help Mission Kids with academic needs
- In some rare cases children with learning disabilities

### Spiritual Reason

Across the scriptures, there are several references to the need for care, protection, and provision for children (Proverbs 22:6, Psalm 127:3-5, Psalm 68:5, Matthew 18:6, Ephesians 6:4). There is a clear mandate for making their needs a priority.

Secondly, Mission Kids are targets for the evil one. The evil one knows that it is easier to get the parents to waver from their calling if the children are targeted, and he does that very often to great success. More often than not it is our children that are left with scars from these spiritual attacks for the rest of their lives, which I must add are no fault of their own. Some never reconcile these hurts and struggle through life. In Matthew 18:6 the scripture tells us that it is better to kill ourselves than to be a cause of a child stumbling.

Our spiritual mandate is that we care, protect, and provide for them – wholistic care, not only the educational needs.

### MKs are not a means to an end.

Very often I have heard it being said that we care for our Mission Kids so that our workers in the field can work tension free, perform better and “win many more souls”. This reason for caring of Indian Mission Kids has led many to live with the pain of knowing that they have been sacrificed on the altar of mission.

Caring for Mission Kids IS NOT / CANNOT / MUST NOT be a means to an end. It is and must always be a Biblical mandate.

On a side note – The same is true of member care in general. Member care is not done so that our brothers and sisters can perform better, nor is it a means so that missionaries will have a comfortable life. Member care is a compassionate outpouring of our heart in the fulfilment of the Biblical mandate of caring for one another. Member care is a spiritual act, not an HR policy.

### Global history of MK education

William Carey is regarded as the father or founder of the ‘modern missionary movement’. He arrived in Calcutta in 1793 and served without returning to England for 40 years until his death. He was the first missionary to take his wife and children with him. The great resurgence of Protestant missionary endeavour from the western world to the rest of the world was often blurred with colonial expansion and domination, but thousands of evangelicals followed Carey and responded to the challenge of the Great Commission, venturing across the seas with their children in tow. Little thought was given to the impact on the children – and William Carey’s own family story is not a happy one.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, boarding schools were established for the education of MKs. A number opened in India, including Woodstock and Hebron. Up until the 1970s, boarding schools were the norm for MK education – there were very few, if any, alternatives. Sadly, one alternative in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century was for children from a very early age to be cared for in their parents’/ passport country in MK homes, but with furloughs being at least seven years apart this meant long periods of separation from their parents.

Several factors caused a significant shift away from boarding schools during the 1980s and 1990s. Three international conferences on MKs for the first time raised awareness about the needs and well-being of MKs, including issues surrounding their education and care. Accounts of child abuse were surfacing and concerns about the impact of separation of families were growing. Some agencies had policies and practices that were potentially very damaging for children and compromised the most basic duty of care for children.

In the 1990s local school options were proliferating and being chosen. Home schooling was become very popular in the USA as an alternative to the secular school system, and many user-friendly home schooling programs were now available to mission families. Some agencies mandated home schooling as the only option for MK education. Secular international schools were being established in major cities around the world. Globalisation was impacting education at all levels and ‘international education’ was becoming more popular. Home schooling became more common, and a variation was home-school cooperatives where parents collaborated to make hubs of homeschoolers with parental and sometimes professional teacher support.

These factors had a significant impact on the traditional MK boarding schools. Several closed, many reduced their numbers of boarders and some ceased offering boarding and became day schools. There were other factors too, such as visa restrictions and new areas of missionary work defined as ‘Business as Mission’ (BAM.)

The emergence of missionary movements from **new sending countries** (South America, Africa and Asia) and the rapid increase of missionaries saw a sudden upsurge in the numbers of MKs from these countries needing education.

The overall trend of global mission in the past decade has seen numbers of MKs from **old sending countries** continue to decline as numbers from **new sending countries** increase dramatically. But **new sending country** MKs’ needs are different and the traditional MK schools that catered so well for **old sending country** MKs are far from the ideal ‘nest’ for **new sending country** MKs.

### **Overview of current MK Education scenario in India**

The Indian response to the education needs of Indian Mission Kids followed a similar pattern to the western response. As an example, the first exclusive school of Indian Mission Kids, Santhosha Vidhalaya, Dhohavur, Tamil Nadu was established in 1982. Grace Academy in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, YCLT in Yavatmal, Maharashtra and Carmel School in Madurai, Tamil Nadu set up hostels exclusively or with special options for Indian Mission Kids alongside their regular school that was open for non-MKs as well.

This list for sure is not exhaustive or complete. I am sure that there are other initiatives. This list is to illustrate the point that boarding schools/hostels were the initial preferred choice of mission agencies and parents - so much so that many mission agencies made it a policy that all Mission Kids must be sent to approved boarding schools. Unfortunately, some mission agencies still have this policy, even when good schooling options are available to parents in their place of work. Most often this policy did not apply to the children of the policy makers, leading to many unanswered questions and hurts.

Indian boarding schools and hostels in the last four decades have done some great work and hundreds of Mission Kids have benefitted from that. However, due to the increasing awareness of the parents of the issues of Missions Kids in boarding schools, and the improving availability of other options locally, the numbers of children registering for these options has drastically declined.

Some of the issues faced by Indian Mission Kids studying in boarding schools have forced parents to look at other options for education.

- Early (as young as 1<sup>st</sup> standard) and formative years of children are spent away from the love and care of home.
- Anxiety and relationship issues develop over years of having no lasting relationship with parents and/or friends
- Poorly or inadequately trained staff in the Mission boarding school and hostels
- Emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of both boys and girls in mission boarding schools. Unfortunately this is a reality. Several conversations are happening among several alumni (within their sphere of safety) of the mission schools and it is only a matter of time before it comes into the open. The stories that are being spoken in the private circles are way too many for us to not cringe in anger and frustration.

Parents and mission agencies explored the option of sending their children to local schools, as many states in the country started to have improved education options, even in rural settings. However, with the often transferrable nature of the mission workers in some cases, and in many cases the absence of good local schools, boarding schools and hostels continued to be the preferred choice of the agencies and parents.

Interserve India's Griha Shiksha, which is the locally developed home schooling curriculum for Indian Mission Kids, does play a role in the lives of some mission kids but still the numbers are negligible. (See <https://www.grihashiksha.in/> )

Possibly the first Think Tank by IMA on the education needs of Mission Kids in India was held between 26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> July 2022. At the invitation of IMA General Secretary Dr Isac Raja, 25 delegates gathered at the IMA Vision Centre in Hyderabad for a three-day Think Tank on education of Indian Mission Kids. The 25 delegate included

- 9 MKs (including 7 who are currently serving in mission)
- 18 parents of MKs (all currently serving in mission)
- 5 involved in MK education (Griha Shiksha; FIND EdTech, etc.)
- 6 mission CEOs/ General Secretaries
- 1 retired MK school principal

There is some overlap in the numbers above – e.g., some are MKs, parents and CEOs. There were no representatives from existing MK schools – we missed their presence and input. The plenary sessions included these issues:

- History of MK education (globally)
- Overview of current MK education scenario in India
- Report and review of IMK education survey of mission parents done prior to the Think Tank
- Report of MK survey
- Sharing of perspectives and personal experiences
- Challenges and solutions
- Presentations on home schooling and online learning support. Dr Amy Mathew shared the provision of schooling for staff children at Madhipura EHA Hospital
- Resolutions and recommendations (done in groups but coming to strong consensus and agreement).

Devotions were led by Mrs. Faith Kulothungan, and Mrs. Angeline Manohar, both parents of MKs. There were ample opportunities to share and pray together. There were many tears and much laughter. The most important objective was to make recommendations for IMA/ agencies, parents, and MK schools to consider positive changes for the improvement of families serving in mission and for the education and care of Indian MKs.

TOPIC	Parents/ families	MK (boarding) schools	Agencies/ IMA
<b>MKs and boarding school</b>	Better/ more frequent communication and contact with children in BS/ hostels.	Dorm parents to be educated and trained for their roles. Schools should have trained and suitable psychologist/ counsellors.	Provision of family counsellors for hurting parents and MKs.
<b>Family vacation/ holiday</b>	Annual family holidays are essential. Parents should prioritize quality family times.	Schools to adjust annual calendar to enhance holiday times to be more family-friendly	Annual family holidays to be mandatory with funding provided
<b>Training and preparation</b>	Parents to become more aware of issues facing children as MKs – e.g., the TCK experience.	Staff training and development of Child Protection Policies and procedures	Pre-field seminars for couples/ parents/ and children. Also, at annual conferences etc.
<b>Alternate early education options</b>	Explore home school or local school options for younger children (up to class 4)	Schools to partner with home schooling parents and GS etc. Consider raising the minimum age for boarding to class 5.	Encourage Home Schooling options at least up to class 4.
<b>External resources</b>			Tap into GoI resources for education/ health etc.
<b>Marriage</b>	Matrimony – better preparation of MKs for marriage		Matrimony – support parents in preparation of MKs for marriage
<b>Funding and resources for MK care</b>		Revamping and upgrading of MK boarding schools (facilities/ staff training/ culture and policies)	Giving greater choice to parents and improving funding support for education/ schooling options

### Specific recommendations for IMA to consider and implement:

1. Standardize Child Protection Policies and child-safe procedures for agencies and MK schools to follow, with training of key personnel and appointment of CPP officers.
2. Facilitate networking on partnerships in MK care and education – e.g., annual regional conferences/ think tanks/ training workshops and seminars.
3. Facilitate a conference for Heads of MK schools and mission leaders/ CEOs to kindle a transformation of Indian MK education.
4. Develop a standard/ systematic policy of best practice for MK care by parents, schools and agencies to ensure better care of Indian MKs.

### Conclusion

It was obvious that there is much pain and hurt in the experience of raising and educating Indian MKs. There is also much to thank God for in providing for mission families and their children especially in the education given by Indian MK schools in recent decades.

But the over-riding question that is to be considered is **'Can we do better and how can we improve our care for families and MKs generally and for their education in particular?'**

**The recommendations above are based on our belief that it is our God-given responsibility to provide the best care and education possible for the children in our care – whether as parents, schools, or agencies.** Mark 10:13-16 reminds us that Jesus was angry with the disciples because they did not make children a high priority. Let us not make the same mistake.

**May God help us.**

**Educare is a ministry of WEC International**