

## MY TESTIMONY

(Sasikala Sunkesula)

My name is Sasikala and my husband's name is Azariah. We have come from Visakhapatnam, India. We have two sons, Samuel and Finney Jeshurun.

I was born in a traditional Hindu family. Our house was full of idols, pictures and images of various Hindu gods. I used to worship one god everyday. My mother was a very staunch Hindu, who disciplined me in Hindu traditions, rituals and worship. She never gave me my breakfast before I finished my ritualistic prayers to those gods. She named me with a collection of names related to Shiva's family, *Ganesh, Gangadhara, Shivasankara, Shashikala, Vishalakshi*. My mother had a great vision that I would become a Hindu saint. She used to say that her goddess promised to her.

Since my childhood days I have a very deep sense of adoration and longing for nature. I used to think that the Creator of this universe should be a very awesome God unlike the numerous gods I knew. I was constantly seeking for the answers for the questions, "who am I? Where did I come from? Where I am going?" No person could give satisfactory answers to all my questions.

I had also desire to live a holy life. But I was full of pride, anger, envy and so many other such qualities. My family members couldn't get peace in their hearts in spite of many rituals and worship to those gods. There were disputes, skirmishes, misunderstandings and also heavy financial losses in our family. We could not find out any way out from these.

Actually I studied my elementary education in a Catholic school. There I learnt a little about Jesus. After I left the school I didn't have much connection with Christianity. At a later point of time my sister was married to a Roman Catholic. My sister and her husband were worshipping both Christ and the gods of Hinduism. They viewed Jesus Christ as one of the gods. Their faith was only nominal and they were not serious about it. I didn't see any change in her or in her husband.

As the days passed by, the search increased in me for a true god who speaks and relates. One day a visiting Hindu priest came to our temple. He was giving a *guru mantra (mystic prayer words)* to those who wanted to exercise and practice a higher form of worship and Hindu religion. It was a mantra or repetition of prayer on the favorite deity of a person. The priest gave me a rosary and whispered a mantra in my ears and instructed me to repeat it 108 times at least once every day. Those words didn't mean anything to me but some magical sounds. I sincerely practiced with great devotion. Meanwhile I got admission into a Post-graduation program in a local University. I had to stay in the campus away from my family members. But I continued this *Guru Mantra* with much fervor. My friends and roommates at the University laughed at me. Yet I practiced the mantra thrice a day. But I could get neither peace nor any change in my life as promised by the priest.

Meanwhile a good Christian student was closely watching me with an intention to introduce Christ to me. One day she came to me and greeted, "Jesus loves you sister!", and said "God has a special purpose for you, and God will use you in a wonderful way." Then she shared the good news of salvation. I replied to her with great resentment, "my religion is the richest of all. I have many gods to worship and so I can't find any reason to follow your Jesus and become a Christian". I also told her that I heard the story of Jesus in my school days and it was quite interesting. Yet she continued to invite me to come to her church. I rejected first. But finally after her repeated invitations I decided to go with an intention to find out points to criticize Christian faith and teachings.

The very first moment I entered the church I felt some unusual peace and some kind of power. The preacher was speaking from the Bible on Ecclesiastes.11: 9-10 & 12: 1-2, which are given below.

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment. So remove sorrow from your heart and put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity.

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth; before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them":

For the first time I felt some one speaking those words directly to me. Some kind of divine fear came upon me. Especially the word *judgment* gripped my heart. I was taught in Hinduism that one could be purified from sins by doing *puja* (worship with ritual), giving offerings and doing good works. He also warned that we should come to the creator while we are still young. These words touched my heart. The next Sunday I immediately accepted her invitation and followed her as I was very much eager to know the answers to all my questions. This time the preacher spoke on Psalm 115:4-8.

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see; They have ears, but they do not hear; Noses they have, but they do not smell; They have hands, but they do not handle; feet they have but they don't walk; nor do they mutter through their throat. Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them.

He said that monkey is not my god, but its creator is. In the same way elephant is not my god, but its creator is. Then he explained about the true living God and the Savior Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and shed blood for all of us. Now whoever believes in Him will be cleansed in His blood and he can become the child of God. He also gives blessed hope that He would come again someday to take us away to His place. There is no next birth. If any person dies in Him He will take the person to heaven.

Most of my questions were answered through the sermons I heard in the church. I felt that it was not the preacher but it was God who spoke to me. The words were very powerful that they cut my heart and convicted me of my sins and judgment. The very moment I confessed my sins to the Lord Jesus Christ and I got assurance and great peace in my heart that my sins were forgiven. I became the member of the same church and began to grow in the Lord and His Word.

I got experience of talking to God and also receive his answers from the Bible. God honored my faith and gave me third rank in the University. (Deut 28:13.) I also learnt to give to God my tithes. I was awarded a good amount of merit scholarship. Thus God showed me truth when I was seeking, and brought me to light when I was groping in darkness. He is not only God the Creator but also God the Savior. He gave me peace, joy, hope and a meaningful life. Now I know who I am and what is the destination of my life. Someday I will go to heaven to live with him forever.

I returned home after my studies at the university. My parents and family members sensed some kind of change in me and slowly came to know about my faith. Sufferings started from my own family. Friends, relatives and neighbors misunderstood me in different ways and talked about me with all kinds of misinterpretations. They didn't allow me to go to church and even to pray at my home. My mother scolded me a number of times that I brought shame, problems

and dishonor to the family and the entire clan. But my behavior was totally and radically changed. I became humble, loving and respectful. They were stunned to see such a great change in me and were impressed. God touched my sister's family and my two brothers through my life and testimony. They also accepted the Lord. After some time of prayer God gave me a teacher job. This gave me opportunity to visit church members and attend some church meetings without the permission of my parents.

Another issue that I had to face was my marriage. My parents were worried about it. Meanwhile God made me busy in evangelism and counseling. God was speaking to me through several verses that He called me for the full-time ministry. I didn't want to accept. In 1989 I was struck with brain fever and felt as if I was dying. Then God questioned me what I could do here for Him if I had died that day. Then I surrendered my life for the ministry and accepted to marry a pastor shown by God. He was a lecturer in a college and studied M.A. & M. Phil in English Literature. I studied only M.A. and was a teacher. Later he did M. Div & Th. M in Theology and is now doing Ph. D in Theology in Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois.

In our ministry many broken hearted people, even those who wanted to commit suicide, received answers and changed, and are living happily as we assisted them to understand the life in Jesus Christ. Now we have two churches in the city of Visakhapatnam and a few small churches in surrounding villages. Most of them came from Hinduism. There are some women and girls who accepted Christ but do not have freedom to attend the church. We serve them in other days and sometimes through phone. There are seven elders, who are serving the Lord in these places. There are also two full-time pastors. There are also a few children school teachers.

Every year one of us visits India to train them and spend in the ministry. I am trying my best to contact our church in India to encourage them and teach them. We are writing letters with good Bible study and sermons and sending them by mail or e-mails. We are also recording our sermons on audiotapes here and sending them. Sometimes I gave sermons directly over phone from here. Now we arranged internet and Webcam. We speak to small gatherings, church elders, families and also counsel individuals through web camera. We are trying with all the available resources to reach our church in India. This is all in addition to the work done by our assistant pastor and elders.

Very recently we started TV gospel program for India in our language. It is reaching many nations, and many Indians are watching all over the world. The program's name is **Rakshakuniswaram** (The Savior's Voice). It is aired on **Subhavaartha TV** channel in India on every **Thursday at 6:00 a.m.** (Indian Standard Time). We are getting responses from many people and even from those who are living abroad like U.K., U.S.A., Middle East, and other third world countries. In US you can watch this on internet on every **Wednesday at 7:30 p.m (US Central time)**. The website is **[www.subhavaarthatv.com](http://www.subhavaarthatv.com)**. Our email addresses are [azariahbs@gmail.com](mailto:azariahbs@gmail.com), [azariahbs@yahoo.com](mailto:azariahbs@yahoo.com), [sbbs92@yahoo.com](mailto:sbbs92@yahoo.com).