

Vision: "Write My Name!"

Adapted from *Hero Tales, Volume IV*, by Dave and Neta Jackson

*A native of India, Pandita Ramabai did more than anyone to call attention to the plight of India's widows and to create places of refuge and dignity.*

I woke early. It was Easter morning, 1896. I looked tenderly at the fifteen girls from Sharada Sadan, my school for Hindu widows, sleeping in our makeshift tent under the trees. All had accepted Christ as Savior and eagerly begged to come to the yearly "camp meeting" where both Indian and English Christians from Poona and Bombay gathered each Easter to pray, worship, and hear preaching.

I slipped out of our tent and walked in the quiet woods, thanking God for my fifteen spiritual children. As the sun rose, filling the woods with a dappled brilliance of green and gold, my heart was full of love for my heavenly Father. I prayed, "Gracious God, give me two hundred and twenty-five more spiritual children before the next camp meeting!"

Later I wondered whether I should pray such a prayer. After all, I had room for only fifty girls at Sharada Sadan! And the local Hindu priests had written the parents and told them to take their girls out of my school when they heard that some had become Christians. So the number of students had actually gone *down* in the last few months. But in my heart, I knew that God had given me a vision—a big vision—to reach out to hundreds more young Hindu widows, even though I had no idea where I would put them.

As spring turned into summer, word reached Poona that central India was suffering from a great famine. My heart ached. I remembered the famine that had taken the lives of my father and mother and sister. I knew what it was like to chew grass, hoping to fill the ache in my stomach. I remembered being so weak I could hardly stand or walk. And during a famine, orphans and widows who had no one to protect them were often in moral danger in the relief camps.

Now I knew why God had given me the vision of hundreds of girls coming to my school. I must go to central India to rescue suffering widows and orphans from the streets and gutters.

Leaving Sharada Sadan in the capable hands of my assistant, Soonderbai Powar, I and a "Bible woman" began our rescue mission. When I had found ten or twenty girls willing and able to make the journey, I sent them back to Poona by train with the Bible woman. The students at Sharada Sadan took on the task of welcoming the pathetic creatures that stumbled off the train.

But bubonic plague was creeping through southern India, and the local magistrate made a rule that Sharada Sadan could not add any more students. What was I going to do with all the young girls sleeping in tents all over the school grounds?

The fruit farm! Of course. I had bought the farm hoping to help feed my students and make them self-sufficient. No buildings had been built there—yet. But I moved all the famine victims to the farm thirty miles west of Poona.

When harvest finally arrived in 1897, the food emergency in central India was over. The rescue missions stopped. I counted the girls who had made their way to my school. Not 225...but 300!

I shared the Good News about Jesus with the girls, many of whom were from the lower castes. When a missionary visited the school and held special services, sixty-seven girls gave their hearts to Christ. The services continued, more accepted Christ...and on November 15, 1897, seventeen carts holding seven or eight girls each made a procession to the Bheema River five miles away for baptism.

As I wrote down the name of each girl who wanted to be baptized, a little girl of six tugged at my skirt. "Bai, Bai, write my name!"

The tiny widow was carried into the river and baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. No wonder my second school for widows was named Mukti Sadan—"Place of Salvation."

*When God gives us a vision of what He wants us to do for Him, He will make a way for us to do it.*