

# Destined for Royalty

*Anand Chaudhari*

Anand Chaudhari descended from a long line of famous Hindu Brahmin priests in Goa, India. His father, Sushu Kumar Chaudhari, who took the title 'Shastri' — one who has mastered the Hindu Scriptures — was the chief priest of the temple called the Shri Santadurga, one of the Kashmiri Brahmins' three most important places of worship in Goa. Sushu Kumar frequently travelled throughout India lecturing leading on Hindus on their sacred writings.

In 1939 an outbreak of smallpox decimated Goa's population, taking four of Anand's brothers in death. The disease struck Anand himself, an experience that remained vivid in his mind for the rest of his life. In his own words:

*"One night my father sat at my bedside and, seeing my life slipping away, from the depths of his heart he prayed to God, a God he did not even know. I remember that prayer. My father promised that if God would spare me, I would be given to Him for His service. He doubtless meant this to be as a Hindu priest, but how differently God answered. He did hear that prayer, and I recovered."*

With many millions of different gods worshipped in India, Sushu Kumar's prayer seemed somewhat unusual. Perhaps somewhere in the back of his mind he believed in a supreme deity

yet unknown to him. After the death of his four sons, Anand's father sank into deep depression. What terrible sins had he committed in his former life to inflict such a heavy karma? At times the guilt seemed unbearable. What acts of penance could possibly expiate all the evils of his past life? Other than performing the necessary regular priestly functions in the temple, Sushi Kumar withdrew into Yoga, meditation and the endless recitation of mantras, especially the word 'OM' (or 'AUM'), which represents Brahman, the impersonal force of the universe.

Determined not to renege on his promise to God, Sushi Kumar began to train his son Anand in the disciplines of the Hindu priesthood. Under the tutelage of his father and other priests, Anand studied the sacred writings of the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita and Ramayana. He learnt how to calculate and construct astrological charts, how to practise Yoga and meditation and how to perform priestly rituals, especially those connected with the goddess Durga, the wife of Shiva, the focus of worship in the Shri Santadurga temple.

Anand memorised endless religious instructions and mantras. The mantras he used as a magical force to 'enchain the power of the gods', to cure or cause disease, to act as a preservative or destructive force, and to cause or erase the effects of spirit possession. One mantra, the famous 'gayatri', reads: *"Let us worship the supreme light of the sun, the god of all things, who can so well guide our understanding like an eye suspended in the vault of heaven."*

Some priests recite the gayatri as many as 1,000 or even 5,000 times a day hoping for the remission of their sins, or to gain wealth, health or happiness. Anand's training also featured warnings. One read: *"Remember, O my son, that there is only one God who is*

*the Creator, Lord and source of all things, whom every Brahmin should worship in secret. But know also that this is a great mystery that must never be revealed to the vulgar and ignorant people. Should you ever reveal it, surely great misfortune will fall upon you”*

His father intended for Anand to gain a good all-round education to further facilitate his priestly calling, so in 1942 he sent him to Bombay (Mumbai) where he stayed with his wealthy uncle and aunt. Throughout his time at school and later at university he never ceased performing his priestly duties. Anand’s life was nothing if not busy. At Bombay University Anand took a degree course in philosophy. At the time it was fashionable for students to join the growing Communist movement and, seeing no serious contradiction between the priesthood and a communistic political outlook, Anand signed up. His local Communist organization asked him to run classes for the labouring people in a slum area of Bombay. The experience raised disturbing questions in Anand's mind.

*“I visited where the labourers lived. I saw their squalid conditions, fifteen or sixteen people lining in a one room shack. There was no running water, no sanitation facilities. The people who had jobs worked like animals for a few cents a day. Hinduism seemed to be always looking back. All you have in this life is a result of fulfilling your karma — what you have done in your past life — and whatever you are doing now will determine your next birth. The Harijan (outcaste) does what he is expected to do, and the Brahmin does what is predestined for him.”*

As a priest, Anand enjoyed the respect of his local community which frequently called upon him to offer special pujas (ritual sacrifices), to officiate at weddings and cremations and to appease

the gods in times of trouble. Privately however, he was becoming increasingly uneasy with the entire belief system of Hinduism. He began to feel that its structure had been deliberately designed to favour and safeguard the rights and privileges of the minority Brahmin ruling class. At the opposite end of the unjust caste system were the hopelessly enfeebled and unfortunate majority, whose belief in reincarnation kept them quiet with the hope of future betterment if they submitted to the religious order and lived good lives. Later Anand reflected:

*“What was the purpose of their endless sacrifices and daily rituals? The gods simply locked them into their wretchedness, to live their miserable existence without complaint — to suffer pain to its numbness, to give something out their nothing, to appease the gods’ anger so that perchance they would return in the next life as a man rather than a woman, or a farmer rather than a barber?”*

Even Anand’s political fervour began to wane. For three years he had readily devoured anything communistic. He had even spoken at Communist rallies. Yet his heart ached with a feeling of emptiness. Disillusionment overwhelmed him as he read the works of several ex-Communists. Then came a turning point.

One night in 1953, the Bombay Communist Party asked Anand to speak at a student debate. His pro-Communist speech drew enthusiastic applause from the audience but when his opponent, a student called Joseph, rose to reply, Anand was in for a shock. Joseph’s final words were: *“According to my faith, peace will come in this world only when Jesus Christ comes back to establish His kingdom on earth — and not until then.”*

Anand was aghast. Jesus Christ? What could that Western god have to do with peace on earth, never mind providing solutions to the pain and poverty of India? Yet Joseph's statement refused to go away. It constantly played on Anand's mind.

*"I tried to forget what I had heard, but I couldn't. That name seemed to be hooked into my mind and I could not shake it loose. Then it struck me. I had studied just about everything else; why not see what this was all about? So about ten days after the debate I contacted Joseph to find out where I could read more about Jesus Christ".*

When the two students met Anand found that Joseph could not fully answer all his questions.

*"Read the Bible, especially, the Gospels," Joseph said, "God will talk to you and show you the truth."*

Anand took up the challenge. His thoughtful examination of the words of Jesus left him feeling overawed by the power, majesty and love contained in them. Nothing he recalled in the Hindu religion came close to the teachings of Christ.

*"I read through Matthew and the other Gospels," says Anand, "Much I didn't understand, but I was like parched ground soaking up life-giving water."*

For months he agonised over the gospels, struck by the purity he found in Christ in stark contrast to the immoral and capricious gods of his own religion. He remembered the god Shiva who in a fit of jealousy killed his own son Ganesha by decapitation and replaced his head with the head of an elephant; and the goddess Kali who

drinks human blood and wears a necklace of human skulls. As he compared the Hindu gods with Jesus Christ he began to entertain the possibility that Jesus might actually be the true God after all. Yet he also entertained another possibility — what if, as some of the Gurus like Ramakrishna had said, Kali, Rama, Hanuman, Jesus and all the gods, are all able to lead to enlightenment? Yet the more Anand read the gospels, the more convinced he became that he could not mix Jesus together with the gods of Hinduism, most especially since Jesus claimed to be the only path to God, stating: *“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”* (John 14:6). In another passage, the Bible stated: *“There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave Himself a ransom for all”* (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

Anand eventually became convinced of the impossibility of coating his Hindu foundation and Communist superstructure with a new layer of Christianity. Through reading the Bible Anand also became aware of his guilt and sinfulness before a pure and holy God. To a Hindu priest and teacher the idea of being a ‘sinner’ was repulsive. In Anand’s own words: *“I never felt myself as a guilty sinner before. According to Hindu philosophy I was completely all right.”*

As the days passed by, cracks began to appear in Anand's philosophical edifice. Finally, after a long struggle, both intellectually and emotionally, Anand visited his favourite spot by the sea on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1954. He had come to an end of his posturing and self-righteousness. Falling on his knees he cast himself on the mercy of God, pleading for forgiveness through the Lord Jesus and

surrendering His life to the service of the one true God. The Lord gave him real assurance of the answer to his desperate call:

*“I will never forget that experience. I felt such a peace in my heart that everything else was gone. I felt freedom and utter joy. All the turmoil ceased — the conflict, everything — I was left with just a serene peace, calm and quietness. I experienced my sins being forgiven in a personal way by the only true and holy God through the death of Jesus on the cross. Because He had risen from the dead, He was alive and had given me eternal life. I wanted to tell everyone I met what had happened to me.”*

Before leaving the beach he removed his priestly Brahmin chord, flinging it as far as he could into the sea. Joyful though he was, the fact is becoming a true Christian was not a soft option for Anand. His change of heart had come after long consideration of the issues involved and there was a price to pay. He took the opportunity to break the news to his relatives at a family reunion at his uncle's house in Bombay. Anand's claim to have met God through Jesus was too much for his father.

*“Impossible!”* his father retorted, *“The ancient monks spent many years in meditation to gain this experience. Even I have never had it, though I've sought it all my life. How could you, a mere boy, have such an experience?”*

*“But it's true father,”* Anand replied, *“I've been seeking truth for a long time. I even joined the Communists at the university for a time, but they have no morality. Then I began to study the Christian scriptures, and there I found the true holy God — Jesus Christ.”*

After an angry outburst, Anand's father lapsed into a stony silence until Anand left Bombay to return home. Tragedy followed shortly afterwards. The next month Anand's parents attended the Kumbh Mela festival at the River Ganges. According to Hindu astrologers, uniquely special powers, only manifested once every 144 years, were to be at work in the sacred river in 1954, enabling the shortening of the devotees' rebirth cycle by 1,000 years. An estimated two to four million people crowded into an 80 acre area by the Ganges hoping for healing, forgiveness and deliverance from the cycle of reincarnation. As the crowd surged forward, Anand's parents and many others were crushed to death. Adding to his overwhelming grief, Anand's relatives blamed the tragic deaths on Anand's conversion to Christ. They saw it as a punishment from the gods and Anand was exiled from the family.

Later he went to a Bible school in Jhansi in the province of Uttar Pradesh, where he studied the Bible under Christian lecturers. Now married, Anand preaches the good news of Jesus Christ in various parts of India. He occasionally reflects on the promise his father made at his side while he lay at death's door with smallpox as a child. Could he see him again, Anand would assure him:

*"Father, I have honoured your promise. I have served God, the only true God, with all my being. He has blessed me far beyond your deepest desires, for I was destined to serve the King of Kings."*