



INDIA

# Of Mice AND Manuscripts



*George Koshy, managing editor of Global Media Associates, India (gmaindia@yahoo.co.in), tells the story of the first children's Bible published in that country.*

The first “readers” of the first-ever children’s Bible published in India were a group of hungry mice. And that is a true story.

In 1840, the first Indian-language Bible was published in India. Over 150 years later, though 15 percent of India’s billion people are children and teens, no one had yet produced a children’s Bible in an Indian language.

In 1994, George Koshy, then with Gospel Literature Service in India, participated in Cook’s International Christian Publishing Institute (ICPI).

“God challenged me as I was at the ICPI,” says Koshy. “By the time the Institute was over, I decided to get involved in preparing the first children’s Bible in my mother tongue.” Malayalam is spoken in Kerala, the southern-most tip of India. There are 22 major languages in India.

Koshy bought several versions of English-language Bibles for children, with the hope that one day he would be able to produce a similar product.

With Bibles stacked one over the other on a table, Koshy began to pray. “Many questions

flooded my mind: ‘Even if I prepare the manuscript, who will publish it?’ ‘Who will draw the pictures?’ ‘Who will market it?’ I brooded day after day,” recalls Koshy.

Not long afterwards, his prayers were answered. “God opened a door without much delay,” he reports. As it turns out, the Bible Society of India (BSI) was looking for an editor to develop a children’s Bible for the Indian market. Koshy gladly took on the challenge.

Realizing the great need for such a Bible, Koshy asked some friends to help write the text. The manuscript was finished in three years. However, because of some theological and other practical problems, the project was shelved. The manuscript was packed and kept in a wooden cupboard.

Years later BSI decided to revive the project. They contacted Koshy.

“I went to get the manuscript,” he recalls. “All that was left were a few shreds of paper and some dust. I could not believe my eyes.”

Three years’ work was gone. The

manuscript provided a sumptuous feast for a few mice.

Koshy embarked on a marathon race. Nights and holidays were dedicated to the work. In just 18 months, a new manuscript was ready.

Meanwhile, BSI asked José Peres Montario, an eminent artist from the Philippines, to develop culturally appropriate artwork. The artist created 200 four-color illustrations in 10 months.

While waiting for the text to reach completion, BSI began to promote the Bible. A color brochure was prepared. Endorsements from major church leaders were sought. Christian magazines featured interviews with Koshy and information on the product.

At last, the release of the children’s Bible was a grand event, with extensive media coverage. It was held at a renowned school, where Bible-based plays and programs were staged. Special discounts were offered. To the non-Christian market, it was promoted as an ideal collection of stories to help

children improve their values. BSI found staff at various Christian schools to promote and sell the product.

In the state of Kerala, *Kid’s Bible* festivals were held in three key towns to promote the Bible. The fonts used in the banner, fliers and other publicity materials for the festivals matched those of the Bible. Child Evangelism Fellowship and other organizations gave full support to the events.

The multi-layered promotion helped create the impression that the Bible was the ideal gift for any child. Within the first six months, 6,000 Bibles were sold. Reprints of the first children’s Bible continue in full swing.

“Mice first ‘enjoyed’ the manuscript,” he recalls, “but today, thousands of children find it sweeter than honey.”

The Malayalam children’s Bible turned out to be so successful that BSI published versions in three more languages. Video and music cassette series of the Bible stories are also in production.

“We have a mammoth challenge in reaching Indian children and young people for Christ,” says Koshy, “and this is a good start.” ♦