

## Indrani and Chandara, Ex-Hindu, Singapore

(part 1 of 3)



Sister Nishani (previously known as Indrani) and her husband, Brother Rafiq (previously known as Chandara) shared with Sister Muneerah Al-Idros, their path toward embracing Islam.

Indrani was 6 years old when her father died. Her mother stopped praying as she felt that god had been unfair to make her a widow with 5 little children. Indrani and her brothers and sisters were brought up as nominal Hindus. They had neither an altar nor pictures of gods in their house, as many Hindus do.

When Indrani was 10 years old she began to love god. She collected pictures of Hindu gods and goddesses and worshipped them at home. She felt the need to pray and thought it was odd that, unlike other Hindu families, her family performed few Hindu rites.

During her teenage years, Indrani started going to temple thrice weekly. She encouraged some of her friends to go to the temple with her, as she quickly became more interested in Hinduism.

She participated in bhajanai (devotional singing) activities and became a committee member in Ayyapan Group in Perumal Temple for several years.

One day, Indrani became very ill. She consulted several doctors but was informed that there was nothing wrong with her. However, her illness persisted. She later consulted a Swami (a Hindu priest) so that he would clear the sevani (evil spirits) that she suspected were dwelling inside her. The Swami and his assistant came to visit her. The assistant was Chandara, who was involved in her temple's religious rites, and who had also organized religious trips to Malaysia for Indrani and her friends.

Indrani was very impressed with the knowledge the young man demonstrated while assisting the swami.

After that visit, Chandara dreamt of his favorite goddess, Kaliamma, telling him to take Indrani as his bride. After much persuasion, his family asked for Indrani's hand in marriage. Indrani and her family were pleasantly surprised by the marriage proposal. Indrani could not believe that her dreams of marrying a pious Hindu had come true.

Unlike Indrani, Chandara was brought up in a religious Hindu family. On top of that, Chandara was the most religious in his family. He would often slip into a trance, reciting the holy mantras in praise of the gods and goddesses who would [supposedly] possess him and speak through him. In Hinduism, it is considered an honor to be possessed by the gods or goddesses.

Chandara and other members of the group often got together to listen to the teachings of the swami. They would also make house visits to chase evil spirits out of other people's houses and bodies. This is how Chandara was appointed to be the swami's assistant.

Indrani had never entered into a trance but had seen Chandara [supposedly] being possessed by the elephant god, Vinayagar. Chandara would behave exactly like an elephant, eating the fruits that the elephant ate.

When in a trance, Chandara would be approached to solve problems. Those who approached him would prostrate before him, for they regarded him as "God". The vibuthi (white ashes) used to anoint the forehead would be brought to Chandara to be blessed.

Despite all this, Chandara did not feel complete. Dissatisfied, he knew there was something not right in his life. He failed to see the light and always felt that his path was blocked by some kind of darkness which he wanted to clear so he could reach the light. He knew that there were 3360 Hindu gods and he prayed to several of them.

Whenever he felt confused, he would go to the library to find out more about Hinduism. He learned from the elders but knew there was still a lot more to learn. Many of the Hindu priests did not want to share everything that they knew; knowledge was their rice bowl, and they did not want their source to be taken away.

It was difficult to learn on your own about Hinduism, as most of the writings were in Sanskrit. Chandara could not find any holy books that satisfied his quest. All the books were written by different authors and each of them had different ideas about how and when Hinduism started. Even the Bhagavat Geeta (which emphasized more on Vishnu), Ramayana and Mahabharata were very limited. These holy scriptures were more literature books, teaching that we should

do good and pray to the gods. Above all these gods is the female god, who is the Aadhi Parasakhti. She controls the whole universe. The essence of Hinduism is to strive at getting a good reincarnation and to worship God and to pray to God through demigods.

During this search for enlightenment, Chandara was approached by a Christian missionary worker in Toa Payoh. He got involved in Christianity in the hope of enlightenment. However, he did not like Christianity, mainly due to the behavior of the people in the church; he noticed that young men and women were behaving indecently. Christianity was not what he was looking for and he withdrew.

### **(part 2 of 3)**

Still, Chandara could no longer bring himself to pray to so many gods. He could worship only one God spiritually and worship the other idols physically, but he did not know who the One God was. Chandara occasionally still got into a trance.

Chandara had curious Malay friends asking him about Hindu worship. They did not tell him about Islam but they told him that unlike him they pray to one God: God.

Chandara, who was the leader among his working mates, would go along with Malays when they performed their Zuhur prayer, waiting while they prayed. At the same time, he would pray to God in his heart, and ask for the right path.

Chandara was very impressed with the adhan, which had a soothing effect on this. The adhan touched his heart so deeply, especially when it was followed by the prayer that his friends and other Muslims never failed to fulfill. He felt like it was so simple to recognize the true God. "Just worship him. Why does one need all these idols and mediators?" It did not take long before he felt it was Islam and God that he had been searching for.

After their marriage, his wife Indrani was still quite active in her temple activities. She became puzzled when her husband, a more pious Hindu than herself, used to hint repeatedly at the existence of one Almighty God, about praying to one God and that a true religion should not have many gods. Her mother-in-law felt that her previously pious son might have offended the gods.

Even after marriage, Chandara continued his search for enlightenment. He was trying to search for his One God in Hinduism, trying to know the One God he was praying to spiritually. He was no longer interested in any of the temple activities, no longer got into a trance. His mother, while in a trance, pointed out that her son's change in behavior was due to his being under a charm.

Chandara did not know anything about Islam except that in Islam, God is One. He would meditate daily and Uthrachamale (... rosary) Usually, he would be chanting the various god's names. However, this time when he called out their names he felt something was wrong so he just said in English, "Almighty God, Almighty God..." In his meditation, he knew Muslims are praying to the true God.

Chandara's biggest problem in practicing Islam was Indrani. She didn't like Muslims and was active with her temple activities. He tried to influence his wife on the teachings of Islam by turning on to the Malaysian Islamic programmed on televisions, like "Pedoman." Indrani would complain that it was not necessary for her husband to take so much interest in Islam. He took this opportunity to express to her that he no longer believed in Hinduism, reasoning that it does not have a holy book and a basis of belief. Failing to find out how Hinduism started it merely seemed a culture full of complexity brought down by their ancestors.

He bought a translation of the Quran by Yusuf Ali and was deeply impressed when he read about the Prophets, of the beginning of mankind and of heaven and hell. He found many things that are necessary for every human bring to know and he encouraged Indrani to read it. When he read that idol-worshippers will be thrown to hell, he had all the idols and pictures removed from their home.

Chandara now concentrated on learning more about Islam from various sources. He tried to learn more about Islam from his Malay friends. However, they usually could not give him answers to his questions. They suggested that he should seek help from ... a religious teacher.

Chandara started bringing home books on Islam, as well as on Christianity, Sikhism and Hinduism, telling his wife to read and make a comparison of these religions. Indrani was not interested she was very satisfied with her belief and with Hinduism. She told herself that there no way he could influence her with his idea of One Almighty God and swore in her heart that she would bring him back to her way.

Indrani had no intention of reading the books her husband brought home. Yet when she had trouble sleeping at night, something made her pick up the Quran and read it. Again and again, when she could not sleep, it was the Quran that she picked up and read. She felt so lost because since her husband removed the Hindu deities from their home, she could no longer pray to them.

Indrani began to have dreams. During her first pregnancy, she dreamt of the Kaaba. She related her dream to one of her Muslim colleagues, who the related Indrani's dream to her father. He told her that she was fortunate to have dreamt of the Kaaba.

She also dreamt of Hindu gods giving her warnings and threats but she had more dreams about Islam and pious Muslims. She continued to pray to Hindu idols, but wondered about her dreams. When she was expecting her third daughter, she had another strange dream. She heard a voice coming from the open window of the bedroom window. The voice said, "I am Muhammad, the Messenger of God. Follow my way and all evil will go away. If you want to know more, ask your husband."

She awoke after this dream but fell asleep again. She had a second dream. In this dream, she saw herself telling her husband about her first dream. She asked him what the "way" was and he told her to look out the window. When she did, she saw Yusuf Islam dressed like an Arab giving a talk on Islam, surrounded by other people dressed like him. Indrani had never seen Yusuf Islam before but she had heard of him. Somehow, in her dream, she knew it was him.

These dreams had a very strong impact on Indrani's belief. She became increasingly drawn toward Islam and wanted to follow the way of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him. She recalls that she wanted to accept Islam, but was afraid as she was expecting her third child. She feared something would befall her baby as she thought of the threats the Hindu deities had made in her dream. After her delivery, Indrani told her husband that she was ready.

They were told about Dar-ul Arqam - The Muslim Converts' Association of Singapore, where they could register their reversion to Islam. Chandara initially refused as he thought Dar-ul Arqam was affiliated to [another strange organization]. They went to Jamiyah (Islamic Theological Society of Singapore) instead, and registered their names as Mohamed Rafiq and Nishani.

When they announced their reversion, they encountered many problems. This was especially so when Indrani started wearing the hijab. Their parents, siblings, relatives and friends who used to hold them dear, now chided them. All the friends Indrani guided to Hinduism now refused to have anything to do with her, for fear that she may succeed in bringing them to Islam. They were especially surprised because Indrani used to dislike Muslims more than they did. Indrani's parents warned her that her husband must have a hidden interest in having more than one wife.

Indrani and her husband, ostracized by their parents, missed the affection they previously received from them. Indrani repeatedly told herself that since God loves her so much, the sacrifice she was making in losing her family was nothing. She knows that no one loves her more than God Himself.

Learned Hindus and gurus tried to bring Chandara back to Hinduism but he turned them down politely. They then severed their relationship with him. Indrani's family swore to see that he children Nisha, Nafeesa and Natasha be

brought back to Hinduism when they grow up, refusing to acknowledge their grandchildren's Muslim names. The children, now studying at the Madrasah (Islamic school), are very pleased with their religion. Chandara encourages them to wear the hijab, even though they are still young, with the intention of getting them used to veiling. The parents observed that the children like the hijab so much that they themselves refuse to remove it.

Despite being rejected by their families, Indrani and Chandara never gave up trying to improve their relationship with them. Today, both Indrani's and Chandara's mothers have expressed that they have a filial son and a filial daughter. Alhamdulillah [All praise is to God].