

My Journey

AS A PIONEER FROM INDIA



I look back at my journey from being a “jungle boy” in rural India to being where I am today and know that my life and faith are truly miracles.



**By Mangal Dan Dipty,
as told to John Santosh
Murala**

I was born in a small jungle village surrounded by the Eastern Ghats mountain range in India. When I was 18 months old, we moved to the village Dangrapalli on the banks of the River Kolab. I was transported in a basket while my parents walked. The village consisted of 20–25 families, who lived in small huts with no electricity. We had no school, hospital, or bus station. We dug the riverbed for drinking water. I spent my childhood playing in the jungle and fields, walking on stilts in the swamps, and swimming in the river.

My forefathers were Hindu temple priests under the Maharaja (King) of Bastar of Jagdalpur. But when the political instability became dangerous, my grandfather and his family escaped to Kotpad. They were given refuge at a German Lutheran mission, where he worked as a caretaker and practiced Ayurveda (herbal medicine). It was here that my grandfather chose to convert to Christianity.

My father continued in the Christian faith by choosing to become an evangelist and a guru (teacher). When I was born, I was named Mangal Dan Dipty (meaning “good,” “gift,” and “light”), inheriting a tradition of Christian faith.

As a child I attended the German Lutheran church regularly. We would go to the mountains to pray together often. One rainy day, everyone in the prayer group was drenched, and one of the preachers offered a fervent prayer pleading with the Lord to stop the rain. To our amazement the rain stopped. That was the beginning of my faith in God and prayer.

Is Mormonism Christian?

After eighth grade, I discontinued school to attend a three-year theological seminary at Kotpad and was ordained an evangelist, as my father had been. After a few

years of conducting meetings in and around Kotpad, I moved to northern India, where I began to sell books from the Evangelical Christian literature society. I came across a book called *Is Mormonism Christian?* Something about the book intrigued me, and I decided to read it.

The book had a lot of criticism toward the Mormons and their beliefs. Even so, many parts of the book intrigued me, especially their concept of the Godhead, the components of their worship, and the history of polygamy. However, what interested me the most was that their church was named after Jesus Christ. I was curious to know more.

One day while praying, I felt inspired to investigate the Mormon Church. I learned that Salt Lake City, Utah, was the Church's headquarters. I decided to write a letter and addressed it to "Men in charge of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA."

Learning from an Apostle

In 1959, in response to my letter, Brother Lamar Williams from the Church Missionary Department sent me Joseph Smith's testimony, the Articles of Faith, and the Book of Mormon. I studied them all and was convinced of their truthfulness. However, there were no missionaries or members to teach me in India.

Then in January 1961, Elder Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles visited Delhi. I spent three days traveling with him to the Taj Mahal at Agra and to Dharamsala. I was like a sponge soaking up all the gospel lessons he taught. On the final day of his visit, I was ready for baptism. On January 7, 1961, I was baptized by Elder Kimball in the Yamuna River; Sister Kimball was the official witness, though there were many curious onlookers. I was confirmed that evening.

Those three days when the Lord's Apostle taught me without any interruptions have been some of the best days of my life. Parting was sad because he had become my special Mormon friend.

Yearning for the Saints

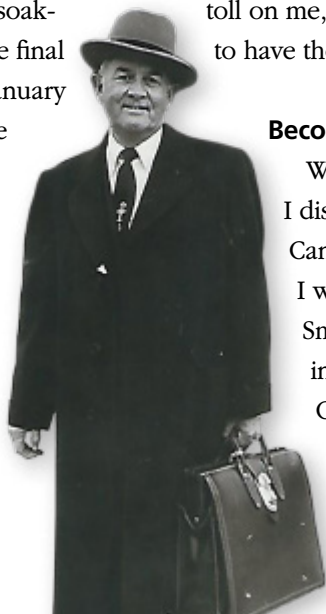
After Elder Kimball left, I shared my conversion experience with my friends, and they mocked me. But I knew the gospel was true and could not deny it, so I decided to find another vocation. I started a garment business as my father had. Gradually, though, I realized that I could not progress unless I gained more education. I was in my mid-20s, and the idea of going back to school was daunting, but I spent the next nine years acquiring education. I ran my business in the morning and studied in the evening. I spent all my earnings on education. I was determined and prayed for divine help. I pursued a bachelor's degree in psychology, sociology, and arts from Agra University. Finally, I attended the Meerut University to study for a law degree.

During the early part of those nine years, there was one Latter-day Saint family in Delhi, the Shortlefts, who worked in the U.S. Embassy. I traveled to Delhi for sacrament meeting in their home. In 1962, Elder Richard L. Evans (1906–71) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles visited us, and in 1964, Elder Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles came. I remember placing a garland on Elder Hinckley and handing over my pot of saved tithing, which I had been accumulating for many years.

Unfortunately, these moments of fellowship—though helpful—were infrequent, and while in India I was devoid of the constant fellowship of other Saints. This troubled my heart. As the years wore on, lonesomeness was taking a toll on me, and I saw no future for me in India. I longed to have the priesthood and live among the Saints.

Becoming a Pioneer

When I felt it was time to be closer to the Saints, I discontinued my law course and immigrated to Canada. When I landed in Edmonton, Alberta, I went to the nearest ward. I met Bishop Harry Smith and immediately felt a sense of belonging and fellowship in that ward. I visited the Cardston Alberta Temple, even though I could not receive my endowment yet.





Above: Brother Dipty as a student in India. Below: Brother Dipty (left) with Paul Trithuvadass, another pioneer Church member from India, on Temple Square in Salt Lake City. Left: President Spencer W. Kimball played an important part in Brother Dipty's pioneer journey.

I wanted to visit Salt Lake City and surprise my good friends Elder Kimball and Brother Lamar Williams. Finally, in the spring of 1969, eight years after my baptism, I visited Salt Lake City and met with Elder Kimball. He was delighted and spent the rest of the day with me.

While in Salt Lake City, I went to a salon for a haircut. I shared my testimony with the barber, who was a convert himself. One gentleman, waiting for his turn, overheard me and told me about his travels to India. He paid for my haircut, invited me to dinner, and drove me to Brigham Young University. I was impressed by the campus. I mentioned that I wanted to continue my studies here but could not afford it. The man offered to pay \$1,000 for my tuition. I was surprised and immensely grateful.

I joined the social work program at BYU. In 1972, after graduating from BYU, I moved to Salt Lake City to pursue a master's degree from the University of Utah. Later I moved to California, USA, where I earned a PhD in clinical psychology, taught courses on how to stop domestic violence, and authored a book. I am now retired and live with my wife, Wendy, in Nevada, USA.

There was a time when I went through much personal strife, challenges, and tribulations. My focus on the gospel and the blessings of the temple helped me overcome many of life's challenges.

His Plans Are a Marvel

I often look back at my journey from being a “jungle boy” in rural India to being where I am today and know that my life and faith are truly miracles. The Lord's embroidery of my life is more beautiful than I ever expected. How wonderful it was to have the Lord's anointed prophet Spencer W. Kimball school me and walk with me at key times in my life's journey.

I often think back to my time with President Kimball. He would invite me to his family camping trips, picnics, and Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners. Even then I knew that he truly was an Apostle and prophet of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I met President Kimball one last time while he was very ill. But he still smiled at me and hugged me. He was my first LDS contact, and I knew he would never let go of me.

I am thankful to God for our prophets and the restored gospel. Our Church is the divine model the world needs today. Because of the Church I was able to gain an education and grow as a person. I am grateful for that day when I knew prayer was real and that I was willing to listen to the still, small voice and investigate the Church. I am grateful that I allowed the Lord to shape my life. I know that if we seek His kingdom, everything else will be added to us (see Matthew 6:33). ■

The author is from Telangana, India.

