

Monday 2nd September

Introducing the Gujarati Shaikh

India's northwest region has always been key for commerce and a major trade route over the centuries as part of the Silk Road, where the traders of the West sought to engage their counterparts in the East and vice-versa.

Any power which had control over this route could dominate the world. Following the religious crusades in the Middle East in the Middle Ages, the triumphant Arab army laid the foundations for an Islamic empire which spread into Europe and vast regions of Asia encompassing many parts of India.

The Arabs excelled in trading and to ensure that they were successful, they kept their finger on the pulse of their burgeoning businesses. Thus, Arab merchants chose to live in the regions where they conducted business. Desiring comforts of home and family led these Arabs to settle in Gujarat and marry the local women and have children.

The offspring of these unions became the Gujarati Shaikh. This people group today bears the physical attributes of this genetic alliance, having a paler complexion than other Indians with brown eyes and dark hair.

The title 'Shaikh' in Arabic refers to one who comes from a ruling class of people, so in the most distant past the Gujarati Shaikh came from those who ruled. Today this title following a first name is treated as a surname or family name.

When the Arabs settled, they transported Islam to their new community. All the Gujarati Shaikh population, which numbers approximately 1.1 million, are Muslim. They live everywhere across the state.

God is the creator of the Gujarati Shaikh as Psalm 139:13-14 indicates:

*For you created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.*

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to hover over this people group and give them a yearning for God, so that they begin calling upon the name of the Lord.
- Pray for the Gujarati Shaikh to be stirred to question their existing belief system and to desire an assurance of salvation through Christ's finished work on the cross.
- Pray for revelation that He can come into their lives and have a relationship with them as a result of Christ's work on the cross and resurrection.

Tuesday 3rd September

Gujarat state

The Gujarati Shaikh live in the state of Gujarat, whom they are named after. This is India's most North Westerly state, immediately next to Pakistan's eastern border.



Gujarat has an unusual mixture of territory. In the west, there is the white sandy desert called the 'Thar' which is home to a seasonal marshland and wildlife reserve called the 'Great Rann of Kutch.' In the south, there are stretches of verdant agricultural lands due to the number of rivers; growing various vegetable crops and food staples. Interspersed on the landscape, are towers where the smoke of industry hits the skyline.

Modern day Gujarat reflects the effects of the commercial upturn in urban areas. Large urban centres are dotted over the entire state which mixes modern commerce with the ancient archaeological reminders of former times. Gujarat is a booming economic hub which also attracts the brains of Indian academia to work there. Gujarat is the place to be, if you have hopes and dreams. This is the door to opportunity and prosperity.

Young people from different states over the north flock to university and college here. Ladies can train to be pilots or get their start on the career ladder in their first newspaper job as a journalist. A family can rent an apartment and set about decorating it with the latest soft furnishings and lead a comfortable existence with beautifully carved wooden furniture. Everything can be bought in contemporary shops in high rise air conditioned shopping centres.

Scripture reminds us that *"the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it"* Psalm 24:1. Declaring this truth, helps us to see that the Gujarati Shaikh may live far off from us, but the place that they inhabit belongs to the Lord and His sovereign ownership, just the same as where we live.

- Please pray that the Gujarati Shaikh will realise that they were created by God and belong to Him.
- Pray for a deep work of the Holy Spirit to take place in the hearts of these people, so that they acknowledge that everything they have comes from God.
- Pray for the Gujarati Shaikh not to be taken up with material possessions but for them to experience grace through Jesus. Living amid God's grace is the place where they will be most satisfied.

Wednesday 4th September

Urban poor

In contrast with the wealthy lives of some in urban areas, are those living in the Muslim ghettos of Gujarat.

Ghettos might give the idea of extreme poverty but in fact this is not the case, as there is electric



and water supply to their areas. Avenues of shops, markets, schools and places of medical care can be found along the main roads. Women dressed in black hijabs and jallabahs (long robes) and colourful shalwar kameez (tunic and trousers) and dupattas (head scarves) can be seen buying fresh vegetables and meat from stall holders in the market.

Houses are not as modern and plush as those in wealthy areas but they are solid with some ground around them. The humdrum of cars and rickshaws can be heard echoing in the dusty main streets on busy

working days. Dogs, cattle and the odd camel wander up the road, putting their noses into litter that is lying on the street.

During times of special events such as a wedding, families hire marquees for the celebrations. Dressing up and celebrating brings excitement to the community. Mosques are scattered through the communities. Muslims observing their religious rituals head off to the mosque for their daily routine of prayers, when the call to prayer is sounded.

Psalm 8:4-5 states, *“What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honour.”*

- Pray that, as Gujarati Shaikh and other Muslims view their current situation as being humble in the eyes of others in their Indian society, they may be aware that God sees their plight in their community and is ready to intervene.
- The Muslim view of God is that He is far off and does not engage with man in a personal way. They are fatalistic about life. Pray that they may have the opportunity and the willingness to hear the Good News, which is counter to what they have been told. God wants to lift them out of their sin to new life in Christ and give them a place of honour, not shame.

Thursday 5th September

Families

Gujarati Shaikh men will use whatever God-given talent they have to set up a business. Long hours of assiduous effort are put in to make the business thrive. Often they come home at night exhausted from their labours. In their business, they will try to be good Muslims by giving jobs to fellow Muslims from poorer neighbouring states.

For other Gujarati men life can be dismal and full of disenchantment as they are poor and unemployed. Their mood of hopelessness affects the rest of the family. Wives in this situation can be worn down by working harder to keep the family fed and to lift the mood of their husbands. As soon as a woman is of marriageable age, a suitable match is made for her by her parents or responsible relative. A partner is chosen for her amongst her people group, one of similar social status. Her role will be to run a comfortable home with servants, raise children and be a good wife to her husband and to live a religious life.



If children belong to a financially comfortable family, they will go to school during their early years, be taught English and will go on to further education and possibly high-paid careers. For the poor Muslim child, they are sent off out to the streets to beg. It is commonplace to see a Muslim child loitering outside the entrance of a mosque with their little hand extended and sad eyes, pleading for money or food. This is an acceptable practice in Muslim society as Mohammed, the prophet, urged good Muslims to give alms to the poor, as a sign of their love for God.

A child's possessions are few and far between. They have small amounts of clothes and few toys. But they will smile and laugh with their friends and make the most of their situation. Everyone enjoys the game of cricket, whether participating or observing. When they reach their early teens, most children will be sent out

to work to supplement the family income.

- Pray for parents of Gujarati Shaikh children to follow Jesus. In turn, pray that they will follow God's Word, to teach their children in the ways of Christ.
- Pray for men to cry out to God for help. In so doing, ask God to bring them to faith in Jesus Christ such that He will be their role model in life as they live in their families and their communities and their witness will be fruitful.
- Pray for female messengers to develop deep and meaningful relationships with Gujarati Shaikh women, where they can share and pray for them. Ask God to answer prayers beyond the imagining of these dear women.

Friday 6th September

Employment

For the past three centuries, the textile industry has been at the forefront of the Gujarati economy. Cotton production has given employment to many of the local people. Indeed, Gujarat state has the highest production of cotton in the whole of India.



In the west of the state, where many of the Gujarati Shaikh live, is a geographical area known as Kutch, where there are fields with acres of white cotton. It is taken to factories to be made into material and then transformed by seamstress into the most intricate of Indian ladies' dresses and men's waistcoats and traditional suits.

At the age of sixteen, girls are apprenticed for six weeks to learn hand embroidery stitching to decorate clothes. Garments festooned with embroidered flowers, leaves and small mirrors and tie dye are the trademark of Gujarat design. Clothes are marketed for both the Muslim and Hindu markets.

Since 1958, car production has been thriving in India. There are car plants in many of the major Indian cities including Ahmedabad and Sanand in Gujarat where Ford, Suzuki, General Motors and India's own brand, Tata, are present.

Another sector which has grown in the past few decades is the pharmaceutical industry. Factories and laboratories line the grounds of the industrial estates on the edges of the cities. Products such as soaps, topical creams, surgical soaps, medicines for the common cold and indigestion are manufactured.

The agricultural industry is sizeable in Gujarat state. Acres of land outside of the cities have been set aside to grow rice, bananas, coconuts, tomatoes, pineapples, mangoes, beans, corn, wheat, potatoes, onions and aubergines. Tractors and machinery can be seen harvesting some crops in the fields, however mainly it is farm labourers who carry out the tasks of sowing and reaping.

- As the Gujarati Shaikh engage in employment at various levels of the textile industry, pray that the Holy Spirit will make them aware that it is creator God made them with the talents and skills to manufacture those products and that He enables the creativity within them.
- In John 6:35 Jesus declares: *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."* Ask the Lord to give the Gujarati Shaikh a deep hunger for God and no satisfaction until they taste of the bread of life, who is Jesus.
- Pray that there would be a childlike dependence upon God the creator and a thankfulness of heart that trusts and praises God and will turn their souls to seek after God with all their being.

Saturday 7th September

God's plan for the Gujarati Shaikhs

Jesus refers to the "harvest" in Matthew 9 and Luke 10, as the souls of people that the Holy Spirit has already prepared to receive the good news with attentive listening ears and willing hearts.

The truths contained in these scriptural passages apply to the Gujarati Shaikh. God has prepared people of peace from amongst this people group to hear the gospel and to come and follow Christ. This is a fact that can inspire us to greater levels of faith as we pray for the salvation of this people. Jesus is saying that there is a harvest of souls and God will bring them into the kingdom of God. Praying for a group of believers instead of individuals is strategic because the gospel can take a greater foothold. Believers are encouraged by others in the spiritual race and are less likely to backslide in their faith. We read of households sharing the gospel in the Book of Acts when Cornelius and Lydia gathered everyone to hear the message.

There is also a reality that Jesus points out in this Scripture passage, that there are few workers to undertake the task of bringing the gospel to the eager seekers of God. Jesus commands His people to pray for God to send the workers. We should not ask God half-heartedly to do this; it is His will and He will call people to the task. There is a sizeable harvest to be brought in.

There is also great scope for short-term prayer teams to go and encourage the long-term teams and national believers and to be involved in the process of birthing new things. If this is something that God has put on your heart, please contact jess@frontiers.org.uk

- As you pray, ask God to increase your faith for the salvation of the souls of the Gujarati Shaikh.
- It is important to pray that the gospel will truly take a significant foothold. Please pray that the Holy Spirit will stir up Gujarati Shaikh who have the spiritual gifting of being evangelists and who will train and disciple others to reproduce and advance the kingdom of God amongst their people group and others in the region.
- Pray for more workers to go to the Gujarati Shaikh both from overseas and from the nation of India. Indian workers have some advantages when doing this as they know the culture, they speak some of the local languages and they can be there on a more permanent basis. But overseas workers bring other strengths, resources and skills. Ask God if this is something he is calling you to be a part of.