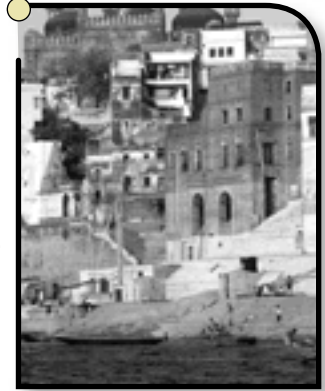


Varanasi is a sacred Hindu city on the Ganges River in India. According to Hindu belief, it is the cosmic center of the universe. On the vast steps that line the Ganges River, Hindus bathe, conduct business, worship, and die.

Interwoven in the pageantry and drama of one million Hindus are 250,000 Muslims who have made Varanasi their home for the past 500 years. Standing high over the Hindu temples and shrines, the Mosque of Aurangzeb evokes the past, when Mogul Muslims ruled India for generations. Muslims continue to live in close-knit communities founded in those days.

Entering a Muslim area is like stepping back in time. The call to prayer can be heard rippling through the air and into homes. Many of Varanasi's Muslims belong to a weaver caste called "Ansari" ("helper" in Arabic). For generations they have passed on their craft from father to son, hand-weaving silk on room-sized, foot-powered looms. The silks they create are so intricate that they are fashioned into saris worn only for special occasions. Even as they value the saris, Hindus look down on the Ansari, saying they are upstarts who will never be high caste.



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The economic challenges of the 21st century are pressing in on the Ansari. Chinese silk and fabrics woven by power looms are competing for the market. Some are beginning to abandon the old ways and branch out into other lines of work that they hope will be more profitable and stable. The realities of the modern world require more of them to mingle with outsiders. Often, one or more boys from a family are sent to school to learn business and English.

Christians have often overlooked the Muslims of Varanasi, but that is changing as God leads workers to these people. There are now a few house churches among the Muslims in this city.

Pray

- ① Pray that as the Ansari mix more with the outside world, God will reveal Himself to them.
- ① Pray for the house churches, that the new believers may continue to grow in their knowledge of God. Pray for emerging leaders of house churches to be identified and trained.
- ① Pray for the missionaries in Varanasi, that God will sustain their ministries and lead them to the harvest fields.