

## PHILIP FROM BANGLADESH

### TRAINING HELPS PHILIP BRING MEDICAL CARE AND THE GOSPEL TO HIS BUDDHIST NEIGHBOURS

When Philip saw members of his isolated tribal community dying because of a lack of access to medical care, he prayed and asked God to intervene. He says, “I never thought that God would open the door through me!” After receiving medical training, Philip can now offer both medicine for the body and medicine for the soul to his brothers and sisters, as well as his Buddhist neighbours.

Philip is a 27-year-old pastor from a small village in the east of Bangladesh. His village is made up of 12 Christian families, and they are part of the Tripura tribal community, who are traditionally Buddhist.

Philip has a great desire to serve his community. “These people are surviving with natural skills and knowledge. But it is not good enough to survive,” Philip says. Most of the Tripura people work as labourers in the rubber plantations or in Jhum cultivation, a type of farming that involves clearing land and burning the vegetation. But this type of work doesn’t provide a very good income – most of the people can’t meet even their basic needs. “These people do not dream of a better future. They dream of good health and two meals for the next day.”

The community have very limited facilities – there is no electricity, no hospital, no school. Philip is one of the very few from his community who was able to complete his high school education – and he was only able to achieve this through distance learning, which meant he could study at home. Philip says, “Educated people do not stay in the village – they stay in the city and do good jobs. But I want to stay in the village to serve these poor people.”

The lack of medical facilities was having very serious consequences for Philip’s community. “I have seen people die without treatment even for simple diseases, like, malaria, diarrhea, and women dying in childbirth. Many people died on the way to the hospital since it takes a long time to reach to the hospital.”

Trying to reach the nearest hospital from these villages is a huge undertaking. First, you must take public transport (a jeep) for one and a half hours, which takes you half way. Then you must walk for another one and a half hours, crossing canals and climbing up and down hills.

But the jeep is only available one day out of the entire week – Wednesday, the market day. So on other days, you must walk the entire way, which can take between five and six hours, or hire private transport – but this is too expensive for most people. Imagine making such a journey whilst suffering from a serious illness.

Philip could see how important it was that his community had better access to medical care, but he didn’t know what to do. “I just used to pray to God for our community to open a door because I could do nothing,” said Philip. He added laughingly, “I never thought that God would open the door through me. This is unbelievable.”

### Building better relationships

When Philip shared with a senior pastor from his denomination about his concerns for his community, he suggested that Philip should train as a rural doctor. During his six months of training he learned about general medicines, minor surgery, and basic theology. He received certification from the centre where he trained, which is approved by the government, and was given a medical kit and financial support to start a small pharmacy. After completing his training in 2018, he went back to his village where he now serves as a pastor and a doctor.

As well meeting the desperate need for medical care in his community, Philip's training has also helped him to build relationships with those who don't know Jesus. "Nearby our village, there are Buddhist villages. I never visited them before, but now I have to visit these villages often, to serve them. I always pray and ask my patients to pray with me before I start my work. I encourage them to depend on Jesus Christ instead of depending on me. I find that a sick person seems to always be afraid of death. So, to recover, they agree to pray with me and I always tell them of the miraculous works of Jesus Christ," Philip says.

He explained that before, the Buddhists villagers did not like the Christians – the Buddhists would mock the Christians and called them names. "But now they have started to show respect toward us. They buy medicine from me and also say good things about my service," he said. Philip's popularity is growing day by day. His friendly nature helps people to accept him easily, and they are gradually starting to trust him.

He hopes that, through his service, his Buddhist neighbours will be drawn to faith in Jesus. "I dream that some day these Buddhist people will become Christians and worship the Lord Jesus Christ. I am working on it. Through this medical service, I am building good relationships with them and telling them about Jesus Christ," he said.

### **'Everything has changed'**

He makes a small profit from his dispensary, about 700 taka (USD\$8) a month – he could earn more, but he doesn't charge for home visits and services. He is still very happy with the amount that he earns, as it helps him to provide for the needs of his family, as well as help others.

He is now well known to the local villagers for his service to his community. "People come to our village and ask about me almost every day. Now I come to know many people. They listen to my suggestions and give importance to my words. I really enjoy serving these people," says Philip.

### **Please pray:**

- That Philip will work faithfully with a heart of service, both as a pastor and a rural doctor. Pray that he will radiate joy and peace so that others will see and enquire about it.
- That many of his neighbours will find salvation in Jesus through this ministry
- That God will help him to grow in his medical skills and knowledge.