

Chapter 7

MISSION TO RURAL INDIA

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My Perception of Rural India

My experience of rural India is limited to the Hindi states in the North. Even in these states historical, geographical, educational, industrial-economic-infra-structural and religious factors combine to create enormous differences. Therefore, what is presented below is, at best, only generalizations with few exceptions. Also, much of what is true about rural India is true for much of urban India as well. In that sense I am not focussing the paper strictly on 'rural' India.

THE SIMMERING RURAL VOLCANO

Rural India is in ferment. Some of this ferment is being expressed in terms of a desire for religious conversion, both to Christianity as well as to many cults. Some of the discontent is expressed in non-religious and non-political movements, e.g. Shetkari Sangathana in Maharashtra and the Tikait phenomenon in U.P.; while much of it is expressed in political movements, whether democratic e.g. Devi Lal, Ajit Singh phenomena, or violent agitations, such as terrorism in Punjab, Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh and Assam. A great deal of the ferment is reflected in quiet migration to the horrible city slums, which seem better than the rural hopelessness. These slums, at least, hold out a hope for the next generation.

Many factors have come together to generate today's ferment. Mass media – Films, TV, Radio, Newspapers – and easy modes of transportation to the cities have given a vision of possibilities of better life.

Democratic experience of being able to change rulers — whether local or national — has made people aware of their power. Democracy has also thrown up leaders who have articulated the rural problems. Three of these problems stand out that have no immediate or easy solutions.

Intellectual Powerlessness

In the modern world in every sphere — from sanitation to scientific breakthroughs that change history for ever — knowledge is power. But for most villages that intellectual power is not accessible because of the corruption of socialized state education. There is a despair with the state school run by educators who have neither a commitment to education, nor a work ethic.

The Hindu temples offer no hope in most cases because the brahmanic forces have always maintained that the power of knowledge is their monopoly. (The RSS related Saraswati Shishu Mandirs are urban phenomena.)

The greatest tragedy regarding education is that the church has lost its sense of mission with respect to mass education. The commitment to mass education, in the language of the people, was a by-product of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformers believed that God has given his Word not simply for the learned priests, but for all mankind, therefore it must be translated in the languages of the people, and the people must be taught to read their own languages. This mind-set came to India along with the first modern missionary, William Carey. He not only began the tradition of translating the Bible in Indian languages but also initiated the drive to modernize India by writing the grammars of Indian languages publishing literature and Newspapers in vernaculars and starting schools in the vernacular. Until then India had been a medieval society, where the language of learning was different from the languages of the people.

The church continues to be the leader in the field of privatized education in India. However, because it is no longer a 'missionary education' the church in most cases has simply

become a midwife for brahmanical dominance of the nation, through elitist education. This began with Carey's younger contemporary Alexander Duff, who started English medium schools for the higher castes. This was a sad contrast to the history of Duff's own country, where the village parish was also the center of village education. Like brahmanical priesthood, the Roman clergy has also preferred to keep the masses ignorant — even the mass was not in the language of the people. That helped perpetuate the reign of superstition. The Reformed faith, in contrast, laid strong emphasis on cultivating the mind of the masses, since knowledge of the truth was seen to be the basis of reform. The early Christian missions were driven by the conviction that the truth must be made available to everybody.

Duff was a great man and he understood the above. Yet, faced with the difficulty of hundreds of undeveloped languages in India, without grammar and literature, he opted for an easy way to just teach in English. He also hoped (understandably for his times, but naively from hind sight) that the truth of the Gospel will filter down to the Indian masses if the higher castes were educated in English and thereby Christianised.

Both the Indian Catholics and the Protestant educators deserve full credit for making a contribution to India of historic proportions. Yet, it must be admitted that they have also continued Duff's folly. Clearly, English has (instead of transforming the oppressive Hindu social order) simply replaced Sanskrit as the language of the elite, to help them run the system to their advantage. It has become a language of discrimination, a passport to unearned privilege. It can be also argued that the English medium education has prevented India from becoming like Japan — strong because of a universal education, which enables every individual to make his full contribution to nation's economic life.

This also explains why BJP and VHP do not protest against English. Since only the children of the higher castes are generally admitted to our schools, these people do not need to argue that India should be ruled by the higher

castes, it is enough to insist that it should be ruled by the English speaking population. The only serious protest against this form of elitism is heard from the backward caste leaders, e.g. Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Chief minister of U.P. This protest must not be underestimated, it could snowball into a movement far bigger than what the BJP launched against the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya because it would essentially be a legitimate protest. The protestors would be saying exactly what the protestant reformers believed, i.e. that one essential ingredient of modernization is that the language of the people should be the language of learning, of the court, of the market and the government. The tragedy is that this protest would be focussed against the church, and would be led by the very people – the lower castes – who are today most responsive to the gospel.

To sum up, if the past is any guide, there is no basis for a hope that the state school, at least in the North, would ever succeed in empowering the masses by educating them. In theory, the market economy may eventually produce enough wealth for private schools to flourish and educate. But that hope, at the moment, is only theoretical.

The despair becomes total when we see that the Christian English schools also insist on interviewing the semi-literate low-caste parents before admitting their children. They stand no chance. Therefore they see no future. It is a terrible feeling to know that for all foreseeable generations your children are going to be at a disadvantage and remain powerless. Is there no Saviour for them?

CASTE

Education, democracy, modern economy and evangelism should have destroyed caste. For example, at least two-thirds of India is Shudras – 14.5% SCs, 7.5% STs, 52% OBCs and about 4% Intermediate castes (Kayasths, Jats and Marathas). In a democracy, they should have been ruling India. But because both the British Government and the church offered English medium education, mainly to the higher castes, they were able to use their newly acquired

power to keep the control of political, administrative and economic levers of power. (The higher castes in the rural areas, admittedly, don't usually know English, their power comes from being the power-brokers for their urban cousins.) The higher castes have managed to rule over the majority by keeping them ignorant and badly divided.

However anti-Brahmanism is now ready to erupt as a volcano in the post-Mandal India. It would be a political revolt with far reaching cultural/religious implications. This lower castes political revolt (because it identifies Brahmanism as the chief problem of India), would offer the greatest opportunity for evangelism, provided, of course, that the church is not seen by the new Ambedkars as itself guilty of casteism and therefore irrelevant.

ECONOMY

Since the Industrial Revolution, economic development has come to mean that capital moves out of the agricultural sector to the non-agricultural sectors (industrial, business and service) of the economy. In a free-market economy this process takes place naturally, so that the capital is moved by the people. That means, the population living off the land decreases dramatically as they take the capital into other areas. (In a country such as the USA less than 3% of the population now lives off the land.)

In a planned socialist economy, in contrast, the capital is moved either by force (ex-USSR) or fraud (India). This means that while the capital is moved from the fields to the factories, the people continue to live off the land unless they migrate to the urban slums in desperation. So, at the time of Independence about 70% of India was rural. Now, after 45 years, it is still about 66%. Which in real terms is almost twice the number of people at the time of independence!

The result of the socialist fraud on the Indian peasant is that while the non-agricultural economy has grown (in spite of the hated license, permit and quota Raj) more than 300% since independence, the agricultural income has declined by at least 3% – in spite of the Green Revolution.

The agricultural sector understands that it has been defrauded. It also believes (perhaps wrongly) that the economic liberalisation hold little hope for it, because these reforms are not even scratching the surface of the problem of the rural economy directly. In fact the reforms are (prima facie) threatening; for instance, cutting down of the fertilizer subsidy. While these reforms could be a great boon to the non-agro economy, they would at least for a fairly long "short-while" hurt most of the peasants a great deal. (I am not opposing the reforms but simply stating the perspective of the peasant – since unfortunately no group in India sees things from a national angle these days, peasants are bound to take a narrow view too).

If the era of planned economy, in which the Government at least appeared to care (e.g. fertilizer subsidy, loan melas, waiving of loans etc.) was sufficiently painful to breed non-violent and violent agitations, we can be sure that the coming non-interventionist era will be far worse, more desperate, bloodier, and therefore more conducive for both cults and conversions.

One principle of the free market economy (which will soon be applied to agriculture also) is that the Government should not intervene in the economy because it is not the savior. That is true. Therefore, that is one reason why capitalism has worked (at least in the social milieu created by the Protestant Reformation).

The reality which is soon going to catch up with the poor Indian politician (and the state) in the horns of an impossible dilemma is this:

On the one hand the logic of free market will not allow the politician to intervene, to help alleviate the sufferings of those caught in non-viable economical enterprises, and on the other hand the politician will not be able to confess that he is not the saviour.

Most small scale farms in India – which means millions of families – are non-viable. India cannot both become a part of the global economy and also retain these non-viable

farms! Capitalism is right , but it is ruthless. Therefore it will have to allow the small farms (hopefully not the farmers) to perish. The World Bank and the IMF are right in asking the Indian state to be ruthless to not play the saviour, to withdraw protection and subsidies. We must not be foolish and demand that the state exhibit a socialist compassion and be the saviour – subsidizing non-viable farms for ever. (The compassion has to be for the poor people, not for poor economics.) The past 45 years have already shown that the state is not the saviour; that it cannot save; it makes a greater mess when it tries to save. Yet, the other part of the reality is, that no Indian politician can confess that he is not the saviour. In order to win elections he has to keep saying that he is the saviour, yet the commitment to sensible economics will prevent him from doing anything to save those hurting by economic reforms; and 'reforms' do mean, a ruthlessly competitive economy which allows the weak or the non-competitive economic units to perish or swallowed up by the bigger and the competitive ones.

This painful transitional era will open up most Indians both to a compassionate church, which does have a saviour and equally to all kinds of cults – the phenomenal growth of the Radha Swami Satsang in Punjab, in these years of turmoil, is one illustration that hard times can lead to escapist religions. A disintegrating society is very conducive to cults, to false messiahs, as well as to the true one. But his truth has to be demonstrated.

In parenthesis may I add, (a) that in supporting economic reforms I am not advocating lack of compassion. The society must be compassionate and build safety nets for those who cannot compete. But even within the church, compassion cannot be allowed to mean merely the dollar-induced institutional compassion, of which the church has become both an apparent beneficiary and a sad, though greedy, victim. And, (b) truth I mean presentation of the gospel as God's power of salvation including economic salvation has to be demonstrated.

OPENNESS TO THE GOSPEL

Rural India, including the North is more open to the Christian mission now than it has been since the 1930s.

The cumulative impact of the Christian missionary movement of the nineteenth century was, that by the end of the last century, the Lord Jesus Christ had become the central issue in India. J.N. Farquhar convincingly shows in his classic *Modern Religious Movements in India* (1910) that every major socio-religious movement in the nineteenth century since Brahma Samaj, was interacting with Christ. The gospel was the saving action, every other movement was a defensive reaction.

It seems to me that one important factor that made Jesus Christ the central issue in India was that the missionary movement had convincingly, compassionately and relentlessly argued that India's chief problem was Hinduism. India had the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Epics, Yoga, Tantra, gurus and their ashrams; but, what it did not have was light. The Hindu reformers agreed that India was a land ruled by darkness, although they did not accept its implication, i.e., conversion. Their response was to reform Hinduism, rather than embrace the gospel. This response was primarily a result of the Enlightenment thinking which came along with the non-Christian officers of the East India Company, who argued that India needed the light of the human reason, not divine revelation. Happily, however, millions of Indians did accept and proclaim Christ and that kept Jesus in the centre of the Indian debate.

Jesus continued to be the central issue in India till the beginning of our century. The situation changed between 1920s and 1940s. During 1920s and the 30s, the rise of Indian nationalism and the Freedom Movement gave birth to the belief that India's chief problem was not sin, not Hinduism, but British colonialism. In Europe, in countries such as Switzerland, Germany, Holland and England, the Protestant Reformation had demonstrated that the political liberties were a gift of the Messiah; an outworking of a living

faith in him; a consequence of making him the Lord of all, including our political lives. Sadly the Indian Church gave no such message. This, among other things, helped push Jesus to become a side issue in India. Then in the 1940s and 50s Jesus became a non-issue, because the potential saviours of India then were Gandhi, Buddha or Marx; or Socialism, Rationalism, Democracy or Congress. Jesus was simply ignored by India as irrelevant in spite of all our evangelism and service.

All those saviours have already failed. Now there is a belief in some quarters, that the hope for India's future can come from a revival of "Ram Rajya", seasoned, of course, with capitalism. Idolatry has now become as honorable a habit as it was 200 years ago. Fortunately 'the hope' is not shared by too many people, many have become cynics, many more are sincerely afraid that in an amoral country such as India, capitalism will lead to the nightmare Karl Marx had predicted.

One factor more than any other, that has opened India once again for the gospel is the fact that under Nehru, Indira and Rajiv — the English speaking Brahmanism, wearing the cloak of secular, non-casteist democracy — succeeded in capturing the country politically, economically and administratively. If this relatively milder Brahmanism placed the vast majority of the Backward castes (52%), Scheduled Castes (14.5%), Scheduled Tribes(7.5%) and the religious minorities at a disadvantage, then what would happen when the non-secular, non-liberal Brahmanism takes over the country overtly, under the banner of the BJP?

Well, the sadhus and sants that have been actively campaigning for the BJP, are demanding that when it comes to power it must change the egalitarian constitution and grant a superior social position for the Brahmins as enjoined by the Hindu scriptures. That prospect is frightening for the shudras. Therefore they are the ones that have now usurped the earlier missionary argument, that India's chief problem has been, and is, Brahmanism.

The first overt revolt against Brahmanism in the post-independent India began with Periyar Ramaswamy Naicker in Tamil Nadu in the form of a movement for Dravidian self-respect. Even though Periyar himself was disappointed with the church and became a rationalist, the socio-political success of his movement led to the biggest church growth in India in Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh during the last 30 years. Great men like Brother Bakht Singh failed in their native North, but succeeded in the South because of the social soil there. Again it is the southern soil prepared by the socio-political leadership which explains why the Evangelical Church of India (ECI\OMS) did not have a similar spectacular success in the North.

Ambedkar had prepared the lowest castes in Maharashtra against Brahmanism even before Periyar. But he led his followers to Neo-Buddhism. A frustration with that route has now opened millions in Maharashtra to reconsider Jesus — provided of course, that the church is not ashamed to identify with the lowest of the low.

In the North, during the past 15 years, Kanshi Ram and his Bahujan Samaj Party has prepared the lower castes to revolt against Brahmanism. While he did flirt with Buddhism for a while, fortunately, he recognized the political disadvantages of preaching Buddhism. That is one reason why he is opposed by the Ambedkarite Buddhists. For us the relevant point is that Kanshi Ram has succeeded in helping OBC leaders such as Mulayam Singh to go beyond the Lohiaite socialist analysis of India, and grasp the essential religious nature of India's problem. Admittedly, they do not go as far as the missionary apologists went in the nineteenth century in critiquing Hinduism, but the critique that they do offer is very valuable.

The anti-Brahmanical mood of the lower castes now makes the North the most fertile ground for the Gospel. While millions have accepted Kanshi Ram's critique of Hinduism, an increasing number of them are also getting personally disillusioned with him (just as Dravidians in Tamilnadu soon got disillusioned with Periyar, Karunanidhi

etc.). This too makes the masses, at least potentially, more open to the Gospel. After all, as Kanshi Ram himself understands, India's political problems are rooted in its socio-religious soil and therefore can not be changed merely by changing governing parties. So, while his diagnosis is right his prescription is too shallow, it can only lead to disillusionment.

My interactions with a great number of the lower caste people, in several states of North India over the past few years have convinced me that there is no intrinsic reason why more than 40% of the North cannot become Christian in the next two to three decades, except, for the inherent weaknesses of the Indian church.

The Internal Weaknesses of the Church

The freedom movement, Gandhi, Ambedkar, Marx and socialism succeeded in pushing Christ into the background because of the following major weaknesses in the church which continue to plague us even today:

EVANGELICAL PIETISM

Pietism began as a reaction to dry theological scholasticism in 1676, with the publication of Jakob Spener's treatise, *Pia Desidoro*, (or *Heartfelt Desire for a God-pleasing Improvement of the Protestant Church*). Initially it was a powerful renewal movement within the Lutheran Church in Germany, but after John Wesley's generation it propelled the western church into world-missions. Ironically, however, it also made the churches that it founded too impotent to cope with the anti-Christian onslaught of Rationalism on the Gospel. Pietism was not all that harmful when it was undergird by a theologically strong culture of the Post-reformation Europe and North America. But its emphasis on loving God with our hearts without also loving him with all our minds, made the evangelical mind too weak to take "captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Co. 10: 5).

The tragedy is that the Evangelical Church in India, which takes our mission seriously, does not even know where our generation is, socially, politically and intellectually, to be able to present Christ relevantly and credibly to our contemporaries. The lack of solid substance in our message is sought to be compensated for with techniques and technology. The emphasis is laid not on the power of the truth, but on the trappings of contextualisation. And contextualisation does not involve relating the Gospel to the serious issues of the Indian culture, e.g. our corruption, dishonesty, oppression of the individual, lack of courtesy or cleanliness, degradation of the environment etc. but only to the superficial cultural issues, such as a woman's make-up with sindur and bindi, or worshipping with oil lamps rather than candles, or sitar rather than guitar. It is incredible that many of our theologians seriously think that these superficial issues will make the gospel attractive or repulsive in India.

Can we name one Christian thinker, artist, scientist, musician, film-producer, politician, writer or preacher who is taken seriously by the nation, if not respected, at least opposed? Why is it that by and large our gospel is neither a threat to the corrupt, nor a hope to the oppressed? The answer is because it is other-worldly; it saves people from hell but not from the Kingdom of Satan; it changes the heart but does not turn the world upside down. In contrast, the missionaries and the Hindu reformers in the nineteenth century and Gandhi, Nehru, Socialists and the Marxists in our century, offered hope for this world and were therefore taken more seriously than Christ. The question is, did the Kingdom of God break into human history in the person of Christ, or did Christ come merely to take us to heaven?¹

The Lord Jesus Christ can and will become the central issue in India again, if we can convincingly show him as the answer to our problems such as the ones referred to above. That calls for doing some more home work than simply memorizing scriptures, playing guitars and interesting games with young people.

THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM

If the problem with evangelical pietism is to isolate the world instead of engage it in debate for truth the problem with theological liberalism is just the opposite. The liberal theological thinkers are usually devout and sincere people seeking to relate their faith to their world. But ultimately, because liberalism is not firmly rooted in divine revelation, it always surrenders to the thought of its generation – usually a few decades behind others. So in the first part of our century the liberals were Rationalists – denying miracles and the supernatural, affirming a mechanistic view of the cosmos. Then they became Existentialists and Marxists – the Nehruvian socialism was not good enough. Now predictably they will follow the feminist spirits of the New Age irrational pantheism, until every one realizes the destructive socio-ecological consequences of these intellectual fads.

Even though many “Liberals” sincerely seek to please our heavenly Father, the world has always been their Mother – because they usually deny the necessity to be born-again of their Father. So it should not come as a surprise that many of them are now delighted to be able to worship the “Mother” goddess with cultural respectability.

It is this spirit of accommodation to the spirit of the age which precludes the possibility of the liberal church effectively critiquing the world with a prophetic mission. The church ceases to be a beacon of hope when it becomes a part of the world.

I respect many liberals, but one reason why it is hard to write respectfully of liberalism itself is because moral liberalism quickly and inevitably follows on the trail of theological liberalism. This happens because theological liberalism does not take sin as seriously as God does. Liberalism in the seminaries is an important factor behind the moral corruption among the leaders of the mainline churches in North India. And that is perhaps the single biggest obstacle to mission, at a time when a new day for

mission has already dawned. No amount of dollars and humanitarian projects will compensate for the lack of holiness in the church – and that applies to evangelicals as well as liberals.

CULTURAL MATERIALISM

Materialism as a philosophical idea died when Einstein put forward his equation $E=MC^2$, proving that the ultimate reality of the cosmos was not material. Culturally, however, materialistic assumptions continue as a powerful force influencing, albeit unconsciously, almost every facet of our lives.

Most of us cannot think of Mission except in terms of money and media. How will we accomplish our mission against poverty, injustices, exploitation of women, untouchables or the tribals, degradation of environment, illiteracy, disease, superstition or sin? We need money! Money for hiring evangelists, community organizers, health workers, educators etc. and more money for running projects.

If it is true that the ultimate reality of the universe is non-material, spiritual, moral and personal then we have to come to terms with the fact that behind the material culture lies spiritual reality. The mission is spiritual. Therefore it is not dollars but God's Spirit and God's Word, that are the basic requirements. It is not degrees, projects or gadgets but the ability to bear one's cross – shame, reproach, persecution, imprisonment, martyrdom – that will turn the world upside down. It is not trees but truth, not goddesses but the Triune God, not employment but repentance, that will save India – including its ecology and economy.

The Western missionary movement had split into two parallel factions after 1910. The liberal wing began to focus on service to the poor. The evangelical wing reacted against this "social gospel" and focussed its energies on preaching the "simple" gospel. During the 1966 Berlin Congress on World Evangelisation and at Lausanne in 1974, the evangelical conscience was reactivated and a "social concern" became an important part of the evangelicalism as well. However, Pi-

etism had already destroyed the Christian mind in the evangelical circles with the result that there was no distinct biblical understanding as to what caused the social problems in the first place. The evangelicals in their enthusiasm for their new found social concern just borrowed the prevailing materialistic analysis of social issues such as poverty. It was assumed that at their root the problems of poverty are economic, therefore the solutions also have to be economic which in turn calls for transfer of material resources from the 'haves' to the 'have-nots'. Most evangelicals have not yet realized that the social problems are rooted in cultural realities – including intellectual, moral and spiritual – and therefore have to be dealt with at that fundamental level. What should be obvious, however, is that when, due to our faulty analysis we put confidence in our material resources, our "missionary" work undermines our mission.

What the missionary movement does not seem to understand is that India will not be reached by our ability to mobilize men and money alone. It will only be reached if we can get the masses excited about the gospel itself. When the people begin to gossip the gospel the Christ will again become the central issue in India. Therefore of 10, 20, 30, 40, or more percent of India has to become Christian in our generation, then the crucial question is not how many missionaries we can send out but how many people we can get sufficiently excited about Christ so that they are willing to debate Him and obey Him unto death. That is the crucial question, because while it was easy to evangelize in the South where Brahmanism had been politically defeated, in the North, where Brahmanism is still firmly in control of the state machinery, it would be a different story. Hinduism is not a tolerant religion, that was a myth Nehru perpetuated to find support for his brand of secularism. Hinduism will abuse its power mercilessly because it is a social system based not on truth but on the privileges of power. We must understand that while anti-Brahmanism is a growing and irreversible idea, in practice it is quite possible that Brahmanism could rule North India for a long time. That is because of the absence of selfless and enlightened leader-

ship among the lower castes which can unite the SCs , STs, OBCs and religious minorities as a political force.

In parenthesis, I should remind my readers that when I am talking about the power of the Spirit, I am primarily talking about the power for cross-bearing witness that Jesus promised in Acts 1:8. Without this all “strategies” and “approaches” are of little value. There is no doubt that all cults and all strategies will win converts everywhere in India now, just as all sects mushrooming in the decaying Roman empire. When people are looking for a saviour they will accept whatever hope is offered to them. But only those saviours will be allowed to survive in peace that bless the empire. The gurus that bless socio-political and economic corruption will grow. Those evangelists and healers who join their league will have all the patronage they want of the Pharaohs. But I am assuming that the reader shares my assumption that this is not what Christian mission is all about. That kind of evangelism isn’t going to ensure that God’s will is done in our land.

Let me reiterate that when I talk of India becoming Christian or the gospel growing, I am talking about India becoming just, prosperous, educated, healthy society. In this paper, I can not develop my thesis that it is truth that will set India free but I am assuming that the readers are familiar with my thesis already stated in my book *Truth and Social Reform*.

So, if the rural India is in ferment; if it can no longer trust the politicians or its established socio-religious leadership; if it is open to fundamental change; if the Gospel is the factor that can bring about the basic change with far reaching consequences; then the crucial question is: *How can we get the rural india excited about the gospel?*

Projects are based on money. Movements are based on ideas catching the imagination of the masses. Put simply, the way to get India excited about the Gospel is to teach it as the answer to India’s questions. The truth of the Gospel must begin to engage the heart and mind of India.

For example, will social engineering, (in the form of quotas and reservations in the educational institutions and jobs) bring about equality and justice? That is the prescription offered by the socialists led by V.P. Singh. Certain sections of the church has jumped on the bandwagon.

The reality is that Kanshi Ram’s lower caste movement in the North, derived its strength from the Scheduled Castes’ beneficiaries of the reservation system, who learnt through bitter experience that social engineering does not result in human dignity. One cannot take the benefit of being a “low caste” through the reservation system, without also accepting the stigma of being a low caste; any more than one can have his cake and eat it too.

Education, free market economy and democracy can become effective antidotes to caste, provided they are undergirded by the Gospel. Conversion to truth will have to be the basic change. That is because caste is a darkness based, not only on vested interest, but also on a lie (or false idea) – that people are created unequal, some from Brahma’s head, others from his arms, stomach and feet.

The truth that can set India free from caste – its most important evil that pervades everything and corrupts everything – is the Good news: that all men and women are equal because we are all made in God’s image; we are all equal because we are all descendants of the same parents – Adam and Eve; all are equal because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; all are equal because all are equally the objects of God’s love revealed on the cross; and all can become equally God’s children by becoming *dwij* – twice born – through repentance and faith in Christ’s work on the cross.

Needless to say that it is not simply a proclamation of the above truth, but also its practice that will both get masses excited, as well as invite fierce opposition from Brahmanism. How many evangelists ask Indians to repent of the sin of racism?

It is amazing that Christians clamoring for reservations (because they lack confidence in the power of the Gospel to

reform India?) for the low caste converts have not even bothered to read Kaka Kalelkar's covering letter to the Prime Minister, which he sent along with his commission's report on Reservations in late 1950s. (Kalelkar Commission preceded Mandal Commission. It was set up by Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru to try and fulfill Government's constitutional obligation to the socially and educationally Backward Castes.) That letter, which forms part of the official report, is fascinating because it shows that Kalelkar, a gentle Gandhian, had understood that

- (a) Reservation strengthens rather than weaken caste,
- (b) Religious systems such as Christianity and Islam can demolish caste far more effectively than social engineering yet at the same time,
- (c) The church leadership was demanding reservations for its members, and thereby foolishly allowing caste to establish its hold on that one force in India – the church – which can destroy caste.

With all the economic and educational resources at its disposal, why would not the church give the best possible education to its low caste converts so that they can compete for jobs in a free market with self-respect and a sense of equality? Why do we have to reinforce the idea that the state is the saviour of the downtrodden?

In defending the responsibility of the state to practice Capitalistic ruthlessness, I am not advocating ruthlessness itself, but affirming that the ultimate responsibility for compassion rests on the church, not on the state. The state should build safety nets for those too weak to survive in a competitive economy. But the Lord asks me to love my neighbour as myself, it does not ask me to agitate that the state should love my neighbour.

Sikh community established Punjab and Sindh Bank and helped hundreds of thousands of Sikhs and Sindhies to become entrepreneurs and to contribute enormously to national economy. In contrast, the Christian community

has wasted billions of dollars in "development" and has virtually not even one millionaire entrepreneur to show forth in North India. This is amazing because historically, the ideas of individual initiative, vocation, work, saving and compassionate yet sensible investment, which produced the Western prosperity, grew out of the Protestant Reformation. And William Carey also brought the idea of a savings bank with him.

This fact alone should make it clear that what is being done in the name of "development" or "Mission to the Poor" both by the evangelicals as well as liberals has to be discarded. What has to take its place on the one hand is preaching of the truth which started Europe on its road to economic growth, as well as compassionate support to families (not so called "communities" that exist only in the project proposals of the "community organizer") to become viable economic units. It might call for Christians banks; venture capital companies and those structures that provide technical, managerial and marketing support and credit. This would be a great need in the rural areas in the light of the oncoming economic hardships we have referred to above.

This paper obviously cannot develop the theme of rural economic development. But it needs to be repeated that we can get the people excited about the Gospel, when our pulpits begin to show that while the state is not the saviour, Jesus is; and when the Christian community shows that while the state can not be compassionate, the body of the Lord Jesus is; while India makes her children unequal, Jesus is able to make us all equally God's children.

HOW CAN THE TRUTH BE COMMUNICATED EFFECTIVELY IN RURAL CONTEXT?

I hope that it is clear to the reader that my emphasis is not on the trappings – on method, form or technique that we use in communication – but rather on the content of our message. However, we do need to encourage the use of the Spirit-inspired imagination and creativity in communicating the truth most effectively.

What is more powerful for village audience – abstract logic or a parable? What has more lasting impact – a story or a drama which is both heard and seen? What is more durable for an oral culture – a prose drama, or a poetic drama that could be memorized more easily? What is easier and more adaptable – a video or a puppet? Which tunes can our people sing more easily – western or Indian? Which instrument the rural believers can afford and learn to play more quickly – a harmonium or an organ? What churches are easier to establish – house churches or buildings? The answers should be obvious. However, for me far more important questions to ponder are:

What are the most important sins of rural India that we must talk about in our communication? Why is idolatry sin? What is wrong with astrology, spiritism, witchdoctors? What is the difference between a church and a caste as social organizations, or between the doctrines of karma and sin as explanations of morality? What about work, gambling, lottery? Why must women, children, animals plants and the soil respected? Why must we learn to repent and forgive one another? etc. etc.

When we begin to apply our scholarship to answer questions such as the above and also talk about those and similar issues biblically, we would find what our preaching is doing is to change an entire world-view and its socio-economic consequences. The truth will set our people free. But let me repeat, it would not happen without the power of the Holy Spirit, which alone would enable us to bear our cross (suffer), as we contend both against the powers and principalities in the heavenlies, as well as the rulers of this dark age.

