

Theological training and the need of laborers in india

[Parts of the World, Asia](#)



By 2035, India is projected to overtake China as the most populous nation on earth. With several strategic people and language groups, there is a tremendous need for us to pray that the Lord will send laborers for the harvest.

As one who grew up in North India and a laboring for the Kingdom of God since 1990, there is no doubt that the Kingdom is advancing. The persecution of God's people has increased but never before is India open for the move of God. The Lord is building his Church in India and the need of the hour is dedicated laborers for the Kingdom.

The purpose of this paper is to introspect on how best we can see our training efforts raising a harvest force that will be committed to see God's work growing.

I intend highlighting the need for laborers in the light of the enormous need and tremendous openness to the Gospel. The present lacuna of the task force will be dealt with and will be followed by some recommendations of how best we could ensure our theological training envisioning young men and women of India fulfilling the Great Commission.

The Need for Laborers

Jason Mandryk in his book 'Operation World' states about India that, " the Hindi speaking heartland, the States through which the Ganges flows (Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal) combine to account for 382 million people. Most of the northern states

recorded less than 1% Christians, and some less than 0.1% (Haryana and Himachal Pradesh).

The statistics and numbers are mind boggling and often leads to a sense of despondency and despair. However one common methodology used to analyze and respond to the need in North India is the PLUG and PREM strategy.

The acronym PLUG stands for the various People, Language, Urban and Geographical groups in India. The Lausanne 1982 defines People Group as one in which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.

There are 1755 such people groups in India. Most of these are in the area called the North India-Hindi belt covering nine states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh. Four hundred million people live here which is 40% of the total Indian population.

In several remote villages of this belt one can easily get a coke but none have heard about Jesus Christ. Most of these people groups still come in the category of the Unengaged and Unreached in the sense that the gospel has yet to reach them and a church planting initiative is yet to be undertaken among them.

Another need is among the 1652 language groups in India with the two major languages of Bhojpuri and Awadhi with 60 and 40 million each.

Substantial work is being accomplished among both these language groups but much more has to be done.

The next is the urban group or those living in the cities. In a report in The Times of India, New Delhi, by 2050, 2 out of every three people in India will be living in a city. Rapid urbanization and resultant migration is resulting in cities becoming magnets attracting rural folk in large numbers. Such sociological phenomenon is changing the traditional paradigms of ministry and drawing unreached and unengaged people groups into the redemptive plan of God.

Dr. Manokaran in his book *Christ & Cities: Transformation of Urban Centers* has explained about the Mega Elite, middle class, migrants and the marginalized that are found in our cities and how they are strategic for the Kingdom.

The geographical groups are those in defined geographical areas like Jharkhand, Bundelkhand and Uttrakhand where millions live not knowing and hearing about Jesus.

The PREM strategy is that until and unless we are intentional in Praying, Researching, Equipping and Mobilizing, we are not going to see the multitudes entering the Kingdom.

There is a tremendous move of God, in India. Space does not permit me to share exciting encounters of people from other faiths who were persecutors or physically or mentally sick having an encounter with Jesus Christ and

coming to his saving knowledge. This shows that God is moving in amazing ways and there is more Church growth than ever in the North from mega churches of 7000 to networks of tens of thousands of house churches.

SAIACS is currently doing a research on 'Christ ward movements' in various parts of India and I hope this will be available soon.

This brings to our mind the promise of God to Abraham in Genesis 12: 1-3, that through you I will bless the nations. The fulfillment of which we see in Revelation chapter 7 where a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language worshipping the Lamb.

The purpose of highlighting the need and pointing out the amazing move of God is to point out that our training should be focused on raising laborers for the harvest. What is mean is that our passion should be on the quality not on the quantity. It is quite unfortunate to see the 'rat race' in the secular world creeping into the Kingdom paradigm. I mean the tendency to evaluate our training solely on the number of students we have each academic year.

There is a tremendous need of pioneers and evangelists who can promote indigenous missions. Pastor's to establish and equip the emerging congregations. Servant leaders who are willing to pursue integrity and excellence and with a willingness to serve.

Where do we stand today?

I am aware of the proverb: " People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." My purpose is not to criticize the present training. I highly esteem

those who have pursued their lives for academic excellence and to raise laborers for the Kingdom. Praise the Lord for their passion and dedication.

Praise God for the spurt in Bible colleges, Seminaries and Training Initiatives. I am not sure whether there has been a study of the actual number of seminaries, Bible colleges and Training Centers in India and how many of its graduates are having hands on involvement in the ministry. But such a study will be helpful in evaluating several of our training and equipping strategies.

Forgive me if I sound harsh but seminaries tend to have a feeling that they are the sole reason for the Church to exist. In my opinion Seminaries and Bible colleges should be the servants of the Church. However mutual responsibility and respect between the two is a must.

Theological educators are familiar with the fact that a credible degree is like a social currency. This results in pursuing high academic standards at the cost of spiritual formation in the lives of the students. Academization has been the priority in several training centers rather than spiritual formation.

Often a top-down model of education model is followed rather than both the students and teachers mutually participating in spiritual and ministerial formation. As a result heart issues are often left unaddressed and there is only a surface level spirituality with no bearings on the attitude and behavior.

While cognitive abilities have to be enhanced the goal of training equipping the whole man of God. Are our present training models able to integrate

academic, ministerial and spiritual formation? This will be the key to see effective laborers.

The need of the hour is to objectively look at the harvest force in the light of the enormous need. While we need to occasionally pat ourselves on our backs, it will be wise to examine the kind of laborers is our training producing.

Training is crucial in providing the vision and position which is important in fulfilling the task of making disciples. Proverbs 29: 18 talks about failure where there is no vision.

Unfortunately today the vision is more about self and less about God. It is self-promotion and chasing selfish agenda rather than pursuing the heart of God. The media is only too willing to help in this pursuit

Holistic spirituality is not cultivated which is crucial to their effectiveness for the ministry. The end result is a worker who is unable to derive ones security and significance from God and end up chasing power and pleasure. Such workers are not willing to serve and unfortunately end up being bad models.

I have had the opportunity to see several potential young leaders who held much promise for God's Kingdom. What I found is that instead of taking up the cross and treading the path of self-denial, they were pursuing the path of visibility and fame. Very soon they made a ship wreck of their life and aborted God's plan to make them a blessing for the nations.

While charisma has its place what we need is character. A willingness to embrace the Incarnational model, reflected in service, humility and simple life style is a must if we need to see the Kingdom impacting India. While India needs to see power encounters with signs and wonders confirming the word, it is character and not charisma that will break the strongholds.

It is sad to see the ' baba culture' creeping into the Church and ministries. Instead of embracing humility and servant hood, workers are pursuing visibility, fame and popularity. Often our graduates are full of knowledge but lack spirituality which is crucial to their effectiveness for the ministry. They know about God but do not know God.

Graduates from seminaries would prefer to take up comfortable positions in Christian organizations because it is more about their own comfort and future than seeing the Kingdom advancing. A few would like to go to the ' regions beyond'.

Having dealt with some challenges and apparent deficits in our training, I propose some recommendations.

Recommendations

The first and foremost as mentioned above is for the Bible Schools, colleges and seminaries to be available to serve the church. Training models should be evolved in the context of the Church as a community. A healthy interaction and interface with the Church leadership and community will add to the relevance of our training.

To see laborers for the Kingdom, the teachers themselves should be passionate about the Kingdom and active practitioners. Often lessons are 'caught' than 'taught'. It is the integrity of his life and skillfulness of his teaching ministry which will rub off on the students. Moreover it is through their mission life that they cultivate in the students a healthy appetite for godliness and holy life. Similarly they need to be dedicated to monitoring the spiritual life of their students.

Indian education is 'rote' oriented rather than critical reflection. Our theological training should intentionally inculcate critical reflection. This will help them derive and apply God's word to issues. Our goal is to help them grounded in the word and reflecting on the realities of the world they live in through God's word. This is when we can see them becoming the prophetic voice of this generation.

Rather than focusing on filling the students with head knowledge, they should be encouraged to see knowledge as a tool to cultivate intimacy with God. Intimacy with God and practice of spiritual disciplines will promote spiritual formation. It is the role of the teacher to see this happening.

An athlete needs both vision and position to win the prize. Vision is a clear understanding and focus. By position I mean his stance or posture. The same applies for a Kingdom worker. While vision is important the right posture too is vital.

Our training should impart a clear vision about the sovereignty of our God – Who he is and what he can do. To see pioneers, our training has to help in trainees to have a clear understanding and the firm conviction that

1. Worship will come to the Lamb from every nation.
2. God will redeem people from every People Language, Urban and Geographical groups
3. God will overcome evil powers in order to bring things under His governance

Our training should be geared to this end that we need to pray and ensure that as much as possible we ingrain students with the clear vision that the Lord we serve is the Lord of history and he is in control.

Ralph Waldo Emerson the American essayist has said, “ Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is not path and leave a trail.” Let the pioneer’s rise!

A right vision without the right position or stance will not help a person to reach one’s goal. Without intimacy with the Lord and resultant holiness, it is impossible to see effective kingdom workers. According to Warfield, “ ministry is a “ learned profession” and so good learning is essential, but before and above being learned, a minister must be godly. These two requirements are not antagonistic to each other.”

There is an urgent need to rethink traditional paradigms of evangelism and church planting. Too long we have focused on the proclamation and ignored the good works which is key to bring hope and joy of the Kingdom to the lost.

The importance of initiating need based and relevant socio-economic initiatives to build bridges into the communities we plan to reach is crucial.

Another area is something I risk to be misunderstood. Too long we have emphasized on the fulltime worker who is called to focus his energies on evangelism and church planting. This paradigm may continue to be relevant in certain contexts, but there is an urgent need to both rethink on the concept of ' full time worker'. In several parts of India since they are not engaged with the community through a vocation or skill, they are suspected of promoting conversion with the help of foreign funds. Moreover, the huge support structure is a drain on the limited resources of mission organizations that are facing not only a severe resource crunch but also ' legal persecution' from the authorities on the pretext of ensuring compliance. Are we willing to rethink our training on these lines?