

From a Church a Year to a Church a Day

A Church Planting Movement among Oral Peoples in Rural India Through Agricultural and Chronological Bible Storying Approach

Quote: A literate and highly trained leader observed: “I never thought I would ever see an oral, uneducated, indentured Kh farmer learning, implementing and teaching such technical agricultural skills to a plantation owner’s workers, while pastoring a church that he started as a result of the training he provided on that same farm.”

An Overview of the Movement. For more than 200 years Baptist church planting in this Indian state averaged one new church a year, but now the yearly total would be equal to an average of planting one new church a day. Missionary work in this state dates back to the time of William Cary. This Church Planting Movement is occurring in one of the poorest, most oral, and indentured servant states in India. The initiation and spread of the movement was due mainly to the agricultural approach. The success, stability and strength of the movement came in the wake of an integration of radio broadcast and follow-up employing Chronological Bible Storying, with on-the-ground agricultural development steeped in evangelism and church planting methodology.

Emerging and increasing in growth between 1994 and 2003 with the major increase occurring during the last four years, the total number of churches increased from about 94 in 1993 to at least 2,017 a decade later. The believing community increased from about 4,860 to about 110,973 during the same period. About 11,093 new believers were baptized in their churches and outreach groups in the year 2002 alone. The potential for continued growth in new churches could be seen in the existing 8,673 Open Door Projects (*agricultural projects*, hereafter ODP) and listening groups. At least 1,345 of these groups were storytelling type listening groups out of which most of the new churches were emerging.

Who are the ethnic peoples in the movement? The movement began mainly among the Kh, one of the largest and most influential people groups in that state, but soon spread to a number of neighboring ethnolinguistic peoples. The peoples in the movement consist of various scheduled castes, some of whom were Animists while others were of Hindu religious background.

History and Background of the Movement. Accompanying the colonization of India by Great Britain, a number of Protestant denominations established themselves in this corner of India. A preacher from Wales is recorded as arriving and preaching in this Indian state as early as 1766. In 1808, Dr. William Carey, Rev. Marsh Man, and a Mr. Wood who were representing the Particular Baptist Missionary Society of England, sent Shri Krishana from Calcutta to preach in the area. The first Baptist church was started in this state in 1822 as a result of William Carey’s and other British Baptist’s influence.

Many advances occurred between 1909 and 1933. The first Christian Church Union was formed during this time. Following the ecumenical trends of the 1928 Jerusalem Council, the CCU merged with the state’s Central Church Council in 1933. The themes uniting the two entities were:

- Ministry would be church-centered, and

- They would develop an indigenous (non-Western) church.

By 1968, many of the churches located in northern India merged together to form the Church of North India to present a united church front to Hindus, rather than a multiple denomination landscape, which they felt hindered witness. Baptists were invited to come under the umbrella of this Anglican dominated group. The Church of North India was episcopal both in polity and doctrine. Baptists increasingly felt the strain of having their Baptist faith, tradition and practice compromised through this union. By 1970 it became obvious to the Baptist leaders and some members who were part of the merger, that the “Baptists were losing their doctrinal distinctives as the constitution of the C.N.I. (Church of North India) asked all churches in the union to accept the Union’s ‘Episcopacy,’ a polity contrary to Baptist penchant for autonomy of local churches.

However, during the entire time from 1970-1980, the Even though Baptists from 1970-1980 were free to use their own book of doctrine and polity, a book called “Baptist Biswas Mata” many Baptists realized they were losing their doctrinal and polity distinctives. In 1972 Baptist leaders formed an association of churches drawn from Baptist and evangelistic sectors within the CNI constituency.

Several other influential events occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. First, in 1973, Owen Cooper, a prominent Southern Baptist lay leader and fertilizer magnate visited this Indian state seeking opportunities to sell fertilizer. As was his personal spiritual habit, he went to church wherever he was on Sunday. So, he sought out the Baptists and worshipped with them. Upon returning to the USA, Owen Cooper urged Southern Baptists, and especially the IMB (known as the FMB, or Foreign Mission Board, at the time), to get involved in mission work there, mainly through agricultural opportunities. Second, in 1978, the Southern Baptist Convention joined the church growth mission as a partner to evangelize in this state. Third, in 1975, Dr. Harold Watson, a renowned Baptist agricultural missionary serving in the Philippines was asked to visit the state and advise them about agricultural needs and opportunities. Watson proposed a new agricultural development and evangelism program which he called “Soil to Smiles”. A local Baptist leader, Dr. SP, took the lead in sponsoring and establishing the agricultural venture. Fourth, by 1980, many of the Baptist churches had already left the Church of North India and joined the UCCCC. Baptists refer to the UCCCC as “The Council.” And, by 1985 in the high hills, agriculturalists and SBC (Foreign Mission Board) missionaries joined local Baptist leaders to establish agricultural programs for Baptists and for any others in the state who wanted them.

Church Planting Approaches Foundational to the CPM. Flowing out of this Baptist history the ARLDF (Asian Rural Life Development Foundation) was established in 1991. FMB missionary John L was the first agriculturalist to relate to the Kh and other people groups through the reconstituted Baptists. In 1995 Calvin and Margaret Fox came with long term agricultural experience in the Philippines with Harold Watson at the Rural Life Center there. He arrived after John L had left and assisted Dr. SP in further developing and leading the agricultural and evangelism projects.

In 1992, prior to the establishment and advances brought by the agricultural projects, a very significant part of the foundation of the future CPM was established. The School in the Air “Bible Storying” program was launched across the state by FMB missionary J. O. Terry. Terry worked with leaders to develop the stories and aired them on FEBA. By 1997, this School of the Air Bible Storying program that was conducted in the Kh language and was

early on credited with assisting in laying the foundation for opening 200 listener groups and 1,000 more advanced Bible study groups.

By 1998, after the arrival of Calvin Fox, 800 Agro-forestry Societies were developed under the ARLDF with Dr. SP as chairman of the network. The ARLDF established creative and effective agricultural programs such as SALT, FAITH, BOOST, TEACH and PREACH, all of which were acrostics describing the nature of the program in a memorable way. For example, SALT stands for Slopping Agricultural Land Technology for use in the mountainous areas that had become useless due to erosion and overuse. FAITH stood for Food Always In The Home, a crop rotation strategy that ensured year-round produce in the home of those who employed it.

Local Baptists, predominantly oral individuals, were each taught from one to nineteen proven agricultural technologies, or from one to five health technologies. Each Baptist farmer chose the technologies that appealed to him and the technologies the farmer needed for his own plot of ground. The agricultural technologies learned and used by the local Baptists consistently increased crop, harvest and financial returns up to twice previous levels within a two to three year period. They could nearly double again the harvest production in the next four years through the application of these technologies.

Occasion and Methodology of the CPM Assessment. The IMB's (previously known as FMB) regional leader, along with the late Calvin Fox, Strategy Coordinator for the Kh, asked that a CPM assessment be conducted to ascertain the scope, characteristics and strength of what appeared to be a CPM. Following the research approach used in assessing six other Church Planting Movements, six active, experienced missionaries and staff of the International Mission Board, composed the CPM assessment team. Between them, more than 334 on-site interviews were conducted. The interview instrument used was based upon Church Planting Movement assumptions coming from the Church Planting Movement booklet prepared by Dr. David Garrison and other IMB administrators. Minimal exchange between incoming and outgoing respondents occurred. Their responses to the questions and the resultant discussions were captured verbatim and later transferred to an Excel spreadsheet designed to contain the responses on each of 121 questions that each person was asked. All of the questions were orally asked through interpreters. There was a high level of response by those being interviewed, thus providing better accuracy and a lowering the error factor. The final evaluation and report was prepared through the combined efforts of the six assessment team members. This is an executive summary of that report.

Church Planting Approaches Foundational to the Existing CPM. Strategy Coordinator Calvin Fox taught local Baptist farmers how to use the technologies on their own land, whether small or large plots. Remember, the majority of those learning and using these technologies were uneducated, often indentured farmers with no prior training of any kind. By 1998, the technologies had been so successful in the area that the following curriculum items had been copied from the ARLDF and introduced as part of the curriculum at the local State University of Agriculture and Technology:

- 1) Flute technology of Bamboo germination
- 2) Soaked polythene nursery techniques
- 3) Dry tree fodder techniques
- 4) Kh lopping

- 5) Summer gardening
- 6) Liquid manuring
- 7) Land capping-Mimosa
- 8) Crow-bar planting techniques
- 9) Two-in-one planting
- 10) Stall feeding goats
- 11) Leaf pack nursery
- 12) Seed collection & Drying
- 13) Soil & water conservation techniques
- 14) Hill planting
- 15) Nodule harvesting
- 16) Double cropping Forage – Ginger

The key to the program “Soils To Smiles” was the use of these technologies as ODPs (Open Door Programs) to introduce the farmers to the villages and to train farmers, plantation owners and their farm workers. In order to do this, the ARLDF trained Baptist pastor-farmers in these technologies. These Baptist pastor-farmers used the technologies on their own farms, or on the farms of those they worked for and achieved success, which recommended them to other farmers.

At the same time these local farmers, many of whom were indentured, manual laborers on large farms around them, were taught a chronological set of Bible stories. As already mentioned, the introduction of stories to the people had begun through radio programs in 1992. Even so, this process was escalated and broadened as the IMB’s Strategy Coordinator, Calvin Fox, again called upon the services of J. O. Terry. Terry, a regional media consultant, storyteller and trainer of Bible storytellers collaborated in crafting stories for use by local farmers and by Far Eastern Broadcasting on local radio stations. Thus, as the farmers were learning the agricultural technologies and the evangelism track stories, those same stories were put on local radio stations by Terry. Thus, the Bible stories the farmers heard the agriculturalists tell as they taught the technologies were the same stories those farmers heard on the radio.

Terry also facilitated the spread, hearing and memory of the stories by providing cassette tapes of the stories. This partnership between agriculture and storying proved to be highly productive in conversions and new church starts. The stories in the storying package were specifically chosen to speak to the religious background of the animists and Hindus. Stories were chosen to introduce the farmers to God, His characteristics and to His Son Jesus Christ as the only God who saves.

As farmers of larger tracts of land, many of them the bosses of the local farmers, saw the production and cash increases that these local Baptist farmers got on their own plots of land, they asked these Baptist, agricultural technology savvy, farmers to train their workers on their farms in those technologies. The plantation owners, seeing significant financial increases in their future production, stood behind the Baptist farmers as they trained and supervised their workers in learning and implementing those technologies. The Baptist

farmers, armed with proven agricultural technologies and a set of chronological Bible stories, taught the technologies and told the chronological Bible stories, bringing production increases to the plantation owners and Christ to their farm workers. This was the fertile ground out of which the CPM emerged. The majority of the churches and membership growth has occurred since 1995, when agricultural and health development projects were first coupled with the gospel storytelling.

Results Observed During the CPM Assessment. As conversions occurred among farm workers, or as plantation workers expressed heightened interest, the local Baptist farmers who trained them moved those individuals into listening groups. As those in the listening groups professed faith, and as those who had already professed faith began maturing in their faith, those individuals were moved into groups that were being developed into a church on that farm or very close to the farm. From 1998 through 2003 this agricultural project approach combined with a Chronological Bible Storying approach has resulted in over 2,100 church starts with over 2,000 listening groups moving toward new church starts. The doubling of the churches is already in the maturing process as the agricultural production on theirs and the plantation owner’s farms double.

A look at growth from 1922 through 1997 which was prior to the coming together and spread of the agricultural and storying methodologies can be seen in the following table.

Year	1922	1936	1993	1995	1997
Churches	71	18	94	194	475
Members	12,513	932	4,860	10,030	24,557

Annual reports to the region based upon what the local leaders were able to gather on a year by year basis from 2000 to 2003 were as follows:

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003
Churches	1,215	1,585	1,754	2,017
Outreach Groups	657	987	1,101	1,345
Membership	47,034	65,400	96,330	127,080
Baptisms	4,669	9,101	11,348	9,891
Non-Resident Leadership Training	Not Reported	Not Reported	1,200	1,556
Resident Leadership Training	Not Reported	Not Reported	40	25
Home Missionaries	0	0	0	23

The CPM assessment team’s interviews revealed that by the spring of 2003, the following totals were indicative of the growth in the region.

- 2,017 total churches (April of 2003)
- 8,673 ODP (Agricultural projects) and listening groups and others (April)
- 110,973 members (April of 2003)
- 11,093 new believers baptized in their churches and outreach groups (In 2002)

As one can see when comparing the annual growth reports with the CPM assessment team’s findings, annual reports were quite realistic, yet conservative in most reported categories.

Obviously, a work that is based upon an agricultural work that calls for regular training sessions and which keeps very accurate field records on the agricultural projects is much more easily and methodically tracked and thus apt to be quite accurate. By comparison, work based only upon local churches that only meet once a year, if that much, that starts work that is not tracked like agricultural projects, will be more difficult to track year by year.

By the end of 2003 and throughout 2004, the annual total of new church starts was equal to an average of one new church a day, a testimony to the continuation of the CPM. The number of outreach groups of all kinds is an indicator of the potential of a continuation of the rapid multiplication of the churches among these people groups.

Recommendations from the Assessment Team. The CPM assessment team that interviewed over three hundred leaders, pastors and members within the region, cited the following items that the continuation of the Church Planting Movement depends upon:

- Increasing the repertoire of stories according to critical topics with more stories in the memory of those extending the churches
- Discipleship stories were lacking among most individual's story sets which were primarily evangelism stories and other stories that told *His Story* from Genesis to Acts.
- Addressing the syncretistic beliefs that came over into the Baptists during their time within Church of North India. What the Baptists had realized in the 1970s and 1980s, which ultimately led to their coming out of the CNI and re-establishing themselves as Baptists, was and is true. During their time under CNI many New Testament doctrinal distinctives were compromised due to the training they received. Stories must be selected from the Scriptures and packaged that speak to each of the doctrinal deviations suffered under the CNI training. It is very important to know that almost all of the doctrinal deviations found among those interviewed were limited to those who had served when the Baptists were still under the CNI. Those who had come to the Lord and came into service after the Baptist time under CNI did not possess the doctrinal differences. Therefore, the very significant mark of the Church of North India on the local Baptist churches, outreach groups and ministries needs to be explored in detail. Once determining the worldview and ecclesiastical influences from that background that are not New Testament in character, those items need to be specifically addressed.
- Relocate all types of training on-site, meaning that all kinds of training should occur very close to where the Open Door Projects, the Listening Groups and health programs are being conducted. Up to the time of the assessment, training was being conducted too far from where the ODP trainers lived and taught. Poor people do not have the time and resources to travel far for training or even for training updates.
- Maintain worldview specific focus on heart language people groups without regressing to generic programs, curriculum and approaches. In such poverty-stricken areas wherein those teaching and implementing the technologies are poor and uneducated, all of the training and the Bible stories should be in the heart language of the people who are learning and implementing the technologies.
- Ordination, as the Baptist convention conducts it, or simply allows it to occur, needs to be reviewed in light of the New Testament. Ordination is one of the many

influences that is a carry-over from the CNI. Once reviewed and established as desired, oral modules and structural procedures should be developed to teach and institute what is developed from any revisions.

- Consequently, specific attention should be given to the handling of baptism and the Lord's Supper. If at all possible, these ordinances should be presented in New Testament fashion with the encouragement to each local church for consideration as the way they will handle those two ordinances. Stories should be developed and told in every setting and session possible, which will assist local churches and leaders to understand more appropriate New Testament polity.
- Subsidy, in all forms, should be explored in greater detail than the team was able to do in the time it was there. Subsidy should be viewed and assessed in missiological terms. Though leaders and sometimes missionaries say that subsidy is not that great in quantity, the team feels it is significant in light of the standard of living in Orissa and must be addressed. If not addressed, the CPM may not escalate beyond the available subsidy support structure and available finances. Subsidy may or may not be at a high level, but it is broad and at each level of the work. Obviously, this is in reference to the establishment of churches and assistance to pastors or leaders. The agricultural platform will continually need to be subsidized. However, subsidy for the platform, as much as possible, should not be allowed to flow over into the establishment of churches and the support of pastors in those churches.
- Recognition of the churches as churches is very weak and needs attention. There seems to be no habit on the part of anybody who assists an emerging group to recognize that they are at a point in time a real church. This is critical for a healthy CPM.
- A more congregational polity should be discussed and adopted if at all possible. For instance, Baptism and the Lord's Supper are in the hands of the ordained and not in the hands of the local church. Few local churches have the right to recognize and give authority to their church's pastor to baptize and offer the Lord's Supper. That is reserved, by past imprint, from the CNI and British Baptists, for the Convention/Union to do.

Adapted by David Garrison from the CPM Assessment Team Report Executive Summary by:
Dr. Jim Slack

Based upon the larger official IMB Global Research Department CPM Assessment Report and historical records.

That All Peoples May Know Him
Week of Prayer
For International Missions
November 28—December 5, 2004

Day 7: Margaret Fox: **Eastern India**

“Calvin and Margaret Fox had served for 27 years in the Philippines when God called them to plant their lives in the cone of India’s poorest and most difficult areas. “God had something very important He wanted to do,” says Margaret.

The Foxes trained local farmers and health workers in eastern India to farm and provide medical care—and plant churches. When farmers and health workers visited villages, each took only work tools, a change of clothes, and a head full of Bible stories and songs. The result? A harvest of tens of thousands of new believers and three church-planting movements.

In late 2003 the Foxes returned to the US, soon after, Calvin died unexpectedly. But God had granted him his heart’s desire: to see the Spirit of God released in a place.

Pray for Margaret, as she discerns God’s plan for her after Calvin’s death. Ask that she will know God’s voice and be quick to obey. Christians in eastern India face intense persecution. Pray that they will feel God’s love and that God will continue using persecution to grow His church.”

This is an exact copy of the insert in the brochure.

Copied by: Dr. Jim Slack

Global Evangelism and Church Growth in GRD, of the IMB, SBC

December 2004

Sunday School Literature of LifeWay
Sunday, December 19: “Why Follow Him?”
Teacher’s Edition
Excerpt Related To Calvin Fox and the Kh CPM

“I met the late Calvin Fox several years ago while visiting **India**. He was an agriculturalist who worked among the **Kh people in the remote hills of *** India**. Calvin taught the **Kh** how to increase the productivity of seemingly unusable land. His work made a significant impact in the lives of many people who depend on what they can grow to survive. Calvin was also a faithful and committed follower of Christ. He shared his faith with the **Kh** and encouraged them to follow Jesus. His work made an eternal impact in the lives of many people who have little access to the gospel.

As my friends and I were prayer-walking with Calvin, he told us that the song ‘I Have Decided to Follow Jesus’ originated among the **Kh people**. Believers among the **Kh** often face social alienation, physical persecution, and sometimes death. And yet, each stanza of

the song ends with the words, 'no turning back, no turning back.' Calvin took us to the graves of believers who faithfully followed and served Jesus in the midst of great persecution. As we stood at the graves of these believers, we were deeply moved by their unwavering commitment to follow Jesus—no matter what." (End of segment in the lesson on Calvin Fox and work among the Kh)

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December 2004

Text entered by Jim Slack