

PENTECOSTALISM IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

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Introduction

By the middle of year 2000, Pentecostalism in India has grown to approximately 33.5 million strong, ranking fifth in the world (behind Brazil, the United States, China, and Nigeria) for total numbers in the renewal. Included in this total are 1,253,041 classical Pentecostals; 5,032,741 Charismatics; and 27,234,219 Neocharismatics.¹ It is not the purpose of this essay to provide a comprehensive history of Indian Pentecostalism. Rather, it will examine pre-twentieth century examples of Pentecostalism in India, followed by a brief overview of the emergence of the classical Pentecostalism, the Charismatic and the Neocharismatic movements, together with four illustrative case studies illustrative of the several waves of the Indian renewal.²

1. Pre-Twentieth Century Pentecostalism: The Historiographic Problem

Pentecostals have traditionally accepted the claim of historians from the United States of America that the modern Pentecostal movement began in Topeka, Kansas, on January 1, 1901, when Charles F. Parham's student, Agnes Ozman, was filled with the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by

¹ Statistics throughout are from David Barrett and Todd Johnson, "Statistics, Global," in *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess. (forthcoming, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), henceforth *NIDPCM*; and D. Barrett, G. Kurian, and T. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, second ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Consult the latter source for methodology.

² This article is weighted heavily towards the Assemblies of God work in India, simply because Assemblies of God materials are more available to the author.

glossolalic utterances. For Pentecostals, this has become both their “sacred time” and their “sacred space.” Such Amerocentric historiographic assumptions now must be called into question, based on ever-growing evidence of pre-twentieth century Pentecostal occurrences, and our current awareness that such incidents were most prevalent outside the United States of America.

In both Roman Catholic and Eastern Christian traditions there is clear evidence of sporadic outpourings of the Holy Spirit throughout the two millennia of Christian history.³ Certain Pentecostal purists might argue that in these early renewals there was no conscious linkage of Spirit-baptism with glossolalia. But such a counter-argument is based upon a twentieth century understanding of this linkage that does not acknowledge the ever present workings of the Holy Spirit, who has been neither deistic nor preferential throughout the Christian era.

We also have clear evidence of Pentecostal-like outpourings among numerous pre-twentieth century Protestants, including the Quakers (especially in 17th century England), the Shakers (beginning in 18th century England), the Moravian Brethren (especially in 18th century German states), the early Methodists (18th and early 19th centuries in England), the Awakened in 18th and 19th century Finland, the Irvingites in 19th century England, and participants in the West of Scotland Revival in the 1830s.⁴ These movements are well documented by historians of European spirituality.

Pre-twentieth century Pentecostal-like outpourings were not limited to Europe, although until recently such movements remained undocumented by western historians. Now, because of the research of such scholars as David Barrett and Gary B. McGee, we are beginning to find evidence of renewal in 19th century Africa and Asia as well. Barrett

³ For details, consult the author’s trilogy on the history of the concept of the Holy Spirit: *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984); *The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1989); and *The Holy Spirit: Medieval Roman Catholic and Reformation Traditions* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), and summaries of these materials in the *NIDPCM*.

⁴ See articles by S. Burgess on the Quakers, by E. Blumhofer on the Shakers, by L. Ahonen on the Awakened, by D. Bundy on the Irvingites (Catholic Apostolic Church), and D. W. Dorries on the West of Scotland Revival in the *NIDPCM*. B. L. Bresson, *Studies in Ecstasy* (New York: Vantage, 1966), and R. A. Knox, *Enthusiasm* (London: Clarendon, 1950) provide additional information, including stories of early Methodism.

states that by the year 1900 there were almost one million indigenous Christians in Africa with Pentecostal characteristics.⁵

McGee argues that late nineteenth century India also witnessed remarkable outpourings of the divine Spirit.⁶

2. Pentecostalism in India before 1906: The Emerging Evidence

In a lengthy essay on early Indian Pentecostalism, Gary B. McGee points to a series of Pentecostal-like revivals in Madras Province (now Tamil Nadu) and in Travancore (now Kerala), South India.⁷ The first of these occurred in Tirunelveli in Madras Province in 1860-61, followed by an outpouring of the Spirit in Travancore in 1874-75. In both cases, charismatic gifts (prophesy, glossolalia, glossographia, and interpretation of tongues) and other Pentecostal phenomena (prayer for the sick, falling down and shaking, as well as restoration of the offices of apostle and prophet) were present. The leader was John Christian Aroolappen, a native Anglican catechist who had been trained by pietistic missionaries. Aroolappen's ministry and the revival itself took an indigenous course, with little or no further influence by missionaries and no western money. Evangelistic outreach involved both men and women, and resulted in many conversions.

Among Aroolappen's converts was the former Brahmin Justus Joseph, who formed the Revival Church in 1875. This group also was indigenous in nature, maintaining traces of local Hindu culture, although Joseph proceeded to negate caste among his adherents. The Revival Church also reestablished the prophetic office and practiced spiritual gifts, including making controversial predictions. Joseph's group continued into the early twentieth century, though discredited and criticized by the more conventional missionaries.

As a consequence of renewed European missionary fervor (beginning in 1897), and spurred on by the Welsh Revival (1904), a series of revivals swept across India in 1905-1906. This awakening encompassed most Protestant groups, including Anglicans (CMS), Baptists, Danish Lutherans, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, London Missionary Society, Church of Scotland, Methodists, Open

⁵ Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia*.

⁶ G. McGee and S. Burgess, "India," in *NIDPCM*.

⁷ McGee & Burgess, "India."

Brethren, Presbyterians, Reformed, and Wesleyan Methodists. Confessions of sin and “prayer storms” (hours spent in fervent and loud prayer) followed, with Pentecostal-like phenomena, including prophecies, dreams, visions, and accounts of visible “tongues of fire.” Nowhere was this renewal more dynamic than at Pandita Ramabai’s Mukti Mission at Kedgaon in Maharashtra State.

Case Study I:

Sarasvati Mary (Pandita) Ramabai (c. 1858-1922)⁸

As a young woman, Ramabai bridged human-rights teaching from the ancient Vedas to unjust religious, political, and economic practices of her own day—especially lack of education, inadequate health care, child marriages, and harsh practices towards widows. These she described in *The High Caste Hindu Woman* (1887). Ramabai was a consummate scholar, becoming fluent in Sanskrit, Kanarese, Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, English, Hebrew, and Greek.

Eventually her search for social justice and compassion led her to the Christian church and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It also led her to found a community of deliverance and care at Mukti in Maharashtra State in western India. She also established orphanages in several villages, and a home for prostitutes, where they were sheltered, educated, and taught Christian doctrine.

It was at Mukti that dispossessed women and children (especially child widows and orphans) experienced one of the greatest outpourings of the Holy Spirit in modern times. In January 1905 Ramabai issued a call for prayer. Five hundred fifty women met twice daily for intercessory prayer. By June, thirty young women went out to preach the gospel in the villages. On June 29, 1905, evidence of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit was reported, with several “slain in the Spirit” and others experiencing a burning sensation said to evidence their baptism in the Holy Ghost “and fire.” Soon the Mukti girls were praying for more than 29,000 individuals by name daily.

The revival continued into 1906, when participants also experienced glossolalia. Several of the missionaries at Mukti, including Minnie Abrams (Methodist Episcopal) and Albert Norton (Methodist, later independent), also received Spirit baptism. In 1907, Ramabai wrote that even the most refined and educated English men and women came under God’s power, losing control over their bodies, shaking like reeds, and stammering words in various unknown tongues, until they were in unbroken communion with God. So far as we know, Ramabai did not speak in tongues, but commended the experience to others.

⁸ For a more complete story of Pandita Ramabai and the revival at Mukti, see R. Burgess, “Ramabai, Sarasvati Mary (Pandita),” in *NIDPCM*.

Numerous miracles are attributed to Ramabai's ministry, including finding locations for water wells in times of drought. The Mukti mission expanded in outreach to include the blind, preschool education, an early hospital, vocational and industrial support services. Meanwhile, Ramabai directed her scholarship towards a full translation of the Bible in the Marathi language. Pandita Ramabai is one of the most amazing women of modern times, and one of the principal modern pioneers in emerging Pentecostalism.⁹

3. Development and Growth of Classical Pentecostalism in India (1906-1960)¹⁰

Prior to 1907 and the arrival of American missionary Alfred G. and Lillian Garr, Indian Pentecostalism made no connection between glossolalia and missionary preaching or as an evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Having just experienced the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, California, the Garrs changed the direction of the Pentecostal movement in India. Alfred Garr firmly believed that God had given him the Bengali language when he was Spirit-baptized, and Lillian believed that she received Tibetan and Mandarin. Both expected to preach in these languages.¹¹

Conflict followed these claims. Alfred Garr's inability to preach in Bengali resulted in his abandoning the utility of tongues as a missionary tool, although he vigorously retained them as the indispensable sign of Spirit-baptism. In this the Garrs came into conflict with missionaries who preceded them to India, including the glossolalic Minnie F. Abrams, who objected to the concept of tongues as absolutely indispensable for Spirit-baptism. Notwithstanding these disagreements, Pentecostalism grew rapidly in India. Sixty veteran missionaries living in India embraced the Pentecostal gift of tongues.

⁹ Pandita Ramabai has been named the "Indian Woman of the Millennium" by *The International Indian-OnLine* 7:6 (October 1999) at <http://www.intindian.com/Vol7-6/pandita%20Ramabai.htm> (Nov 3, 2000).

¹⁰ The most comprehensive study to date is Michael Bergunder, *Die suedindische Pfingstbewegung im 20 Jahrhundert, Eine historische und systematische Untersuchung*, Studien zue interkul-turellen Geschichte des Christentums 113 (Frankfort: Peter Lang, 1999).

¹¹ Gary B. McGee, "'Latter Rain' Falling in the East: Early Twentieth-Century Pentecostalism in India and the Debate over Speaking in Tongues," *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 68:3 (September 1999), pp. 658-65.

Pentecostal revival broke out in Calcutta in 1907, under the influence of the Garrs, and was especially strong at the Elliot Road Orphanage in that city, where a Methodist missionary, Fannie Simpson, ministered. Eventually, Simpson was recalled by her bishop, although she returned to India as an independent Pentecostal missionary about 1915, establishing the girls' orphanage at Purulia.

South India has been more responsive than the North to Pentecostalism. A strong Christian presence had been there for centuries (according to the fourth century historian, Eusebius, since the time of St. Thomas in AD 57), with Marthoma Syrian and Assyrian branches coexisting until the arrival of Roman Catholicism in 1600. In addition, the people of Travancore (later Kerala) were the most literate in all of India, and eager to read early Malayalam and English Pentecostal literature.

George E. Berg, an independent American missionary of German descent, went to India in 1901, and returned to the United States in 1908, where he received the baptism in the Holy Spirit at the Azusa Street mission. In 1908 he returned to India and lived in Bangalore, using it as a center for his work.

Fire Baptized Holiness missionary, Daniel Awrey, visited India in 1910-1911 with Frank Bartleman (the chronicler of Pentecostal origins in Los Angeles). In 1911 J. H. King also visited India, receiving independent missionaries R. E. Massey and D. S. McHaffey into the Pentecostal Holiness Church. A permanent Pentecostal Holiness work was begun in 1920 under J. M. Turner.¹²

The first Assemblies of God missionary to South India was the veteran Mary Weems Chapman, who already had spent many years in Africa. She travelled extensively, holding meetings in Bombay, Mukti, Dhond, and Bangalore, finally settling in Madras in 1915, founding the Pentecostal work there. While in Madras, a delegation from Travancore requested that she come there. In 1922 Spencer May, a British Assemblies of God missionary from Wales, came to Trivandrum (capital of Travancore) to join with Mrs. Chapman. Together they published the first Malayalam Pentecostal magazine, the *Pentecostal Trumpet*, with circulation in South Africa, the Gulf States, Ceylon, Malaysia, as well as India.

Robert F. Cook received Spirit baptism at the Azusa Street Mission in 1908, while praying for his wife's healing. At that time he also felt

¹² M. Kumar wrote a history of Pentecostal Holiness Church, *This is Our South India* (no place: no publisher, 1983).

called to India. He arrived in Bangalore as an independent missionary in 1913. While working with George E. Berg, Cook joined the Assemblies of God and moved to Kottarakkara, Travancore. Several years later, Cook founded Mt. Zion Bible Institute (June 1927) in Chengannur. In 1929, Robert Cook and Indian pastor K. E. Abraham left the Assemblies of God, choosing to work independently. Abraham separated from Cook in 1930, forming the Indian Pentecostal Church (IPC, currently, the second largest Neocharismatic work in India).¹³ In 1936, Cook joined the Church of God (Cleveland, TN), bringing those churches that were under his supervision with him. According to Church of God literature, this included 63 churches, 2,537 members and 43 pastors.¹⁴

Case Study II:

John H. Burgess and Bethel Bible School¹⁵

When Robert Cook went on furlough to the United States in 1923, William M. Faux, foreign mission secretary of the Assemblies of God, came to Travancore to conduct revival meetings. He soon recognized the need for additional missionaries and Indian workers. Returning to the United States, he commissioned John H. Burgess to begin a Bible college in Travancore.

John Burgess (1903-) was born into a Christian Reformed family in Muskegon, Michigan. As a young teenager, he heard about the Azusa Street revival from family who brought this news back to Michigan. John and his immediate family became involved with the new Pentecostal movement, and joined the Assemblies of God immediately after its formation in 1914. During the First World War, he received the baptism of the Holy Spirit in a small storefront church in Muskegon Heights, Michigan. He attended Rochester (N.Y.) Bible Training School (1924-25) and Bethel Bible Training School, Newark, New Jersey (1925-26). Burgess received a divine call to become a missionary to India during a literature course at Rochester Bible School. He pastored for one year in White Plains, New York, before

¹³ K. E. Abraham, *Yesucristhuvinte Eliya Dasan Athava Pastor K. E. Abraham* (Trivandrum: Pentecostal Young People's Association, 1965); H. G. Varghese, *K. E. Abraham: An Apostle from Modern India* (Kadambanad, Kerala: Christian Literature Service of India, 1974).

¹⁴ No author, *History of Church of God Missions* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1943), pp. 135-41; R. Cook, *Half a Century of Divine Leading and 37 Years of Apostolic Achievements in South India* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Foreign Missions Department, 1955).

¹⁵ Materials taken from family archives and records.

being appointed as an Assemblies of God missionary to South India in 1926.

During his first year in Travancore, John Burgess held evangelistic services and worked under the tutelage of aged Mary Weems Chapman, who died November 27, 1927. However, Burgess' primary purpose was to establish a Bible school. It was quite apparent to early missionaries in India that the work to be accomplished was far too vast to be left in the hands of missionaries alone. In June 1927, Burgess founded Bethel Bible School (later College) in Mavelikara, Travancore (now Kerala). The school was relocated in 1949 to Punalur. Outside the United States, Bethel Bible College is the oldest Assemblies of God institution for ministerial training in the world.

For the next 25 years, Burgess ministered throughout Travancore in such towns as Chengalur, Quilon, Kottarakara, Pattanapuram, and Tiruvalla. Rather than viewing himself as a dispenser of foreign ideas and capital, he was motivated by relational Christianity. He encouraged strong community among Pentecostals, without regard to caste. Support from the United States was often undependable, so that he lived with the Indians, riding a bicycle (later a battered World War II jeep used on the Burma front, with six bullet holes and deceased missionary's Clarence T. Maloney's chest x-ray serving as rear window). For John Burgess, missionary life was a pilgrim's faith venture, with ever-present poverty, danger, and separation from family to be endured in view of the immanent return of Christ.

In 1950 Burgess was forced to return to the United States to pastor because of the sickness of his wife, Bernice (1901-90). His dream of developing native leadership in the Indian church has been realized, for the Assemblies of God church in Kerala now functions without missionaries, governed exclusively by Indian leaders. Currently, the Keralite church sends missionaries to other sections of India, to numerous countries in Asia, the Middle East, and the United States.

Early Pentecostal missionaries in South India focused most of their attention on evangelistic work and on the training of Indian evangelists and pastors. While George Berg established five schools for children, and Robert Cook founded four such schools, they did not consider charitable and social work as effective as evangelism.¹⁶

In contrast, because of difficulties faced in evangelizing North India, early Pentecostal missionaries there turned to establishing institutions

¹⁶ Later exceptions included the boy's orphanage at Junnar, Maharashtra State, and the industrial school at Shencottah, Tamil Nadu. Early leaders at Junnar included Jessie Ferguson (Australian missionary, coming from Mukti), Australian Tommy Evans, Ted and Estelle Vassar, and Christelle Evans. The Shencottah industrial school was founded by Robert and Doris Edwards.

such as orphanages, industrial schools, elementary schools, correspondence schools, radio programs, leper asylums and dispensaries. The Assemblies of God developed the most extensive system of institutions, primarily centered in the Gangetic plain. These include an orphanage and girls school at Bettiah, a girls' orphanage at Purulia, the James Harvey boys school at Nawabganj, a leper work at Uska Bazar begun in 1911 by Minnie Abrams, a co-educational Bible school at Hardoi, the "Baby Fold" at Rupaidiha, a girls' industrial school at Siswa Bazar, a men's Bible school at Laheria Sarai, and Childers Lodge, a Himalayan hill station operated as a missionary rest facility and revival center.¹⁷

The Pentecostal Holiness Church also has been active, establishing orphanages in Jasidih, Giridih and Jha Jha (boys), and Madhupur (girls). In addition, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) and the United Pentecostal Church have extended their South Indian works to the North.¹⁸

Gary McGee has pointed out that, because of intense opposition, missionaries in North India often set up mission stations with a church, school, and missionary residence. The late Benjamin P. Shinde (a product of the Junnar Boy's Orphanage and one of the earliest trained Indian missiologists) argues that this mission-station model retarded the development of Indian Pentecostal leadership in the North.¹⁹ In contrast to stand-alone mission-stations, orphanages and industrial schools have been the most successful in developing Indian leadership.²⁰

¹⁷ Some of these institutions are no longer in existence.

¹⁸ M. Baird, *Of Whom the World Is Not Worthy: Stories of North India's Christians* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1941); E. Harvey, *The Faithfulness of God*, 2nd ed. (Battle Creek MI: Grounds Gospel Press, n.d.); H. Howard, "A Brief History of the India Work" (unpublished paper, 1999); H. Hunter, "International Pentecostal Holiness Church," in *Acts of Pentecost*, ed. Yung-Chul Han (Seoul: Han Young Theological University, 1998); J. Mueller, *With Our Missionaries in North India* (Springfield, MO: Foreign Missions Department, 1937); no author, "Pentecostal Holiness Church in India" (Unpublished paper, n.d.); V. Schoonmaker, *Christian Schoonmaker: A Man Who Loved the Will of God* (Mussoorie, India: Hyratt Press, 1959).

¹⁹ G. McGee, *This Gospel Shall Be Preached*, 2 vols. (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1986), I, pp. 97-98; B. Shinde, "The Contribution of the Assemblies of God to Church Growth in India" (M.A. thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, School of World Mission, 1974).

²⁰ J. Mueller, *With Our Missionaries*, p. 17. When mission-station homes, such as Childers Lodge (Mussoorie), were established, missionaries from older

In recent decades, missionaries in North India made concerted efforts to reach the larger cities. The best known Pentecostal work in all of India has been that of Mark and Huldah Buntain in Calcutta. It now feeds over 20,000 hungry Indians each day. It has expanded to a hospital, a school of nursing, a junior college, a vocational school, six village clinics, a hostel for destitute youth, a drug prevention program, and twelve schools that provide instruction for 6,000 children.

While classical Pentecostalism has significantly impacted specific regions throughout the subcontinent, currently it is the slowest growing wave in the Indian Renewal movement. It is fair to say that India has responded less favorably to Christian culture imposed from abroad than to those forms that have a more indigenous base.

4. The Catholic Charismatic Movement in India

In 1972, Mino Engineer, a young Parsi civil engineer who had been studying at Fordham University and had been converted to Catholicism through his involvement with Charismatics, brought the Catholic Charismatic renewal to India. In that same year, two Jesuit priests, Fr. Fuster and Fr. Bertie Phillips, who had been in the United States for studies and research, returned to India as Charismatics. These early leaders formed prayer groups—the first beginning in Bombay (Mumbai). The movement spread throughout Maharashtra State and then to all of India. In 1974 a group of thirty Catholic Charismatic leaders met in Bombay to hold the first National Charismatic convention, to begin a journal, *Charisindia*, to print the first edition of *Praise the Lord* hymn book, and to serve the renewal. At present, the leading Indian Catholic charismatic leader is Mathew Naickomparambil.

Case Study III:

Mathew Naickomparambil: Catholic Charismatic Healing Evangelist²¹

Born in Kerala in 1947, Mathew Naickomparambil was Spirit baptized in the early 1970s on his own, well before the Catholic Charismatic Renewal was known in India. He entered a Vincentian

denominations often were touched by the renewal as they were hosted by Pentecostal missionaries.

²¹ Based on P. D. Hocken's biography of Naickomparambil in *NIDPCM*. See also J. Duin, "India's 'Billy Graham' Is Catholic," *Charisma* (November 1994), pp. 86-89.

seminary for service in the Syro-Malabar rite. Following his ordination as priest in 1976, Naickomparambil received many spiritual gifts. The first healing through his ministry occurred in 1978, and shortly thereafter he began to have frequent visions.

In 1987, Naickomparambil felt led to proclaim the word of God rather than to counsel and minister individually. This led to daily proclamations at the Potta Evangelization Retreat, north of Cochin. Vast crowds attended. In 1990, the Vincential order bought a nearby hospital in Muringoor, near Chalakudy, to form the Divine Retreat Center, led primarily by Naickomparambil. Retreats in six languages, including English, are simultaneously conducted in six different auditoriums. Retreats are conducted every week of the year with an average of 15,000 people per week and up to 150,000 at the five-day conventions, especially during the summer holidays. Sunday is registration time; Monday is the day of surrender; Tuesday is the day of confession; Wednesday is the day of counseling; Thursday is a time for inner healing, prayer and fasting; Friday is devoted to the gift of the Holy Spirit; and Saturday is the final mass, with the blessing of rosary and the Bible. Everyone in attendance is given accommodation at the center during the retreats.

Over 300,000 non-Christians and millions of Christians have attended these week-long retreats, and large numbers have accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Good news and healing conventions are held by Naickomparambil and his associates in parishes all over Kerala. He first visited the United States in 1992 and ministered at healing conferences then and on subsequent visits.

5. Indian Neocharismatics

By far the largest category within the renewal in India is that of the Neocharismatics. These are Christian bodies with Pentecostal-like experiences and a common emphasis on the Holy Spirit that have no traditional Pentecostal or Charismatic denominational connections. This is a catch-all category of dozens of independent, indigenous, postdenominational denominations and groups. According to Roger E. Hedlund, Indian Christians of indigenous origins include members of tribal communities, converted Dalits or untouchables, as well as converts from much earlier indigenous Christian churches in India, such as the St. Thomas Christians in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.²²

²² The leading scholars concerned with indigenous Christian movements in India are Roger E. Hedlund of Serampore College, and O. L. Snaitang of Shillong. Hedlund is the managing editor of *Dharma Deepika: A South Asian Journal of*

By far the largest Renewal group in India is the New Apostolic Church founded in 1969, with total adherents of 1,448,209. The second largest, the Independent Pentecostal Church of God or IPC (founded in 1924) has c. 900,000 adherents throughout India and ten other countries. The New Life Fellowship (founded in 1968) now has approximately 480,000 adherents, and the Manna Full Gospel churches and ministries (founded in 1968 with connections to Portugal) has 275,000.

Millions more are Neoecharismatics in older independent Christian churches, such as the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, and the nonbaptized believers in Christ.

Case Study IV:
The Sharon Fellowship Church²³

One of the thriving indigenous Neoecharismatic Indian churches is the Sharon Fellowship. The founder and president of Sharon is Rev. Dr. P. J. Thomas, the son of P. V. John (Ayyappilla Sir), a high caste Hindu convert. P. V. John was converted under the ministry of Brethren missionary V. Nagal, and shortly thereafter joining the Church of God, Anderson, Indiana, USA (non-Pentecostal). Subsequently, P. V. John received Spirit baptism and fellowshiped with the Assemblies of God (working with John H. Burgess). In 1938, for personal reasons, P. V. John and his two sons, P. J. Daniel and P. J. Thomas, left the Assemblies of God and joined with the Indian Pentecostal Church (IPC). P. J. Thomas was ordained by K. E. Abraham, and traveled to Australia and the United States for theological training.

In 1952 P. J. Thomas returned to Kerala, where he began conducting evangelistic meetings in Thiruvalla. The following year, he left the IPC due to an internal split among the leaders. Thomas' independent work shortly grew into the Neoecharismatic Sharon Fellowship Church, which was eventually registered with the Indian government in 1975.

During the first twenty years of Sharon's history, the extension ministry was limited to the boundaries of Kerala State. After T. G.

Missiological Research (Chennai, 1996-). Among his most important articles are "Indian Christians of Indigenous Origin and Their Solidarity with Original Groups," *Journal of Dharma* 24:1 (1999), pp. 13-27; and "Indian Instituted Churches: Indigenous Christianity Indian Style," *Mission Studies* 16 (January 13, 1999), pp. 26-42.

²³ Interview with John H. Burgess, October 25, 2000 in Strafford, MO, U.S.A. Daniel Ayroor's interview with P. J. Thomas and T. P. Abraham, January 1998, in Trichur, Kerala, India. Special thanks to Roger E. Hedlund for collecting materials.

Koshy began church planting in the 1970s in North India, the church began to grow rapidly. Soon Sharon churches were founded in the Gulf States and the United States. At present, the Sharon Fellowship Church has over 90,000 members and over 800 pastors. In addition, it has developed a group of training institutions, including Sharon Bible College, Thiruvalla; Faith Theological Seminary, Manakala; Doulos Theological College, Alwaye; Calicut Theological College, Kozhikode; Light for India Bible College, Trivandrum; Bethesda Bible School, Venpapa; Bethesda Bible School, Madras; Faith Bible Institute, Kakinada; Faith Theological and Bible Training Center, Faridabad; Sharon Women's Bible School, Thiruvalla; and Faith Theological College for Women (including graduate programs), Manakala.

6. Conclusions

Over the past several years, Indian Christians of all varieties, especially the more vigorous Pentecostals, Catholic Charismatics and Neocharismatics, have suffered severe persecution at the hands of radical Hindu groups. Catholic priests have been beheaded and nuns raped. Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have been burned, Christian bodies have been exhumed from cemeteries, and Bibles have been destroyed. Christian martyrdom is not uncommon in India.²⁴

As is common in times of persecution, Indian Christian leaders are beginning to invoke the blessings of martyrdom. In a recent sermon, Sharon Fellowship leader T. George Koshy recalled the martyrdom of a 18 year old North Indian girl who was hung upside down and burned to death for her steadfast Christian faith. His words reach out to challenge complacent Pentecostals around the world, "The entire tribe [of that girl] are in Pentecost now.... Brothers and sisters, take a stand. If you have to give your life, don't hesitate, don't turn back." Koshy concludes, "Martyrdom contributes to the harvest. I am reminded of the words of Medhi Dibaj, the recent Iranian martyr, who said, 'It is a terrible waste for a Christian to die a natural death.'"²⁵

In response to rising persecution, virtually all Christian groups have united in forming an "All India United Christian Voice," to conduct mass

²⁴ *Times of India* (Bangalore, Nov. 8, 1998). Also no author, "Direct and Indirect Persecutions of the Christian Church in India" (21 pp.) at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Crete/2339/persec1.htm> (July 12, 1999).

²⁵ T. George Koshy quoted by Bill Somers, "The Precious," in <http://members.tripdasia.com.sg/Gareth/prophecy/precious.html> (Oct 24, 2000).

rallies and to issue joint press releases. Unfortunately, this spirit of cooperation has only emerged under duress and shows little indications of permanence. Much more likely is a continued weakening of Indian Pentecostalism, in all of its forms, by frequent divisions and non-cooperation between various Christian groups as well as between foreign missionaries and Indian leaders. Notwithstanding, modest growth continues, especially among the more indigenous Charismatic and independent Pentecostal groups. In order for this growth to continue, these groups must address issues of change and continuity within the Pentecostal message in ever-changing secular and global contexts.

The story of Indian Pentecostalism is just emerging and is far from complete. Historians of the renewal in India must reflect on the extent to which this growth is the result of an Indianization of western Christianity in the post-colonial period (since 1947). Most participants have been more concerned with evangelism, in feeding hungry children, in struggling for power, in apocalyptic issues, and even in survival, than in recording and interpreting their history in a professional manner. Meanwhile, vital primary literary sources are mislaid, neglected, and destroyed; while nearly all early Indian Pentecostal leaders have died without being interviewed. Sadly, many great renewals of the Spirit in past centuries have been forgotten.²⁶ It is the author's hope that this will not be the fate of modern Pentecostalism in India.

²⁶ According to R. E. Frykenberg, "Christianity in South India Since 1500: A History," *Dharma Deepika* (December 1997), pp. 3-7 (5), "What we call 'forgetting,' in a collective sense, happens when any community fails to transmit to posterity what its members understand about themselves and events in their past. 'Remembering,' by enhancing and preserving its own history, is one of the crucial means by which a community empowers itself."