

EXPLORING NEW PARADIGMS FOR A NEW INDIA

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Twenty years from now, we will perhaps be looking back and pondering the role of the Church in the new India of the 21st century. Did the Church rise up and take its place in the new India or did it sit back as an observer during one of the most momentous economic and societal shifts ever known? This article will explore some of the cultural changes currently happening in India and then consider two new paradigms that the Western Church must consider in order to be relevant for the needs of the Indian Church today and in the future.

AN ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL SHIFT

India is going through tremendous economic and cultural changes. Any India traveler that hasn't been there for the past eighteen months would immediately notice upon returning the increased presence of construction cranes and high-rises going up around the country. This is accompanied by billboard advertisements enticing Indians to buy their own flat, condo or villa and to finance it at one of the many banks promoting home loans. The pace of life is quickening in India as the number of middle class Indians has surpassed that of the United States.

In a recent expose on India the New York Times wrote about the changes happening in India due to the impact of the four-to-six lane freeway called the Golden Quadrilateral which runs through thirteen states connecting India's four largest cities, New Delhi, Calcutta, Chennai, and Mumbai. The article states, "For India, already one of the world's fastest-growing economies and most rapidly evolving societies..., the redone highway is about grafting Western notions of speed and efficiency onto a civilization that has always taken the long view." The Times article gives an image for India that in some ways is a call for the Church to take its place in the changing culture. The Church must be as serious about its role in shaping India as Microsoft is as it plans to invest \$1.6 billion dollars, add 3000 new workers and open retail outlets in India's 33 largest cities over the next four years. Their strategy includes "adopting" 100 schools in six states which will be carried out by their key leaders in India who have the titles of Developer Evangelist and IT Professional Evangelist. How can the Church respond?

In the midst of these economic changes and opportunities in India, there is spiritual opportunity as well. DAWN Ministries (DAWN stands for Discipling a Whole Nation) has referred to the opportunity now present in India as one of several "ripeness factors." At a time when people are experiencing major changes and disruptions in their life, whether social, political, economic, or through natural disasters, there is an openness to the stability and hope that is offered by the gospel message. In other words, the fields have become ripe for harvest. Certainly India has had a significant number of these factors present over the past several years, including earthquakes, the tsunami, political tensions with Pakistan, Hindu-Muslim conflicts, government changes, and,

as described above, the upheaval being brought about by the economic gold rush. The fields are ripe for harvest in India.

At the same time that India has been experiencing such turmoil, there is much evidence that God's Spirit has been moving in extraordinary ways. An example is the new willingness of leaders from the established church traditions to sit around the table with leaders of the emerging, house church movements, and discuss cooperative efforts and partnerships. And, in answer to the prayers of Believers across the country, there is a constant stream of reports of miracles which result in entire families and villages of Muslims, Hindus and tribals turning to Christ. There are many who believe that there could be an increase in the number of Christian believers by five or six times in just the next fifteen years! There are also several national strategies being developed that involve hundreds of Indian ministries and thousands of workers.

Over the years, much of the success of the missionary efforts in India has come in five ministry areas; evangelism, discipleship, leadership development, theological education, and community development with its water wells, health care, children's education, orphanages, etc. Certainly, these areas must continue to be a focus of the efforts of the Church in India, but in the context of what is happening in India today, there are two additional ministry areas, really new paradigms, that demand our attention.

TWO NEW PARADIGMS TO CONSIDER

Models that describe a healthy, vibrant church should include the criteria that the church be self-governed, self-supporting and self-propagating. The church which does not exhibit these characteristics will be a church dependant upon others for its survival, rather than a church that is reproducing itself through a continual multiplication of new Believers and new churches. The West can play a key role for the Indian church in a new and expanded way particularly in the areas of developing models of self-support and training and mentoring for better self-governance.

A SHIFT FROM WEST TO EAST

The first new paradigm for the future of India missions involves a shift from Western to Indian resources to pay for ministry support. We must acknowledge that there will never be enough funding from outside, Western sources to pay for all the evangelists, teachers, leaders, pastors, buildings and strategies needed for the harvest God is bringing in. India has approximately 600,000 villages and over 1 billion people. Even if there was only one pastor, paid \$100 per month, for every 1,000 people in India, over \$1 billion per year for pastors alone would be required. If the cost for Bibles, teachers, buildings, literature, training, and community outreach, etc., is factored in, then the figure becomes unreachable, and more importantly, unsustainable. If the West is going to encourage and equip India for gathering the harvest, versus restricting the harvest, then this new paradigm will prove critical.

It should also be noted that, as the Indian economy and culture are changing, the Church must position itself to enable Indian Christians to take their place in the new economic and cultural system. In the past, much of the marginalization of Indian Christians has been related to caste and religion. 63% of Christians in India today come from the Dalits, those considered

“untouchables” in Indian, Hindu society. In the new economic-based society, caste and religion become secondary to the pursuit of wealth. In the melting pot of a growing economy and urbanization, both existing and new Indian Christians must be prepared and equipped to take their place lest they become even more marginalized.

In one sense, the Indian church is well ahead of other developing countries in becoming self-supporting. India has been developing its own leaders for many years. The credit for this wonderful circumstance however, is not due to the foresight and wisdom of Western missionaries. The fact is that the Indian government no longer allows visas for Western missionaries. Into this supposed vacuum of leadership God has raised up a remarkable army of Indian nationals, many of whom are challenging the rest of the world by their example of prayer, commitment and results for the Kingdom. Currently, the Indian government still allows Western money into the country. Though we may no longer see white faces leading Indian Christian organizations and ministries, there is too often a white face pictured on the currency which is keeping the ministry afloat. The expectation is also easily created that Western currency will provide for the future as well.

There is a three-fold solution to the financial challenge posed by the great potential of the Indian church of the future. One solution is an increased focus on bi-vocational ministry. Another is the creation of many more micro-enterprise strategies. And finally, the development of hundreds of "business as mission" entities can enable Indians to support their own growth from within the country and sustain themselves for the long-term.

It should be noted that there are distinct differences between the three self-support models listed above. First, bi-vocational workers are individuals such as Paul the apostle who sustain their Kingdom efforts through earning their own support. In his writings, the apostle Paul was consistent in his message that providing for his own ministry needs was a model to be considered and duplicated by his readers. If Paul had waited on others to provide for his needs, he may never have completed even his first missionary journey nor had any basis for writing his letters. Could it be that bi-vocational ministry, or tent-making, could be a necessary foundation for healthy, reproducing churches that succeed over generations? Paul succeeded in a bi-vocational or tent-making ministry even though he was often on the move as evangelists often are. When considering the demands on an evangelist, perhaps this fact gives additional credibility to bi-vocational ministry at the local church level. Certainly, an individual in ministry, who is working or in business for themselves, is positioned in the scriptures as having a key role in building the Kingdom of God.

The Church Growth Institute in India states that ten years ago, 10% of Christian workers were bi-vocational. Today, the figure is close to 30%. For the purposes of assisting the India church to become self-supporting, the intent here is not to suggest that Western missionaries should go as tent-makers. Rather, the West can provide help with training workers and advancing funds for small start-up businesses, which is related to the second model of developing self-support, micro-enterprise.

Micro-enterprise often includes Self Help Groups (SHG), which are groups of individuals who are taught how to start savings accounts and then given matching funds to start small businesses.

Training and accountability will hopefully lead to profits which are used to return the match so that others can benefit and for supporting families as well as for sustaining and multiplying local churches – and beyond! Common micro-enterprise businesses are small stalls selling food or small household items, sewing centers, small-scale agriculture, handicrafts, goat or cow projects, and many others. This model usually works best when there is small-group accountability, specific training for the micro-enterprise project and when someone has already shown some proficiency in business. Proficiency is especially important when attempting to teach a pastor to become a businessperson.

The third model of developing indigenous support is on a larger scale. It is the model of “business as mission.” In this model, the West utilizes its expertise in business start-up, marketing, sales, manufacturing, etc., to start significant businesses within India. For the Indian church to be able take its place in the new economy, to have influence, relevancy, and a strong voice in society, there must be Christian businesses that are run with a Kingdom mentality. Of course, the success of these businesses not only influences society and culture but supplies a critical source of funds for the Indian Church to become and remain self-supporting. The book “Great Commission Companies” by Steve Rundle and Tom Steffen does a good job in further explaining the business as mission concept.

A whole army of people knowledgeable about these models is needed to pass on their expertise as well as seed money for training and start-up costs. Because the Indian government has given serious thought to passing laws restricting the inflow of Western funds for use in Christian efforts, there should be a sense of urgency in our efforts.

THE CHALLENGE OF CAPACITY BUILDING

The second new paradigm is that a whole generation of new ministries is changing the face of India missions. Preliminary results from recent research suggest that the majority of all ministries now in existence in India have been created since the early 1990's! And they are having a significant effect on the way that ministry is being done. This "emerging church" is based upon "grass-root" level workers that are ministering to people in their own geographic location, language and culture, something an outside missionary may struggle to do after many years and a substantial financial investment. Most of these new ministries are spontaneously begun by believers who are simply following the urgent desire God has given them to share the good news with others. The majority of leaders of these start-ups are ill-equipped to understand the laws of India in order to properly register their organization, do not know how to handle money within an accountability structure, are not informed on how to organize a board to achieve good governance, and are not familiar with the concept of how to be a servant-leader.

For the hundreds of new ministries that are emerging in India, there is an urgent need for mentoring and equipping leaders in management and organizational skills. Without these skills most of these organizations will prove to be unable to grow and flourish in the future. Many organizations are growing so quickly without trained leadership that issues such as human resources, fund-raising and self-support, and developing strategies and tactics to accomplish their mission and vision are poorly handled or are not even considered.

There are several Indian and Western ministries such as Christian Institute of Management and Development Associates International that are tackling this critical need for leadership and organizational development which is sometimes called capacity building. They are beginning to mentor, train and equip the emerging church on a much broader level than before, both geographically and content-wise. These entities need and deserve all the support we can give them in an area that is often overlooked for “missions” focus and giving.

As the country of India moves with the speed of a bullet-train into new economic and societal paradigms, now is the time that the body of Christ must join together to make a significant impact on the Kingdom. In India, we have an opportunity to bridge the secular-sacred divide by being salt and light in a dark area of the world. It won't be easy for many of those in professional ministry to adapt to these new paradigms that focus on areas usually reserved for the “secular” world. Nor will it prove easy for entrepreneurs to take time to learn the nuances of appropriate missions strategy and cultural differences when working in another country. In any case, the details remain minor from the perspective of the opportunities God has given us to be a part of perhaps the largest movement to Christ ever seen.

A DECISION-POINT

There will be a new India created in the next twenty years and the Church is in a unique position to help create a new Indian culture and society that reflects biblical values. The Western Church must be informed about the changes that are happening. The Church, both clergy and laity, must then be prepared to play a role in encouraging the development of Indian resources through participation in the growing economy, and to also assist in the development of new leaders and organizations. The West must make a conscious decision to engage the new India in new ways.