Roots in Rural Berar

By FRED W. SCHELANDER, Anjangaon

When the Alliance began its pioneer work in Berar, the idea of conversion from one religion to another was completely foreign to the indigenous mind. A man was born with his religion, along with his parents, and had no more thought of changing it than he did of changing them. In some parts of our Marathi field much the same feeling exists today. In other parts, how different!

Ninety per cent of the population live in villages. These cannot be reached by radio—they have none—nor by the printed page, for few can read. From the beginning our missionaries chose the hard but only way of evangelizing them,—personal visitation and preaching. The efforts of the 'touring season' (in winter months mostly void of rain and heat) formed the backbone of our work. God graciously gave Indian helpers whose knowledge of their own people has proved invaluable.

The great barrier was the iron 'caste' system. But God, who lifts up the poor from the dunghill to set him with princes, opened hearts in the despised Mahar caste. This is the largest group of 'untouchables' in our area, often numbering a fifth of the population. These have come to the Lord in their hundreds. Over two hundred villages have resident converts. A few have little mud churches where the living God is worshipped. In scores of villages non-Christian neighbours listen to Christians at their evening bhajans (hymns, with Indian music and instruments). Scattered widely are the all too few resident pastor-evangelists, themselves converts trained in our Bible school. Some of these pastor-evangelists are trained teachers. With their aid, a beginning has been made in establishing village schools for children of converts.

New inquirers are now brought mainly by the Christians. All the preachers and missionaries have to do is to instruct them more perfectly and baptize them. In the slack hot season, when the intense heat drives the missionaries off the plains, eager volunteers assist the young workers in widespread evangelistic campaigns. The caste Hindus, though often bitterly-hostile, admit that Christianity has come to Berar to stay. Some of them have become favourably impressed and openly declare that God is in us of a truth.

'A great door and effectual is open unto us'—the future seems bright. 'But there are many adversaries.' The backward pull of Hindu relatives and old customs is strong. Persecution by the high castes is never dead and sometimes is very much alive. India's political future threatens severe persecution for both the urban and rural churches. While we believe that Christianity has taken root in the villages of Berar, we know it has not yet taken strong root. 'Wherefore pray ye...'.

The India Alliance

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The India Alliance is a bi-monthly paper published by the India Mission of the C. & M.A. for the purpose of soliciting prayer and inspiring interest in missionary work in India.

The paper is partially supported by free-will donations. All correspondence should be addressed to: Mission House, Abola, Berar, India.

Prayer Power

Air power effectively drove the wedge that enabled the Allied armies to pierce Hitler’s ‘Atlantic Wall’ and make their relentless drive across France in the endeavor to liberate the enslaved peoples of Europe.

What air power is to a modern army, Prayer Power is to a militant, missionary church. It takes the earnest, sustained power of Christ-like intercession to crash the gates of hell and launch the offensive against the strongholds of Satan so as to liberate sin-bound souls, take away ‘the captives of the mighty’, and deliver ‘the prey of the terrible’.

It takes prevailing prayer to establish the Church of Jesus Christ in a non-Christian land.

Reader, will you pause a moment! Think! Pray! Read each article in this missionary news Bulletin. Then, pray! Read, and pray! Pray for the church in urban and rural India. Pray for India in this hour of political uncertainty. Pray for the British authorities. Pray for India’s political leaders. Pray for our Christian pastors, evangelists, Bible women, teachers, elders, deacons, village workers, youth leaders, home-makers, and our missionaries.

Pray for the ever-increasing number of babes in Christ. Pray that there may be more workers to labour among them. Pray for souls. Pray for revival in India.

Last week a letter came from a saint in America. She wrote, ‘This morning the Lord said India on my heart. . . I know that something really big was accomplished for India. . .’ Last Sunday at this mission station thirty outcastes went down to the nearby river to follow the Lord in Baptism. This is only the beginning! Will you pray? Prayer support is what we need more than anything else on this mission field.

The India Alliance

Prayer Works in Gujarat
BY AUGUST HELFERS, Mission School, Dholka

News that there were to be special meetings for prayer during the week preceding Easter in our churches in America, reached us months afterwards. However, the Spirit of God who had planned it so, had also put the thought in the hearts of many of the leaders in our churches here in Gujarat. (‘When God intends special answers to prayer, He calls for a solemn assembly, Joel 2: 13, 16.’ Matthew Henry) The powers of hell seemed to have come up like smoke upon us for several months, but the spell was broken during Holy Week.

Thank God!

The Week of Witness was observed soon afterwards. Over 250 people in thirteen of our churches volunteered to give their time to visit, in witnessing groups, many sections of the city of Ahmedabad and the surrounding villages. Over four hundred meetings were held. More than 23,000 heard the gospel preached. Some 4,200 gospels were circulated and thousands of tracts were distributed. This seed sown in these thousands of hearts awaits the watering with our tears and prayers. Let’s pray!

Within the past six weeks two of our members who were well-trained young men died of phthisis. It has now almost become proverbial among people to ask the question, ‘Why are so many of our Alliance young men slain by this disease?’ In some cases, at least, it can be said that God has permitted it for a purpose: some of our young people have resisted the spirit of God; some are fighting against serving God. Our generation needs to return to an appreciation of the means of grace, a humble desire to study the Word of God, and an all-consuming passion to win the lost to Christ. Let’s agonize in prayer!

The Alintra church elder who, by evil, fought against the other churches, was successful for a time in alienating some men and retaining this church property. He died a horrible death two years ago, and within the past two months those in this church who have withstood the grace of God have of their own accord come and restored the property and asked to be restored to the fellowship of the other Alliance churches. Thank God! In Gujarat, as throughout the world, prayer changes things! Therefore, never give up praying.

Tools and Torches

By RAGHUEL P. CHAVAN, Akola,
President, Berar-Khandesh Christian Youth Movement

Missionary work started in Berar and Khandesh more than fifty years ago. At present seven missions, including our own
October, 1944

C. & M.A., are working in this area. These missions have established churches and have given a good start to the work of evangelizing this section of India.

Now the time has come for the Indian churches to evangelize their own country. It seems that the second half of the twentieth century in this area, if our Lord tarries, will be the era of evangelization by the Indian Church.

Until very recently the evangelistic work of the different missions was carried on separately without any mutual concern; but in 1939 the Berar-Khandesh Christian Council was organized for the purpose of considering methods of evangelism and discussing mutual church problems. At that time a committee on young people's work was appointed. Thus, the year 1939 marks the first milestone in the history of young people's work in Berar and Khandesh.

When the said Committee began to function, it was discovered that young people's work—all important to the future of the Church—was greatly neglected. The Committee prayed, and plans were made to rectify this mistake. Hence, it was suggested that a united rally might be one way of helping young people. The first rally was convened at the Free Methodist Mission in Yeotmal in 1941. The rally proved a splendid success. Thus, the year 1941 marks the second milestone in the history of the Christian Y.P. in Berar and Khandesh. The united rally has now become an annual affair.

Thus, the young 'people's' work, formerly neglected, is now firmly established among all the missions in Berar and Khandesh. At present in this area there are more than fifty organized Y.P. societies and more than 1,200 enthusiastic young people forming the membership. The village young people, less favoured than those of the city congregations, are responding to the challenge, nevertheless, and there are several village societies. God is using these ready tools from city and village to build His Church in India.

Through these tools 'lively stones' are being hewn out of the dark mine of a non-Christian land—souls are being saved. Various projects, such as leadership schools, short term Bible schools and witnessing campaigns are being encouraged by this co-operative movement—all with the supreme aim of evangelizing India.

India today needs saved, consecrated young people of leadership quality—young people who will lift up torches of gospel light so as to let those, in our dear Motherland, who are in spiritual darkness see the Light of Life. I am sure God has ordained us for this purpose!

Power House of the Church
in India

By HARRIET B. BEARDSLEE
Principal, Women's Bible School, Khamgaon

That woman is the key to most of the problems in India is an acknowledged fact. Therefore, it goes without saying that unless the women are saved we can never hope for model Christian homes with family altars and children reared for God. Our problem down through the years has been that of reaching the women with the gospel. Lady missionaries have faithfully toured the villages, carrying with them the Word of Life.

We have had some fruit but we have come to see that it takes more than mere preaching to save these women who are so bound, by their caste customs, by fear and superstitions, by sin and darkness, that they are altogether in the clutches of the evil one. In order that a desire for everlasting life be created in their hearts, they need to see living examples of what the grace of God can do in a heart wholly surrendered to Him. Hence we have come to believe that a few humble, victorious, God-fearing Indian Christian women can do more for their sin-bound sisters than foreign missionaries can ever hope to do.

Not a few young women are beginning to realize that they are 'debtors' to their Hindu sisters to give them the gospel. Many of the older women are desirous of learning to read the Word of God. The Lord, who giveth the Word, is giving a company of village women to publish it. Women are backward in India but these earnest Christian women (some partially trained in the Women's Bible School) are doing much to build a truly Christian community.

There seems to be a hunger for God in the hearts of many these days. On the other hand, many are cold and indifferent. Pray that the day will soon come when in every village there shall be godly homes which shall prove to be real power houses in bringing India's women to the feet of the Saviour. In this way the Church of Christ will be firmly established in this dark and needy land.

A Few Women

By JANE E. KERR, Valsanagar

Tightening the folds of her saree around her slim body in order to avoid all possible chance of defilement from contact with those of less religious pretension, Priti Bai, the recognized and honoured devotee of the village temple, noiselessly, yet very conspicuously, picked her steps through the crowd grouped on the open verandah listening for the first time to the ever wonderful story of the love of God.

Place was given her as befitted her religious
and social standing, and having adjusted her five yards of coloured drapery she too squatted on the sun-baked ground, intent to hear this ‘new thing’ which had come to their very doors. She listened: asked questions and nodded her head in sorrowful assent to the assertion that God alone can cleanse the human heart from sin. ‘Aye aye,’ she wailed. ‘It’s true. My service brings no peace. Go! Go! Go!’

Time wore on. Some went to feed and milk their buffaloes. Others to cook the noon meal for the field workers. But Pritibai sat on. The fact of Christ’s love and provision for fallen humanity had gripped her soul. are you so long in coming?

‘It’s true. My service brings no peace. work to God and move on.

She has settled to paralysis, adding, ‘She has come to the end of the street and left us with the truth of her farewell appeal in our ears and hearts: ‘Come back again and teach us.’

Now, visit with us Salomibai and her tailor son. They ply their trade in another small village accessible only after a heavy walk through deep sand. ‘We must sew, you know,’ the toothless mother explained, ‘otherwise what shall we eat?’ Then, after a dissertation on the evils and expense of daughters-in-law, Salomibai settled to listen. Soon the bit of sewing fell from her wrinkled hands. Tears began to trickle down the furrowed cheeks, while she brokenly repeated, ‘It’s a good story, a good story, but why were you so long in coming?’

Let the Church answer her question!

Another morning finds us addressing a big crowd in a town where there is a high school and a thirst for secular education on the part of the young as a stepping stone to lucrative employment. But, no sound of the gospel had as yet penetrated that ‘dark corner of the earth.’

‘Talk to the men,’ urged the leaders. ‘We are only women: the slaves of men and the mothers of their children. For us there is no place outside the toil of field and home.’ ‘We too are only women,’ we reply, ‘but the great God who loves both you and us just as much as He does the men has sent us with His message. Will you listen while we deliver it?’

Babies are settled in their laps. Older children are admonished to behave while these neglected women listen eagerly to the thrilling love story of the cross of Calvary. Suddenly a woman in the back of the crowd jumps to her feet and asks that we tell the true story and service, even how to teach illiterate mothers of their children. For us there is no full-fledged sermon. In alternating years of study and experience he acquired the skill of presenting the gospel in the villages in song, story and service, even how to teach illiterate Christians to read their Bibles. Intensive study of the Word and the inspiration and fellowship of Christian worship gave him the spiritual experience which alone makes teaching fruitful. So when he at length received his diploma and went out for full time warfare, he was not a raw recruit going to try his weapons, but an experienced soldier ready to enter service in an advanced sector.

Over 60 men and women students have been enrolled at some time during this past year; the average term enrolment being 13 married men and their wives in training and five or six single men. The war with its attendant scarcity of supplies and high prices has brought difficulty, and the spiritual warfare has also its crisis, but the Word of God is still being entrusted to men of faith and faithfulness who will be worthy and able to teach others also.

PRINTED IN INDIA AT THE WESLEY PRESS AND PUBLISHING HOUSE, MYSORE CITY