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A STUDY OF THE DYNAMICS OF THE MOVEMENT IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ASSOCIATED WITH
BRO. BAKHT SINGH

Submitted by: Rebekah Naomi

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When Bro. Bakht Singh yielded to the will of God in being associated with a new movement in Madras, God promised him: "Behold, I will do marvels." And the marvels that God did was to use him and his co-workers to begin a new work in the construction of God's house. A work that continues today and will continue till the Lord returns.

To study the life and ministry of Bro. Bakht Singh I have chosen Dr. Paul Pierson's 'TEN DYNAMICS OF THE EXPANSION OF THE CHURCH' as a grid. I found all the ten dynamics at work in the Bakht Singh movement, though some in small measure and some in a greater measure. (Each of the ten dynamics are named, as Dr. Paul Pearson has given, after the serial number.)

1. PERSONAL OR CORPORATE RENEWAL PRECEDES THE EXPANSION OF THE CHURCH.

The corporate renewal was in far away England. Honor Oak Fellowship, London, played an important role in the Bakht Singh movement. They had a similar vision of the "Church" which the Lord would reveal to Bro. Bakht Singh later on in his ministry. In the 1930s one of its elders, George Patterson visited India and returned with a great burden for India. When he shared the prayer burden the same burden came on all the saints at Honor Oak. Twice a week over one hundred of the saints would go down on their knees praying for India. These included Bro. Austin Sparks, Bro. Patterson and Lady Ogle. (From among them came Bro. Flack and Bro. Raymond Golsworthy who would later join Bro. Bakht Singh for an extensive ministry.)

The personal renewal was in the conversion and call of Bro. Bakht Singh. Bakht Singh was born on June 6, 1903 in the Punjab, India, while the great renewal was going on in Sialkot and other places in Punjab. While studying in London, he was a paying guest of Miss. Kemp who went out of her way to show Christian love. In an Anglican service held on board a ship in 1928, the Lord first spoke to Bakht Singh and he became conscious of the power of the living Christ. Later the Lord used Mr. Owel Hansen and Mrs. And Mr. Haywards in Canada to teach him important lessons in prayer and in finding the will of God in everything.

The Lord laid claim on his life and Bakht Singh surrendered his life on the 4th of April, 1932. The Lord said he had to live by faith, not asking anyone even for a cup of tea. Then the still small voice said he had to agree to three conditions: 1. Withdraw all his claims to his Father's property, 2. Not join any society and 3. Not make his own plans, the Lord would lead him day by day. Bakht Singh agreed.

2. MISSION MOVEMENTS APPEAR ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE CHURCH.

On returning to Bombay, Bakht Singh met his parents who wanted him to keep his faith a secret. Because he refused to do so they rejected him. He was left penniless, helpless and homeless. But Bakht Singh got busy witnessing for Christ in Bombay. And though he never revealed his needs to anyone, the Lord provided for him in wondrous ways.

Then Bakht Singh went to Karachi on the invitation of his sister, and began work among 5,000 sweepers who were Christian in name only. In 1934, many were born again and Imam Din, a sweeper who worked for a missionary, was the first convert of Bro. Bakht Singh and he became his first co-worker. From there Bakht Singh was an itinerant preacher going wherever the Lord opened doors. Revival began to spread over the Indian subcontinent starting with Martinpur. The Lord led him after much prayer, to Jhansi, Agra, Ludiana, Poona, Madras and Travancore. Everywhere crowds thronged to hear this young, fearless, Sikh convert, who preached the Word with power and authority. "Sinners were converted, saints were strengthened and the sick were healed at every meeting."¹

3. MISSION MOVEMENTS ARE LEAD BY A MINORITY GROUP.

The Holy Spirit moved mightily in the city of Madras through Bro. Bakht Singh in 1938 and 1940. People felt as if Madras had become a Christian city. But the religious leaders of the churches in Madras wanted to put out the fire. So, in November 1940, they met, discussed, and unitedly closed the doors of all their churches to Bakht Singh's ministry. But the newly converted and the rededicated people of God in Madras began pleading with Bakht Singh to come back and preach to them.

In May 1941, being a guest of Lady Ogle at Silverdale, Coonoor, Bakht Singh spent days together in prayer, alone, and with others. He had about 400 invitations to preach, and he knew most of doors would close if it became known that he was associated with a new movement. At last, one sleepless night, he yielded. And God promised him: "Behold, I will do marvels." (Exo. 34:10.) then he spent 21 days in fasting and prayer with his co-workers. God guided him to return to Madras and the rest is history.²

4. THERE ARE TWO STRUCTURES IN GOD'S WORK – MODALITY AND SODALITY.

In the Bakht Singh movement, the church is the stable structure. The local church gives would-be leaders training in personal witnessing, cottage prayer meetings, open air ministry, children's ministry and ministry among women. With this kind of training, the needs in the expansion of the church are met.

5. THERE IS A KEY LEADER.

What stands out in Bro. Bakht Singh as a leader is that he was a man of prayer. The then Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, sent two detectives to find out how Hebron, Hyderabad, gets the highest

¹ T.E.Koshy, Brother Bakht Singh of India, Secunderabad, OM Books, 2003,

² T.E.Koshy, page 208.

collection among the churches in India. Bro. Bakht Singh showed them the two holes in his small prayer mat and said that was his bank.³ During his train journeys, he would pray for the whole night. He valued the prayers of the Hebron sisters. Every time he went abroad, he would send his itinerary to all sisters (each one a copy) requesting them to pray for him.⁴

6. THERE ARE NEW METHODS OF LEADERSHIP.

Living by faith was his personal trait. He also taught hundreds of fulltime workers to live by faith.

He also encouraged women to come out for full time service. Here is what Sis. Sowmyamma John says about the Hebron Sisters: "Hebron sisters had very strict and Godly discipline. They very faithfully carried their responsibilities: a) Hebron Messenger (magazine) in three languages. b) Vacation Bible School, now in about 140 places round the year, c) kitchen work, d) visiting homes, e) sisters' meetings in different colonies, branch assemblies, hostels, etc. thereby much increase in the church members, deeper work done in their hearts, they live separated lives and later become active members."⁵

This gives a picture of leadership training given to women in Hebron. Bro. Bakht Singh saw the need among women and children and tapped the resources in the Hebron sisters for the required leadership.

7. HAVE OFTEN INVOLVED THEOLOGICAL BREAKTHROUGHS.

Bakht Singh's vision of the church was different from what traditional churches then upheld. To him a church was the dwelling place of God. Its members consist of those who have been "born again" by the Holy Spirit into the family of God. Such a church is a spiritual entity with no need for earthly organizational rules.⁶ No man-made constitution whatever can truly bind together the Church of God.⁷ The church, as represented by the Assemblies, is a community in which the five fold biblical gifts of spiritual leadership are exercised, ie. Apostle, prophet, evangelist, teacher, pastor.⁸

8. HISTORICAL CONTEXT IS IMPORTANT.

Nationalism was at its peak and Bro. Bakht Singh's introduction of Indian methods of worship like men and women sitting separately during the service, love feast after worship on Sunday, women covering their heads during prayer, sitting on the floor in simple pandals (temporary shelters), songs and messages in Indian languages, Indian instruments for worship, helped Indians to easily associate themselves with the movement.

In the 1930s when revival broke out, modernism, the Oxford group, Syncretism, religious pluralism and other liberal teachings were influencing the church in India. The towering personality of Mahatma Gandhi was casting its shadow on the church too. Bakht Singh was bold enough to speak against any

³ Sis. R. Chandra's handwritten notes, Sis. Chandra. R. is a full time servant in Hebron, Hyderabad.

⁴ A Hebron sister's hand written notes.

⁵ Sis. Sowmyamma John's handwritten notes, Sis. Sowmyamma John is a senior Hebron sister.

⁶ Roger E. Hedlund, Quest for identity, Delhi, ISPCK, 2000, 176.

⁷ God's dwelling place, Bombay, 1992, p. 101.

⁸ Return of God's glory, Bombay, 1961, p.7.

teaching or practice that was contrary to the word of God. After sharing his testimony at the Keswick Convention in 1965, in the editorial of Hebron Messenger he responded with great joy over his fellowship with the saints at the convention and praised God for the work He was doing among them.

9. NEW FORMS OF SPIRITUALITY.

- A) Love feast: the Sunday love feast provides opportunities for people to live and work together. I personally have enjoyed cutting vegetables, cleaning up the place and washing vessels together with other saints. (this happens in the Gurudwaras of the Sikhs too.)
- B) Central prominence given to the Bible: members of the church carry their Bibles to the service. Interaction between the speaker and the congregation is kept alive by reading entire passages responsively. The exposition is followed very carefully by the congregation. Speakers encourage us to take down notes.
- C) The worship experience is indigenous : no separate meetings are conducted for the various languages. Translation is done in two or more languages. Each song is sung in several languages simultaneously. The congregation is seated on mats on the floor and all, men and women participate in the worship as lead by the Holy Spirit. ⁹

10. DISTRIBUTION OF INFORMATION IS IMPORTANT.

“Bakht Singh did not use any human methods to attract crowds, but totally depended upon God through extraordinary prayer, often praying throughout the night. On Saturdays, in preparation to the Lord’s day, prayer went on all night. Through this means, without any advertisement, the Holy Spirit brought together large masses of people to hear the gospel. Bakht Singh believed that God’s work needs no human publicity. He followed the method practiced by the apostles in the book of Acts.”¹⁰

As a witness in the city, he lead the congregation in gospel processions, often several miles in length and at times, numbering more than 12,000. Children would be in the lead, women in the middle and men in the rear, singing songs and carrying gospel placards and banners.

Hebron Messenger, a magazine, started being published in the 1960s, in which Bro. Bakht Singh would write the editorial. Announcement of the dates of the annual All India Holy Convocations were done on this magazine. A number of books written by Bro. Bakht Singh have been published.

CONCLUSION

Dr. Paul Pierson’s TEN DYNAMICS OF THE EXPANSION OF THE CHURCH ¹¹ reveals that God works in patterns in History to exalt valleys and bring low mountains and hills. As I write about Bro. Bakht Singh I feel no amount of toil will suffice in studying about this great man of God. It is not that my life has been touched by him, but that I have been rooted and planted in God’s house where the living waters flow, because of the work that he began. This is the witness of tens of thousands of others.

⁹ Roger E. Hedlund, 154.

¹⁰ T.E.Koshy, 193.

¹¹ Dr. Elaine Vaden’s class notes.

THE IMPACT OF BRO. BAKHT SINGH'S MINISTRY AS VIEWED BY THE HEBRON SISTERS

Dear Hebron sister,

As desired by my teacher at SAIACS in History of Christianity, Dr.Elaine Vaden, I have taken up the study of the above topic. As all of your lives have been moulded by Late Bro. Bakht Singh, I would consider it a great privilege if you could fill up this questionnaire for my research paper. I would treasure every piece of data, every story and every ideal that you would reveal to me.

1. Your Name:
2. Your Date of Birth:
3. Year of being born again:
4. Year of joining Hebron:

ABOUT BRO. BAKHT SINGH:

5. Do you know about his time table (daily):
6. Can you tell us something about his habits?
7. How did he deal with people?
 - a. Dealing with Hebron sisters
 - b. Dealing with children
 - c. Dealing with full time workers
 - d. Dealing with assemblies
 - e. Any other category
8. What do you remember of his ministry?
 - a. Regular meetings
 - b. Open air ministry
 - c. Visiting people
 - d. Cottage prayer meetings
 - e. Any other ministry
9. What do you remember of the Holy Convocations?
10. What do you think has been the outcome of his ministry?

ABOUT YOURSELF:

11. Your previous profession:
12. Can you tell us something about your calling to full time service?
13. Your experiences then:
14. Your experiences now:
15. Your daily time table:
16. How satisfied are you with your work?
17. Shortcomings of the fellowship
 - a. Then:
 - b. Now:
18. Who were the personalities that affected you?
19. How do you see the role of leaders after Bro. Bakht Singh?

What do you think is the role of Hebron sisters in building the church?