

BHOJPURI CASE STUDY: 3 phases of work (April 2009)

In the north Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are approximately 90 million Bhojpuri scattered throughout 170,000+ villages in India and Nepal. The population includes each of the four major castes along with millions of casteless *Untouchables or Dalits*. More than 85 percent of the Bhojpuri people are Hindu, with another 10-12% being Muslim and the rest are Animists with a few scattered Buddhists.

Phase 1

David and Jan Watson were appointed as Strategic Coordinator missionaries for the Bhojpuri in 1989. They made a few trips to the two provinces where the Bhojpuri-speaking people lived while doing language study in New Delhi. During this period of time, they began to catalyze multiple types of ministries to try to initiate work: Jesus Film, radio broadcasts, gospel recordings, Bible translation.

David, who at heart was a church planter, visited older established churches to get their help. They did not believe strongly in the vision but were willing to cooperate on their own terms: "If you fund us, we will send out church planters." David had few options, so he chose to do it this way. The churches sent out many fully-funded young men as church planters. During the first year of CP efforts, ***six of these church planters were killed and no new churches were started!***

Soul Searching Obviously David was devastated and wanted to quit. However, God would not release him from the work. During the first Gulf War they were expelled from India due to anti-American sentiment and went to Singapore. David went through a period of depression and major soul-searching in which he look at the New Testament to find answers for what went wrong. His attitude was: "Lord teach me from the Bible how to do this work your way."

Phase 2

The Watsons developed a new strategy based on Luke 9, 10 and Matthew 10. In these chapters, Jesus told His disciples to find a *person of peace* in each place. They were to share the gospel only when a whole oikos was open to listening. Often that man would then become the leader of the new church started in his home. The church planters were told to proclaim the kingdom and heal the sick just like Jesus told his followers. Special emphasis was put on prayer for the needs of people. In the course of the next few years, many miraculous healings were the occasion for people to believe. Many Bhojpuri knew Jesus as Healer first, and then as Savior next.

David worked with a variety of local leaders who contributed to the new work. The key local partner for this movement was an Indian Baptist pastor named Victor John. Victor had become dissatisfied with the status quo of little or no evangelistic growth. David gave him hope that things could be different and began to give him simple methods (Luke 10) for accomplishing the vision. Very soon, David and Victor became tight partners in reaching the Bhojpuri. When they ran into problems, they worked through them together. This was a key partnership because David is a strategist and teacher and Victor is an implementer and mentor.

David made frequent trips into India to work with Victor and a few men they were discipling. They recruited and fully funded Indian church planters to go to new villages, find people of peace and plant churches. On their visits, they might tell a Bible story, pray for needs, tell a parable, share a testimony – a whole variety of methods. They were trying to cast spiritual bait and discover who a person of peace might be. If they found someone interested, they would stay 2-3 nights, trying to lead them to faith. Regardless of the response, they moved on after 2-3 nights. They were itinerate church planters. Some worked in 5 villages, some 20. If they found no one interested, they moved on. They came back to visit villages where people demonstrated a spiritual interest. Leading people to faith didn't always happen instantly.

As mentioned before, during the first year – traditional results yielded only rejection and violence – 6 CPers were martyred. In years two to four, there were no visible results, but key leaders were trained and methods were improved. Finally, in year five, there were 8 new churches started. In year six, there were 48 new churches.

However, a problem developed. What David and Victor trained the church planters to do, and what they did was not the same! David and Victor taught them to train the new local believers to become leaders of their churches. But often the church planters led the churches themselves. So, they gave them an ultimatum: "You must move

on to start new churches or get the new church to support you themselves.” Some of the church planters would not cooperate, so David and Victor let them go. Less than 50% continued for 2 years. One difficulty that compounded this was that there was no one able to check on them in remote areas and assist them.

Soon, the new churches ran out of their ability to multiply using this model. This was because the model was that all church planters had to be fully supported by someone. In time the number of new churches began to level off.

Soul Searching Many new churches were starting which should have been an occasion to rejoice. But they began to question how the work was progressing based on a critical evaluation of his own work. They reasoned, “If we keep doing what we’ve been doing, the Bhojpuri will never be reached.” Most of the new churches started were first generation (started by the paid church planters). The Bhojpuri churches were not themselves reproducing. The current model was not sufficient for reaching 170,000 villages.

Phase 3

After this period of re-evaluation, David and Victor gathered the church planters together. At this point, they probably had 40-50 fully supported church planters. They gave them new instructions: “You may not plant any more churches. Nor can you pastor any churches!” The church planters were shocked: “Then what *can* we do?”

David and Victor gave them new instructions. They were to *train church planters* from the Bhojpuri. They were to go back to the same villages where they had planted churches and tell them: “We will not start any more churches or pastor your churches. It is your responsibility to do these two things. We will help you do it.” Essentially, the church planters were changing roles from church planters to church planting catalysts.

The trauma of changing roles was too great for some, and over half left the work. For David and Victor, it was a difficult transition. However, they trained the catalysts that remained. These catalysts went back to the villages with the goal of helping the churches plant second generation churches. Many of the Bhojpuri churches succeeded in starting new churches. Victor and David began to evaluate the catalysts *not* by how many churches they had started *but* by how many churches they had trained to start churches.

The second issue that the catalysts addressed was the local leadership of Bhojpuri churches. Previously, when the outside church planter was not in the village, the church might meet to sing songs and pray, but not much else. The church planting catalysts had to work with the churches to assist them in raising up new leaders and training them how to lead themselves.

The catalysts continued on full salary with David and Victor, but their role shifted to doing mobile trainings around the country (eight teams). During this time, the movement began to multiply very rapidly. The difficulty of keeping records grew as the movement began to explode, but the following are best estimates:

Year Six	- 48 new churches
Year Seven	- 148 new churches
Year Eight	- 327 new churches
Year Nine	- 500+new churches
Year Ten	- 1,000+ new churches

By year ten in 1999, an outside research team from the IMB calculate the following results based on extensive field research:

- 3,277 – 5,461 total churches
- 224,722 – 374,536 church members
- 10,608 – 17,680 total outreach groups
- 2,077 – 3,461 new churches established during 1999
- 49,636 – 87,727 baptisms during 1999

A subsequent research study in 2004 gave an estimate of 30,000 churches (based on credible research methodology). A 2008-09 research study done by OM, IMB, and the Indian Mission Association has a preliminary estimate of 80,000 churches among the Bhojpuri.

Other Notes:

- David Watson pulled out of direct leadership in 1997 – many thought that was too fast, but it is probably one reason the movement has continued to grow.
- Victor has also pulled back from some leadership functions – partially by moving to Sweden and partially by traveling to train others
- The average church size in the last study was 64
- The average church starts 3.2 churches in the first 3 years, then typically slows down to starting 1 church every 3 years. Partially this is due to reaching those they know and partially due to either building a church building and/or employing a pastor.
- Outside groups often “buy” the churches by paying pastors – that branch tends to stop growing – but the movement is starting churches faster than outsiders can “buy” them
- Annual leadership meeting now has 15,000+ people
- A group is not called a church until it starts another group
- Discovery method of studying scripture allows insiders to lead bible study within 3-4 weeks
- They have sent missionaries to 4 other Indian UPGs as well as Bhojpuri in Nepal, Bhutan, South America, Fiji
- Movements are starting in several of the surrounding UPGs due to overflow and various people’s focused efforts. Movements have reached critical mass among the Awadhi of Uttar Pradesh and the Magahi of Bihar.
- Only paid people are trainers – training centers keep moving around to be close to new edges of the work
- David has trained in 50+ countries and is training people who are part of CPMs in Indian and African contexts. Without foreign SCs he has trained people who have helped catalyze CPMs in Africa. In most of these places he did 1-2 years of initial contact and training and then the movements began with leaders who decided to embrace all the elements taught even when they did not understand all of them. These were primarily UPG focused efforts
 - Ethiopia (first was two years of contact and training and then 3000+ churches in last 4 years.) This involves a network of over 200 groups working together.
 - Sierra Leone - 2000+ churches in 3 years after initial 3 year contact
 - Central African Republic – 600+ churches in 2 years after one year of contact
 - Sudan – 400 churches in the last year

What changed?

- Every day, hundreds of Bhojpuri Christians were looking for persons of peace. When they led that person to faith, they would communicate: “God can use your household to become a church.” Then they would come back frequently to train the new believers.
- The early persecution of the original church planters came from baptizing individuals. So now they were trying to win whole families and baptize whole families. Husbands would baptize their own wives, or women baptize women.
- The church planting catalysts began to train as many as they could. Sometimes the new believers would prove faithful and sometimes not. They began to train any Christians they could find in this methodology. Soon, other missions groups became jealous of their work and began to schedule their own trainings to conflict with the times set up by David and Victor.
- Obedience-based discipleship may be the most important part of what they did. New believers were obeying the call to love others and share the gospel. David and Victor discovered that the catalysts and church planters must love God, love people and work hard. Good methods just helped them move faster!
- The CPM really started moving when Victor John got involved and David stuck with him through thick and thin.
- Pastors of Bhojpuri churches began to start new churches. Often these Bhojpuri church planters helped to pastor them for some time until local leaders rose up. Often the Bhojpuri church planter led two churches at same time and MAWL’ed new leadership (often for several weeks). [MAWL = Model, Assist, Watch and Leave]

- Local leaders emerged and pastored these churches. They did not call someone from outside to do this. [However, in some places outside Christian groups have come in to these churches to help pastor them. In these places, the CPM stops.]
- Sometimes the original church planting pastor would take the pastor of the new church with him to teach him how to start a new church in a new village.
- The churches grew to involve related households and friends. They often met in a courtyard, not inside houses since the groups were too large for one house.
- Most churches had 2-4 church starts they were working on at any given time.
- Most worshiped in Bhojpuri language, but mixed castes in churches. The gospel often broke down barriers dividing castes.
- Immediate baptism was the norm for new believers.
- Signs and wonders were common – healings and exorcisms. People often knew Jesus first as Healer, then Savior and then Lord

Weaknesses:

- Because of the nature of work in India, many leaders of churches were being approached by outside Christian groups to receive support from them. As a result, the allegiances of these leaders began to shift to the agendas of these organizations. In many places, this has slowed or stopped the movement. Often the trainers only had 2-3 years with these new pastors before outside organizations found them.
- At the time of the assessment, 60% of the pastors deferred to an outside ordained clergyman to do baptism and Lord's Supper as a result of this outside influence.

Longevity:

How has this movement continued to grow and maintain its growth while showing no signs of slowing down?
Some suggested answers are as follow:

- 1) Discipling lost people to begin thinking about obedience and then expecting obedience from day one has created a very solid base for the church.
- 2) The rate of renouncing Christianity is very, very low. This seems to be primarily due to their "slowness" in discipling. They almost exclusively evangelize households of peace. When they find a household of peace they embark on a 26+ week Creation to Christ discovery process and use discipling questions to lead them to the point of commitment through baptism. The household coming to faith together greatly strengthens them and the slower discovery process allows them to understand their commitment before making it. Quite a few households begin the process and then stop or pause the process and that is expected by the church planters.
- 3) A reproducible method of discovery Bible study is used for this Creation to Christ series – the outsider only asks questions. This allows an inside leader to take over the group discovery process by week 3-4 and learn to lead the group while they are becoming a believer. This also allows them to start other discovery groups before they even believe.
- 4) Persecution is expected and people are taught how to respond to persecution.
- 5) There is a tremendous amount of discipline by outside leaders not to answer questions but point new believers back to scripture to let the Holy Spirit guide them to scriptural answers.
- 6) Everybody is expected to be able to reach lost households and start churches.
- 7) There is an ongoing, "open source" training center process (the centers move every year or so) open to all leaders for as much and as often as the desire. This combats degradation of information and processes from generation to generation.