Globethics Repository



Pentecostal Beginnings in Rajasthan, India

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see https://www.globethics.net. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy.

Item Type	Article
Authors	Lukose, Wessly
Publisher	Asia Pacific Theological Seminary
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-11-07 20:47:18
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/236669

[*AJPS* 13:1 (2010), pp. 3-19]

PENTECOSTAL BEGINNINGS IN RAJASTHAN, INDIA: Part Two

Wessly Lukose

The second part of the study on Pentecostalism in Rajasthan discusses contemporary features of the movement including Pentecostal concentration in the state and its socio-cultural status. It also deals with the relationship between Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals including the Pentecostal impact on other Christian sectors as well as the ecumenical attempts in the state.

4. Contemporary Pentecostalism in Rajasthan

Although Pentecostals made little advancement in the beginning, Pentecostalism is making a significant progress in the state today. It is true that most pioneer missionaries of Rajasthan were independent workers concentrating mainly on their local churches. However, currently there are a number of Pentecostal organizations working and at least four North Indian Pentecostal organizations have their headquarters in Rajasthan. Although Pentecostals are a minority, they try to involve themselves in various aspects of society and also contribute to the development of the community in several ways. As a result, Pentecostalism has become a significant local religious movement.

4.1. Pentecostal Concentration

As mentioned earlier, the Pentecostal message first came to three districts of Rajasthan, namely Banaswara, Ajmer and Udaipur. However, Pentecostalism expanded to other districts in the course of time. Today there are Pentecostals, at least in small numbers, in almost all 33 districts of Rajasthan, except Baran. The northern districts of Rajasthan were the regions most neglected by Christianity in general

due to their desert climate as well as the repressive religious nature of the people. However, very recently some Pentecostal churches have chosen to concentrate on north Rajasthan. For example, FFCI has launched evangelism and church-planting missions in the districts of Bikaner and Nagaur. Bethel Fellowship began a church-planting mission in the districts of Dhaulpur, Dausa, Karauli, Sawai Madhupur, and Hanumangarh in 2004. Although North Rajasthan does not have a significant Pentecostal presence, all those districts now have a few Pentecostal congregations.

Southern Rajasthan has the greatest representation of Pentecostal Christianity. Three districts, namely Udaipur, Jaipur, Banaswara and Ajmer, have the largest number of Pentecostals. However, these three districts have the greatest representation of Christians generally. Most Charismatic organizations concentrate on these districts, mainly because of the responsive nature of the tribal people there. Another reason is that it is comparatively easy to work where there is some Christian presence, rather than working in a new place. Also, there is a tendency to build on the foundation of others. Although many South Indian pioneer missionaries concentrated only on South Indians in the beginning of their ministry, they have gradually changed their focus to natives. Many Kerala churches also have changed their attention from their own communities to Rajasthanis. For example, until recently, the Rajasthan chapter of IPCoG did not have many local congregations. On 28 February 2007, it inaugurated their mission centre in Jaipur with the aim of reaching the natives.[1] They have also launched a Bible Training Centre with the intention of training Rajasthani missionaries to establish churches locally.

The research shows that Udaipur has the maximum representation of Pentecostals. The change in focus of Pentecostals in Banaswara, Jaipur and Udaipur is very evident. In Banaswara, Pentecostals concentrated their missionary activities on the villages, and tended to neglect urban areas, except for a few congregations, which are focusing on certain linguistic communities. For example, there are four congregations concentrating only on the South Indians, mainly people from Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In Jaipur, the Pentecostal focus was the city, and little effort was made until recently to reach villages. The best example is the Alpha church, the largest Pentecostal church in the district. Peter Kuruvila, the founder and senior minister of the church,

[1] 'IPC Rajasthan Mission Centre *Uthkhadanam*,' *Subhashitham* 2, no. 6 (2007): 5

and also a prominent Pentecostal leader, has admitted that his church realized the significance of reaching the villages only very recently.[2] Subsequently, they have appointed missionaries to a few nearby villages. In Udaipur, Pentecostals seem to have focused both on the city as well as villages. There are a number of churches in the villages under the banner of various organizations, and in most parts of the district there is a Pentecostal church. At the same time there are Pentecostal churches in the city as well. Rajasthan Pentecostal Church (RPC) is the largest Pentecostal congregation in the whole state, with over six hundred members. Calvary Covenant Fellowship is another growing Pentecostal congregation in the city. Most leaders admit that Filadelfia Bible College (FBC) is a major reason for the growth of Pentecostalism in Udaipur. Apart from that, Aravalli Bible Training Centre is established as a daughter institute of FBC, recently expanding its mission to the neighbouring villages. There was no established Pentecostal training school in Jaipur until recently. In brief, it can be argued that since Pentecostals in Udaipur have focused both on the city as well as villages in their mission work, the district has seen the greatest expansion of Pentecostalism in Rajasthan. However, Pentecostals in Banaswara as well as Jaipur have failed to maintain a balance between urban and rural mission, but have concentrated on either one or the other. Consequently, Pentecostals did not expand there as much as in Udaipur.

People from existing churches were the first converts of Pentecostalism, as most Pentecostal missionaries began their work among them. Nevertheless, gradually the focus has shifted to the non-Christian natives, and so villages soon became the main focus. Although non-tribals were approached in the early stage of Pentecostal missions, the tribals soon became the primary target as they began to be responsive to the Pentecostal message.

4.2. A Predominantly Tribal Religion

Pentecostalism in Rajasthan is a movement of the poor and the marginalized segments of the society, particularly tribals. Pentecostalism in Rajasthan is predominantly a tribal movement, in spite of the fact that it has followers from non-tribal backgrounds as well. Pentecostalism has made inroads into many tribal communities in Rajasthan, and so a majority of its followers are tribals.

---

[2] Peter Kuruvila, interview by author, Jaipur, Rajasthan, 08 May 2006.

Twelve out of the eighteen Pentecostal leaders who were interviewed revealed that their focus is on the tribal people. Seven of them said that their mission service is completely among the tribal groups. Six leaders said that they had not yet turned to tribal communities. However, four of the six have only South Indians as members in their churches, and their church services are in their mother tongue, Malayalam. Although the majority of Pentecostals are from the Bhil tribe, as it is the case with Christianity in general in Rajasthan, Pentecostalism has followers from other tribes as well.[3]

It is important to understand why tribal communities have turned to Pentecostalism. Although the spiritual means like healing and exorcism are the major means for the growth of tribal Pentecostalism, identity concern seems to be an important reason for the tribals turning to Pentecostalism. The identity issue has always been a significant issue in the Indian context among the Dalits and other socially downtrodden people since early times. It is observed that as in the case of the conversion of many Dalits to Buddhism during the time of Ambedkar,[4] one of the major reasons for the tribal people embracing Pentecostalism is related to the issue of identity. Ambedkar realized the need to have a better identity for Dalits. Balkrishna Govind Gokhale's study reveals that Ambedkar was searching for a total transformation in the lives of his followers into 'a new identity, a new culture,' and that is why they accepted Buddhism.[5] Many tribal pastors and believers have argued that they have gained a new identity through becoming Pentecostals. Some of them have said that their status and position have improved. One pastor has admitted, 'we were not allowed to sit along with certain groups of the people, but here in the church we have been seated along with great servants of God.'[6]

---

[3] For an understanding of people groups who have representation in various forms of Christianity, see Rajasthan Harvest Network, *To Glorify God by Reaching the Unreached in Rajasthan for Lord Jesus Christ*. (Jaipur, India: Rajasthan Harvest Network, 1998).

[4] Ambedkar is known as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. He had to suffer a great deal from the high castes as he was from a lower caste Hindu background. He, along with many of his followers, embraced Buddhism after considering many alternatives.

[5] Balkrishna Govind Gokhale, 'Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar: Rebel against Hindu Tradition,' in *Religion and Social Conflict*, 21.

[6] Heeralal, interview by author, Kherwara, Rajasthan, 06 May 06. 'Great servant of God' (*Parameswar ka Mahan Das*) is a common term used by

Anderson's observation regarding the involvement of laity in Pentecostal worship seems to be significant factor that appeals to the masses in Rajasthan. According to him, Pentecostal liturgy with the emphasis on 'freedom in the Spirit' has also been a factor that has contributed to the appeal of the movement. Anderson observes,

This spontaneous liturgy, which Hollenweger has identified as mainly oral and narrative, with an emphasis on a direct experience of God through his Spirit, results in the possibility of ordinary people being lifted out of their mundane daily experiences into a new realm of ecstasy, aided by the emphasis on speaking in tongues, loud and emotional simultaneous prayer, and joyful singing, clapping, raising hands and dancing in the presence of God. This made pentecostal worship easily assimilated into different cultural contexts…. Furthermore, this was available for everyone, and the involvement of the laity became the most important feature of pentecostal worship….[7]

Women also have been given a voice in Pentecostal churches. They have said that they were not encouraged to come to the front, but in the church they have been given the opportunity to participate and take responsibility, 'We are allowed to preach, share, and give testimony, and also to lead the choir and prayer groups.'[8] Practices, such as the holy hug[9] following the Holy Communion, non-tribal believers and pastors eating along with the tribal believers and pastors, the seating of unschooled and untrained pastors along with the trained and the educated pastors and leaders, the involvement of the entire congregation in worship, Scripture reading, prayer and testimony, were cited by tribal Pentecostals to show that they are welcomed and accepted by the Pentecostal community with little discrimination. They have argued that such opportunities have provided them with a new identity. However, this does not mean that there is no differentiation in the Pentecostal churches, and the tension within the movement is also noticeable.

Pentecostals in North India to address a Christian minister who has a well-known ministry or who is possessed with much power of the Holy Spirit.

[7] Allan Anderson, 'Global Pentecostalism in the New Millennium,' in *Pentecostals after a Century*, 223.

[8] Group interview by author, Macadadeo, Rajasthan, 07 May 2006.

[9] There is a practice in Rajasthan of embracing fellow Pentecostals after Holy Communion, which they call the 'holy hug.' However, one is only allowed to embrace members of the same sex.

What McGavran calls the 'redemption and lift' factor also seems to be important in the choice of Pentecostalism by the marginalized.[10] He talks about the spiritual redemption and the socio-economic lift Christianity brings to the masses. At the same time, McGavran argues that the line between 'redemption' and 'lift' is a thin one, and therefore such 'separation must not be too rigorously interpreted.'[11] However, Peter Wagner underlines that this 'redemption and lift' has been taking place among the Pentecostals as well, especially when people from the lower strata of society are converted.[12] A careful look into the Pentecostal Movement in Rajasthan shows that this 'redemption and lift' factor is likely to be another reason for the phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism among the tribal communities in Rajasthan. The tribal Pentecostals in Rajasthan can be seen as a redeemed and lifted up community. A.T. Cherian's study shows that there was socio-economic enhancement of tribal people after coming to Christian faith, and his survey included Pentecostals also.[13] Most people said that they also achieved material prosperity by the power of the Holy Spirit. They shout the slogan that 'we are not poor, but rich in the Lord.'

4.3. A Growing Christian Sector

Although Pentecostals were initially looked down on as a sect and were not welcomed in Rajasthan, today they are accepted by other Christians. Christian growth was extremely slow in the state. However, with the coming of Pentecostals, the momentum for the growth of Christianity in Rajasthan has increased. Currently, Pentecostals are the fastest growing sector of Rajasthan Christianity despite the fact that they are latecomers in the soil. Many non-Pentecostal leaders have acknowledged Pentecostal impact in the state. According to Chouhan, a leading evangelical leader in Rajasthan, the charismatic expression of Christianity is responsible for the present growth of Christianity in Rajasthan.[14] Post-independence Rajasthan saw the establishment of various Pentecostal organizations and the formation of numerous Pentecostal congregations in diverse parts of the state. Cherian's

---

[10] For more details, see Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 209-220.
[11] McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 212.
[12] C. Peter Wagner, *Look Out! Pentecostals are Coming* (Illinois: Creation House, 1973), 70-71.
[13] A.T. Cherian, 'Contribution of Churches.'
[14] Chouhan (pseudonym), interview by author, Jaipur, Rajasthan, 09 May 2006.

research also shows that Pentecostalism has brought expansion to Christianity in Rajasthan and concludes that although missionary work began in Udaipur district in the nineteenth century, there were hardly a hundred local Christian families, but with the coming of the Pentecostal message there are now hundreds of local Christian families in the district.[15]

One important question to consider is who Pentecostals are. As mentioned earlier, this thesis follows an inclusive definition of Pentecostalism. A broad definition is needed to refer to Pentecostalism in Rajasthan as some of the early classical Pentecostal churches in Rajasthan have now moved closer to the Neo-Pentecostals in response to changing contexts. Using this definition, there are many churches in Rajasthan that believe and practise the spiritual gifts and the Holy Spirit emphasis is seen in many churches. There have been changes in worship and preaching styles in several churches, including the main-line churches. However, the task of categorizing the churches in terms of Pentecostalism in Rajasthan is not so easy. The issue has two complex aspects. The first one is the hesitation of classical Pentecostals to include other churches as Pentecostal. They think that such an attempt will cause them to have to compromise, and tempt them to dilute many Pentecostal doctrines, which they consider unique.[16] It is interesting to note that many South Indian Pentecostals in Rajasthan have this attitude, and it is not surprising to learn that almost all of them are from a classical Pentecostal background. The second aspect is the unwillingness of non-Pentecostals to align themselves with the Pentecostals. Many non-Pentecostals fear their church leaders. Others say that denominationalism is not the issue; rather the Holy Spirit is to be given His due place in the church, and so they are not interested in categorizing themselves.[17]

Although early Pentecostal missionaries worked as independent missionaries without any external support, today there are at least twelve Pentecostal organizations working in Rajasthan, apart from many independent local congregations, in various places. Then there are six other independent local congregations based in cities, but having

---

[15] A.T. Cherian, 'Pentecostal Revival, the Key to Church Growth,' *Filadelfia Jyoti*, Souvenir (Udaipur, India: FBC, 2006), 40. Cherian has done an exhaustive research on Christianity among the Bhils in Jhadol Taluk.

[16] Many Classical Pentecostals in Rajasthan argue that adult baptism, speaking in tongues and holiness are some of the unique doctrines of Pentecostalism, and they need to sacrifice them just for the sake of worship and healing.

[17] For example, the CNI pastor at Beawar has the same opinion.

outstations in the surrounding villages. Three out of the above eighteen Pentecostal organizations are concentrating mainly on South Indians in their missionary activities. Another three out of these eighteen focuses on only Rajasthanis. The other twelve are missionary organizations, with a multicultural focus. Seven out of these twelve have church-planting missions in other states as well. Four of them are based in Rajasthan. FFCI has begun in Rajasthan and has expanded to other states and is one of the largest indigenous missionary organizations in North India, having more than a thousand churches covering at least thirteen North Indian states.

There are seven Pentecostal institutes for theological education in the state today. Filadelfia Bible College, established by Thomas Mathews and Thampy Mathew, is the first and the only established institute that offers programmes that are validated by an accreditation agency. Both the Gospel for Asia Training Centre and the Aravali Bible Training Centre offer programmes, which are approved by their mother theological institutes. There are two schools, which are approved by their parent organization. The other two training centres are run by the respective missionary organizations with an aim to train local workers for church-planting missions. At the same time, both FFCI and Mission India run short-term laity training at regular intervals. As a result of these missionary organizations and theological institutes, there are hundreds of congregations in the state today.

At the same time there are dozens of schools and orphanages aiming at the socio-economic development of local communities. Although Pentecostals in Rajasthan were apolitical, as in many parts of the globe, they have begun to be involved in politics, and so there are village leaders from the Pentecostal community.

4.4. A Rajasthani Movement

As discussed above, missionaries from North Indian states have played a significant role in bringing the Pentecostal message to Rajasthan, and South Indian missionaries have made a decisive contribution to the making of the movement. However, the real impetus of the movement is the multiplication of many local missionaries. Many non-Rajasthani missionaries began to focus on the Rajasthanis in their evangelistic and church-planting activities. The selected converts were sent for training in Bible schools in other states as there were no Pentecostal theological institutes in Rajasthan until FBC was established in 1982. They returned as missionaries, evangelists, pastors,

teachers and social activists. Consequently, thousands have been attracted to and follow Pentecostalism. They in turn went to work in different villages and established churches, and thus made this a movement in Rajasthan. Thus, both the Rajasthani and non-Rajasthani missionaries have their roles in the origin and growth of the Pentecostal movement in the state.

The most significant fact is that today's Pentecostalism in Rajasthan is identified as a Rajasthani movement where local leaders are at the forefront of leadership, and there has been an increase in the number of local pastors. Although many missionary organizations in Rajasthan have South Indian founders and leadership, most of their workers as well as followers are Rajasthanis. Most of the largest Pentecostal congregations are established by local ministers. Many people who are under training in various theological institutes in the state are Rajasthanis. There are two organizations founded by Rajasthani missionaries and having purely local leadership: Calvary Covenant Fellowship Mission founded by Monohar Kala and Covenant Ministries founded by Pathras Masih. At the same time there are a number of local people who are in the senior leadership, even in those missionary organizations founded by South Indians. For example, Jaswant Rana[18] is currently the joint secretary as well as Christian minority representative of FFCI. Tajendra Masih is serving as an executive council member of FFCI, and he served as its Vice president, along with K.V. Abraham, from Kerala for many years. There are a number of other leaders, such as Samson Wilson and Valu Singh, who served as executive council members for FFCI. There are local ministers serving as teachers in various theological institutes. For example, natives like Benjamin A.K., T. Masih, Cornelius Masih and J. Rana are among the faculty members of FBC. There are schools and orphanages run by local Pentecostals. Many Pentecostals are actively involved in the Tribal Christian Welfare Society of India (TCWSI), and many Pentecostal ministers hold significant positions in this Society. In brief, today mainly natives are seen in Pentecostal congregations, institutes and leadership, and thus they have made Pentecostalism a Rajasthani movement.[19] However, this does not mean that Rajasthanis were given due representation in the senior leadership of all Pentecostal organizations.

[18] Although Jaswant Rana hails from Gujarat, his ancestors are originally from Chittorgarh, Rajasthan.

[19] 'Leadership,' here, means mainly pastors of local congregations.

5. Pentecostals and Non-Pentecostals in Rajasthan

There has been a progressive improvement in the relationship between Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals in Rajasthan. Although the relationship was not encouraging in the beginning, gradually they have developed a friendly and healthy relationship, and have begun to mutually respect and accept one another.

5.1. Pentecostal and Non-Pentecostal Divide

Pentecostalism as a product of local revivals among the existing Christian community did not mean that Pentecostals received the same degree of welcome throughout its history. Rather, initially they were not considered a part of the Christian community, as in many other parts of the globe and faced opposition and intolerance from other forms of Christianity. Several stories of the mocking, humiliation, rejection and even physical assault they faced from their non-Pentecostal counterparts were narrated by Pentecostals during the fieldwork.

There is a dual aspect to the opposition faced by Pentecostals. The first is the rejection faced by local Christians who had received supernatural spiritual experiences. They were mocked and mistreated by their church leadership and fellow Christians. For example, as seen earlier, during the revival in Banaswara, there took place unusual spiritual experiences in the prayer meetings of the young boys and girls in the hostel run by the UCNI. There were visible manifestations of Spirit revival, such as weeping, confession of sins and speaking in tongues. However, they were forbidden by the church leadership from gathering together. According to Pathras Masih, it was told that they were 'filled by the evil spirit,' and thus the 'spiritual thirst was quenched by the leaders of the church'.[20]

According to Tajendra, the first local Pentecostal missionary from Banaswara, the resentful attitude of non-Pentecostals towards Pentecostals is seen at the death of Mrs. Jiwa. The Presbyterians did not provide a place for a church burial when Mrs. Jiwa died, insisting that she was a *dubki vali*. Consequently, she was buried outside the cemetery. However, the important point here is that the leadership of

[20] Pathras Masih, interview by author, Banaswara, Rajasthan, 12 May 2006. Today, he is one of the most influential Rajasthani Pentecostal leaders.

the Presbyterian Church was not indigenous, and Tajendra thinks that if the church leadership had been local, the story would have been different.[21]

The second aspect of the opposition is that the South Indian Pentecostal missionaries, particularly from Kerala, faced rejection, neglect and opposition from the existing churches. The issue of contention was not the Holy Spirit baptism but rather water baptism. The Kerala missionaries emphasized the importance of adult baptism by immersion, and they taught the need for baptism by immersion even for Christians in other churches who did not receive adult baptism. This is how tension was created, and the Pentecostal missionaries were labelled '*dubki vala*' (the immersion people) and sheep stealers. They were also prohibited from entering into the houses of Christians, and there was public declaration in the existing churches to this effect. Pentecostalism in Rajasthan became known as *dubki mission*. The tension continued for many years as many people were converted from existing churches to Pentecostalism. However, Pentecostals eventually realized the need to avoid the process of 'pentecostalization' of Christians in other churches, and this is why they gradually shifted their focus on to non-Christians, and particularly the tribal communities.

5.2. Pentecostal Impact on Christianity

The current study shows that there are three main areas where the Pentecostal influence on Christianity in Rajasthan is evident. The first one is in the area of Christian spirituality, as was the case with the church in India in general. In my work on 'Pentecostals and Indian Church,' I have found that one of the major contributions of Pentecostalism to Indian Christianity is in the spiritual aspect of church.[22] It seems that the church in India tends to be moving towards a waning of spirituality, following the direction of western liberalism and secularism. In his preface to *Fire from Heaven*, Cox states that the predictions of many sociologists prompted him to talk of the death of religion in the West, and that is why, in his book *The Secular City*, he proposed a 'theology for the "postreligious" age.' However, three decades later Cox acknowledged that the phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism had convinced him that 'it is secularity, not spirituality

[21] Tajendra, interview, 23 May 2006.
[22] Wessly Lukose, 'Pentecostals and the Indian Church,' *Cross and Crown* 35, no.4 (2005): 12.

that may be headed for extinction.'[23] Through lively and vibrant worship and fervent prayer, the churches in Rajasthan became spiritually alive. Today, the Pentecostal style of worship is adopted by many non-Pentecostal churches in Rajasthan. Rev. Lora, a CNI pastor, said that they now have a charismatic style of worship in their church.[24] However, many young people feel that this is a tactic by the leadership to encourage them to remain in the church because they are attracted by music and the Pentecostal pattern of lively worship. Based upon extensive field research in Udaipur district, A.T. Cherian argues that the chief local leaders of most non-Pentecostal mission organizations have had a charismatic experience, and so they practise charismatic spirituality in their ministry. He also reveals that most of them have some connection with Pentecostalism.[25]

The second area of Pentecostal influence is in missions. According to Anderson, one of the chief reasons for Pentecostal growth is its 'strong emphasis on mission and evangelism.'[26] Pentecostals believe that the Holy Spirit is a missionary spirit. This missionary concept of the Holy Spirit drives them to engage in missionary outreach. When Pentecostals began to make an impact upon tribal communities, many non-Pentecostal organizations also followed their example by working among the tribal groups. This does not mean that Pentecostals were the first to work among the tribal communities; rather the 'successful tribal story of Pentecostals' sparked a new initiative among non-Pentecostals to serve the tribal groups more comprehensively. Pentecostal missionary fire ignited a new vigour, zeal and spirit in the missionary

---

[23] Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Cassell, 1996), xv. He confidently argued that the age of the secular city will soon spread across the globe, and it is an age of 'no religion at all.' 'It will do no good to cling to our religious and metaphysical versions of Christianity in the hope that one day religion or metaphysics will once again be back. They are disappearing forever and that means we can now let go and immerse ourselves in the new world of the secular city.' See Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 3-4. However, after two decades, he confessed that 'the great era of modern theology,' the 'liberal theology' is coming to an end, and he argued that 'the post modern world will require a different theology.' See Harvey Cox, *Religion in the Secular City: Toward a Postmodern Theology* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 268.

[24] Lora (pseudonym), interview by author, Beawar, Rajasthan, 17 May 2006.

[25] Cherian, 'Pentecostal Revival,' 38-39.

[26] Anderson, Introduction to Pentecostalism, 206.

activities of other churches as well. Many non-Pentecostal churches began to realize the significance of healing and other spiritual gifts in their mission work. As a result, they have changed their strategies to reach the tribal communities. While conducting a marriage ceremony in a village in the district of Banaswara, a prominent non-Pentecostal leader confessed that the Pentecostal approach would be helpful for his church. He came to the conclusion that only 'the message and method of Thomas Mathews' would result in successful mission work in Rajasthan. By this he meant the Pentecostal message and practice, as most Christian leaders consider Mathews to be the most effective Pentecostal missionary in the state.[27]

The third area of Pentecostal influence is in practical theology. There are two particular aspects of the teaching of other churches that have been influenced by Pentecostals. One example is the attitude of CNI towards the immersion baptism of adults. Until recently, only infant baptism was taught and practised by the CNI. Pentecostals were ridiculed as *dubki vala* in the early days of Pentecostalism in Rajasthan. There was a time when members of CNI who received baptism by immersion were expelled from the church. However, the teaching and practice on this issue has changed. In the latest By-Laws of CNI there is an amendment to the section on 'the sacraments of the Church,' whereby adult baptism by immersion is termed 'believer's baptism,' and is accepted as an 'alternative practice' alongside infant baptism.[28] However, some CNI priests and laity see it as a measure to stop the exodus of members to Pentecostal churches. R. Masih, a retired CNI priest, has called the move a 'defence mechanism.'[29] Another important change is in the understanding and practice of spiritual gifts. One influential evangelical leader admitted that his organization made changes both in theology and methodology after they realized the significance of healing and other miracles. He said, 'we only preached about the person of Christ, but we realized that not only the person, but also the power of Christ is to be preached and demonstrated to have an effective work among these tribal people.'[30] It is significant that this

[27] For further details, see Lukose, 'Thomas Mathews,' 24-27.
[28] For more details, see *Constitution of The Church*, 17.
[29] R. Masih (pseudonym), interview by author, Ajmer, Rajasthan, 17 May 2006.
[30] Babu (pseudonym), interview by author, Jaipur, Rajasthan, 22 May 2006. He is the leader of a large non-Pentecostal organization in Rajasthan, having more than 300 congregations.

leader referred to the 'power of Christ' rather than 'the Holy Spirit.'[31] However, he acknowledged the changes in their understanding of the manifestation of the power of God. At least five non-Pentecostal leaders in Rajasthan who were interviewed admitted, rather reluctantly, that their understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit has changed after being influenced by the Pentecostal message.

5.3. Pentecostals and Ecumenical Attempt

There is an increasing interest in ecumenism among Christians in Rajasthan today. There have been efforts in various districts of Rajasthan to build up a unity among various Christian sectors. In many cities like Udaipur, Banaswara, Ajmer and Jaipur, they have formed a united Christian Association. In most cases, they have a monthly meeting and annual assembly, apart from gatherings on special occasions like Christmas and Easter. It is very significant that during such meetings the ministers share the platform irrespective of denomination. In Udaipur, it is the practice that a Pentecostal pastor will preach when the meeting is hosted by a Catholic church, and *vice versa*. Ministers are included in the administrative body of this fellowship, irrespective of denominational differences.

Today, Pentecostal pastors and singers are invited to other churches during special gatherings to preach and lead the praise and worship sessions. Such a practice was unimagined until a few years ago. For example, the RPC choir have been leading the worship during the annual convention of the CNI church in Jodhpur since 2001. Pastor Paul Mathews was invited to be the chief judge in the 2005 singing competition in the CNI church in Udaipur. Many Pentecostal preachers are given an opportunity to preach in mainline churches. I myself was invited to be a guest preacher in the annual convention of a non-Pentecostal church in 2004. Isaiah,[32] a CNI priest in Udaipur, used to attend the Sunday service at RPC after his own church service, stating that he and his family were interested in the Pentecostal message and worship. Pentecostals used to consider members of other churches to be nominal Christians or unbelievers and were not encouraged to attend their gatherings. However, today they have begun to participate in the meetings of other churches.

---

[31] It is likely that his Brethren pneumatology has restricted him from using the phrase 'power of the Holy Spirit.'

[32] Pseudonym.

Christians in Rajasthan organize *Masih Mela* (Christian Festival) in many villages. It is a common event in many regions of Rajasthan, and usually takes place during the Christmas or Easter season. They organize special Christian gatherings, and people come from far distances to attend. These meetings include devotions, Bible study, separate meetings for women, children and youth, and gospel preaching every evening.

The present research has found two major reasons for the increasing interest in ecumenical initiatives among Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals in Rajasthan. For most leaders, the chief reason is the increasing persecution of Christians. The intensified persecution from Hindu militant groups has forced Christians to realize the importance of coming together and acting in unity. Christians feel that their rights are not protected and that they are denied justice, and so, in response, they have decided to come together. There are several examples to underline this fact. The most recent one is the 'peace march' in front of the State Assembly in Jaipur by Christians of all denominations in Rajasthan to protest against the attacks of Hindu militants on the Emmanuel church, Kota. Leaders and members of many churches rallied together under one banner in March 2006.

The second reason for this desire for unity is the increasing understanding between Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals. There was a time when denominational doctrines created barriers between Christians. However, as discussed earlier, people are being exposed to new expressions of spirituality. It is significant that Pentecostals have changed their attitude to Catholics and other non-Pentecostal Christians. There was a time when Pentecostals believed that Roman Catholicism was the religion of the anti-Christ.[33] Pentecostals were known as sheep stealers. However, the charismatic experience provided opportunities for people to participate in each other's activities and to interact more, and thus they have begun to understand each other better. Due to information technology, people have begun to read about, watch and engage in new experiences, and this has promoted a better understanding of each other. Today CD, DVD, audio and video cassettes, books and magazines containing charismatic messages, praise

[33] K.E. Abraham, *Mahathiyam Babylon* [Babylon the Great] (Kumbanad, India: K.E. Abraham Foundation, 1993) is the best example for understanding the early approach of Indian Pentecostals to Roman Catholicism. Abraham tries to establish that the Catholic Church is the 'mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth' as mentioned in Revelation 17:5.

and worship and other Holy Spirit manifestations are available, even for non-Pentecostals.

This does not mean that there is a smooth relationship between various Christian groups in every part of the state. There is reluctance and a degree of tension in some places. For example, in Ajmer, some Pentecostal pastors have complained that they are not included in the administration of the united fellowship in the city, and that they do not have a voice in such an assembly. Also some non-Pentecostal leaders have pointed out that not all Pentecostals are cooperating in these initiatives. In a discussion during an interview about the ecumenical efforts taking place, Rev. Collin C. Theodore, the CNI Bishop of the Diocese of Rajasthan, expressed his concern that not all were equally interested. He presented me with a book entitled *Uniting in Christ's Mission,*[34] and stated that 'this is what I am trying to do, to unite all Christian missions in the state.'[35]

6. Conclusion

This study on Pentecostalism in Rajasthan concludes that the Christian message had reached Rajasthan long before Pentecostals came to the state, where Pentecostalism is not a breakaway movement from either the existing churches or the Pentecostal revival elsewhere in India. The origins and growth of Pentecostalism in Rajasthan are due to four major reasons. First, missionaries from other North Indian states, influenced by the indigenous revivals in various places of the country, brought the Pentecostal message to Rajasthan. In this sense, Pentecostalism in Rajasthan can be viewed as a product of the missionary outreach of North Indian Pentecostals. Second, the local revivals that took place in the existing churches in Rajasthan have created a spiritual thirst among the Christians. From this perspective, Pentecostalism in Rajasthan can be regarded as a revival movement linked to the spiritual renewal that took place in the existing churches. Third, missionary activities of South Indian Pentecostals played a significant role in the making of the Pentecostal movement as these missionaries took the Rajasthani revival to new heights. Fourth, the involvement of Rajasthani missionaries caused the movement to spread to almost every district. Despite the divide between Pentecostals and

[34] Enos Das Pradhan, Sudipta Singh, and Kasta Dip, eds., Uniting Christ's Mission: Towards a United, Holistic, Evangelistic and Cross-Cultural Mission (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006).

[35] Collin C. Bishop, interview by author, Ajmer, Rajasthan, 19 May 2006.

non-Pentecostals, Pentecostalism has had an impact on other Christians, and the spirit of ecumenicity is on the rise. Although Pentecostalism is a minority religious movement with most of its followers being tribal it has become the fastest growing Christian sector in Rajasthan.