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Dear colleague in mission:

Greetings in the Lord Jesus!

I enclose a short paper, "Literacy for Tribals", my wife and I have written as a report to DNA leaders on IICCC's contribution to literacy strategy. Please prayerfully consider the issues raised and write me your desires regarding literacy training for your workers at IICCC.

Yours for the Lord's harvest in India,

Warren W. Glover, Ph.D.
Principal

Encl.: "Literacy for Tribals" — for your information, Roger
LITERACY FOR TRIBALS—A REPORT TO IMA LEADERS
Warren and Jessie Glover
20 September 1982

In this paper we wish to clarify the strategy we see necessary in India for reaching tribal people in a literacy campaign, and particularly with reference to the current Literacy Workshop at IICCC in Nasik. We request also that you, as leaders of member bodies of IMA, give your comments in response.

The Task Facing the Church is Immense

Compared with the 29.5% literacy rate for the nation of India in 1971, there has been an improvement in 1981 with 36.2% literate. However, the actual number of illiterates has risen by 4.8 crore to over 40 crore! ("Literacy in India" by Dr. R. Theodore Srinivasagan, in Mission Outreach, Sept. 1982, p. 26).

There are a large number of government and voluntary agencies working in the field of literacy, and they have contributed to the advance in the number of literates (32.2 crore) in the decade. But the resources available are still very much less than the task. This being the case, we must use whatever strategy is available to make progress, but we must also be wise to use a strategy that produces positive results.

The Task is Urgent!

Christians should be "People of the Book" in practice! So if the Church is to grow to spiritual maturity, individual Christians need to be taught to read the Scriptures. And in many responsive areas of India (the tribal areas), the literacy rate is 5% or less. So literacy teaching for tribals is an urgent need felt by mission leaders.

Hence leaders of FMPB and IEM requested IICCC to provide training for their missionaries involved in teaching literacy in the State language, and in response to this request Mrs. Jessie Glover is teaching a 4-week Literacy Principles course. This is the course Rev. Theo Williams drew attention to at the IMA conference at Denishpet, July 1982. We assumed the missionaries sent for this training would be ones working with caste people with the State language as mother tongue or with tribals fluent in the State language as a second language. But in fact all of the participants sent for the workshop are working with tribals, mostly in places where the tribals do not know the State language well.

We therefore feel it is necessary to clarify the position IICCC holds regarding strategy for literacy work amongst linguistic minorities. This strategy is based on SII's findings in more than 19 developing countries worldwide and is further endorsed by the experience of UNESCO and the research of CIIL, Mysore.

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Teaching Through the Mother Tongue is Ideal

As Jessie Glover wrote in "Literacy for All?" in 1981 about tribal illiterates:

Very few adults can speak the State language sufficiently well to be able to learn to read. Reading is a very complex skill. It may be possible for the tribal person to memorise the letters of the State language, but when he tries to join the letters together, [although he will be able to chant the syllables! the words and sentences are meaningless. He quickly becomes frustrated and discouraged and is likely to drop out of classes altogether.

Many of the adults in some of the most responsive mission fields of Central India are effectively monolingual in the tribal language, for example, Kukna in the Dangs District of South Gujarat. For such people a literacy programme using the State language is most likely to be an exercise in futility and frustration. Rather, Kukna adults must be taught in their mother tongue using materials which are relevant to their situation.

But What About Government Schools for the Children?

Government-run schools in tribal areas in most cases use the State language as the medium of instruction. Where tribal children are unfamiliar with this language, they will normally have to repeat grade 1 a number of times and possibly other early grades as well, until they gain sufficient competence in the State language to carry on with schooling. Many, many children will find this too much of a discouragement and handicap and will drop out, but it is only one or two of the more able who succeed in the system and become functional readers in the State language. The cost in terms of failure by many of the students is considerable, and it is unlikely that these failed students, who have been hurt as children, will ever as adults agree to attend literacy classes.

The government is also aware of this problem and tragic situation, as is evidenced by Constitutional provision for education in the mother tongue and by their current practice of providing primers and educational materials in more and more minority languages, such as Halbi in Bastar District, or Kuvî in Orissa.

Every Situation is Different

Just as God has made individual people distinct, and does not deal with any two of us in exactly the same way, so it is a fact that communities of people are different. In particular, from the point of view of a literacy strategy, communities differ in:

1. their degree of bilingualism in the State language,
2. their sense of identity at the group level,
3. the relative prestige in the eyes of their own language and of the State language.
In this paper we wish to clarify the strategy we see necessary in India for reaching tribal people in a literacy campaign, and particularly with reference to the current Literacy Workshop at IIOC in Nasik. We request also that you, as leaders of member bodies of IMA, give your comments in response.

The Task Facing the Church is Immense

Compared with the 29.5% literacy rate for the nation of India in 1971, there has been an improvement in 1981 with 36.2% literate. However, the actual number of illiterates has risen by 4.8 crore to over 40 crore! ("Literacy in India" by Dr. R. Theodore Srinivasagam, in Mission Outreach, Sept. 1982, p. 26).

There are a large number of government and voluntary agencies working in the field of literacy, and they have contributed to the advance in the number of literates (8.2 crore) in the decade. But the resources available are still very much less than the task. This being the case, we must use whatever strategy is available to make progress, but we must also be wise to use a strategy that produces positive results.

The Task is Urgent!

Christians should be "People of the Book" in practice! So if the Church is to grow to spiritual maturity, individual Christians need to be taught to read the Scriptures. And in many responsive areas of India (the tribal areas), the literacy rate is 5% or less. So literacy teaching for tribals is an urgent need felt by mission leaders.

Hence leaders of FMPE and IEM requested IIOC to provide training for their missionaries involved in teaching literacy in the State language, and in response to this request Mrs. Jessie Glover is teaching a 4-week Literacy Principles course. This is the course Rev. Theo Williams drew attention to at the IMA conference at Denishpet, July 1982. We assumed the missionaries sent for this training would be ones working with caste people with the State language as mother tongue or with tribals fluent in the State language as a second language. But in fact all of the participants sent for the workshop are working with tribals, mostly in places where the tribals do not know the State language well.

We therefore feel it is necessary to clarify the position IIOC holds regarding strategy for literacy work amongst linguistic minorities. This strategy is based on SIL's work in more than 19 developing countries worldwide and is further supported by the experience of UNESCO.
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1. their degree of bilingualism in the State language,
2. their sense of identity as a group,
3. the relative prestige in their eyes of their own language and of the State language.
4. the existence of any literature in their own language,
5. the nature of the school system in their area,
6. their responsiveness to the Gospel,
7. their motivation to read as a means of growth in the Christian life,
8. and many other factors.

Therefore, a programme which is designed for one community in one particular area is not necessarily going to be the right strategy for another community. For example, the teaching of literacy through the State language, Hindi, may be initially usable for the Inner Seraji-speaking people of Sainj Valley of Kulu District, Himachal Pradesh, because of some degree (among the men) of bilingualism with Hindi. But this would not prove the correctness of trying such an approach for the Bhatta of Bastar District, Madhya Pradesh, because we know the Bhatta are a very tight-knit group without any degree of bilingualism in Hindi, or even in Halti (the District lingua franca).

Mother-Tongue Translation is Still Vital

Nevertheless, whether tribal people learn to read in the State language or in their mother tongue, they still have as the language of their heart and their home the mother tongue. It is in this language that they think, discuss the matters closest to their heart and deepest in their emotions, and it is in this language that they will best come to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and grow in their knowledge of Him.

Therefore, in conducting this year at IIOCIC a literacy course for missionaries supposedly working through the State language, we are in no wise undermining or denying the need of each tribal group to have mother-tongue literature and Scripture translation. We acknowledge that the mother-tongue strategy appears to take longer, and therefore mission administrators find it hard to wait on this strategy. But when one considers the high failure rate of the other approach, namely of teaching believers in a language they do not fully understand, the mother-tongue approach is the only viable strategy to build a literate Church growing on the Word.

Next Step—A Primer Construction Workshop

As indicated above, we do not anticipate that the strategy of teaching tribal adults to read using the State language will be successful in most places. However, we do not feel that the present four-week course led by Mrs. Jessie Glover is a waste of time because it is a very valuable training for the field missionaries teaching the course since it covers the principles of a literacy program, methods of motivating students and teachers, pedagogical principles for using existing materials, and understanding the nature of reading.
What this course is not covering is how to make a set of primers in the tribal language, such as Durwa, Kukna, Bhatti, or others spoken in the fields where these missionaries are at work. We plan that IICCC 1983 will offer two forms of literacy help: a repeat of this four-week Introduction to Literacy Principles (for missionaries working with people fluent in the State language) and an eight-week Primer Construction Workshop.

The Primer Construction Workshop will be for those who:

1. are already working in tribal areas,
2. have learnt the tribal language well, and
3. have completed the IICCC General Course, or an equivalent amount of linguistic training. (Those with only the basic linguistics of IMTI or BBI courses may be admitted to the Workshop, subject to completing concurrently extra work in linguistics, especially phonemics, and so will necessarily have less time to give to Workshop goals.)

Participants would spend time working with a language helper under the guidance of a Literacy Consultant to prepare a trial primer in the tribal language.

Just what literacy courses IICCC will actually offer depends on the requests from you, the leaders of member missions of India Missions Association, and on what applications come in. We look forward to a response from you on the matter, if possible before mid-November so that we may work together as a staff at IICCC 1982 to plan intelligently how best to serve you next year.

Respectfully submitted,

Warren W. Glover, Ph.D.
Principal IICCC

cc: IMA Training Committee members
    all IMA Missions leaders