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# History of Indian Pentecostal Church of God in Andhra

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**KEYWORDS:** *Indigenous church movements, Azusa Street, Spirit Baptism, CMS, Pandita Ramabai, Syrian Christians, Thomas, glossolalia*

PENTECOSTALISM HAS witnessed rapid growth in India, which ranks fifth largest in the world today with about 33.5 million adherents. 27.3 million of these adherents are Neocharismatics, 5 million are Charismatics, and 1.2 million are classical Pentecostals.<sup>1</sup> And one of the largest indigenous Pentecostal movements in India has been among the adherents of one group of Pentecostals, the Indian Pentecostal Church of God (IPC).

This article will present a brief history of the Indian Pentecostal Church

of God in the state of Andhra Pradesh. In doing so, this research will show that there were antecedent Pentecostal and Pentecostal-like movements in India prior in time to both the Topeka and Azusa revivals in the United States. The aim is to create a wider awareness of the indigenous nature of Indian Pentecostalism, i.e., to demonstrate that Indian Pentecostalism originated independently in India itself, rather than through a movement which spread to India from the West. Furthermore, this research will show that P. M. Samuel, P.T. Chacko, K. C. Cherian and K.E. Abraham were all co-founders, not Abraham alone, as some historians contend (including Roger Hedlund).

More recent research done by Roger Hedlund on indigenous church movements in India reveals that South India is a bastion of indigenous Christianity and the IPC is considered the largest indigenous Pentecostal movement in the country. He claims that the Andhra

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<sup>1</sup> David B. Barrett & Todd M. Johnson, 'Global Statistics' in *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, (NIDPC), ed. Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), pp. 284-302.

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IPC was started by P. M. Samuel.<sup>2</sup> However, he also states<sup>3</sup> that K. E. Abraham was the founder of the IPC, a fact which I dispute. In fact, P. M. Samuel, K. C. Cherian and K. E. Abraham were co-founders of the IPC. In the preface to his autobiography, P. M. Samuel calls Apostle K. E. Abraham one of the founders of the Indian Pentecostal Church of God. Samuel writes: 'One of the founders of the Indian Pentecostal Church of God, Apostle K. E. Abraham wrote in his autobiography, "My brother, Apostle P. M. Samuel, will give you more details of our Indian Pentecostal Church of God and its service in his autobiography."' <sup>4</sup> As a result, Samuel penned his autobiography at Abraham's request and at the request of many Christian friends.

## 1. Azusa Street Revival

Historically it is believed that modern Pentecostalism began at the dawn of the twentieth century on January 1, 1901, when Agnes Ozman, a Holiness preacher at Charles Fox Parham's Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas, was filled with the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. Parham states that, 'Humbly in the name of Jesus, I laid my hand upon her head and prayed. I had

scarcely repeated three dozen sentences when a glory fell upon her, a halo seemed to surround her head and face, and she began to speak in the Chinese language, and was unable to speak in English for three days.'<sup>5</sup> Two days later, when he returned from his preaching at the Free Methodist Church in Topeka, other students at Bethel Bible College also had experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit. According to Sarah Parham:

As he reached the top of the stairs, he could see a sheen of light, brighter than the light from the coal oil lamps, coming from the room. As he entered the room, he was overwhelmed by what he encountered. Some were standing and others were kneeling. Together, in perfect harmony as if led by an invisible conductor, they were singing *Jesus Lover of My Soul* in tongues. Sister Stanley, one of the more mature students, approached him, saying, 'Just before you entered tongues of fire were sitting above their heads.'<sup>6</sup>

By summer, Bethel Bible College had closed, because the building that they were renting had been sold, and Parham moved to Houston, Texas, where he once again established a small Bible school on January 1, 1906 with about twenty-five students. One of them was William Joseph Seymour, a

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2 Roger Hedlund, 'Indian Instituted Churches: Indigenous Christianity, Indian Style', *Mission Studies*, 16, No. 1 (1999), p. 35.

3 Roger Hedlund, 'Nationalism and The Indian Pentecostal Church of God', *Indian Church History Review*, 39, No. 2 (December 2005), pp. 91 and 93.

4 P. M. Samuel, *Autobiography* (Vijayawada: Zion Printing House, 1980), n. p.

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5 Sarah Parham, *The Life of Charles F. Parham* (Baxter Springs: Apostolic Faith Bible College, 1930), p. 52.

6 Parham, *Life*, p 53, cited in Eddie L. Hyatt in *2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity* (Chicota: Yhatt International Ministries, Inc., 1996), p. 150.

local pastor of a Black Holiness church. Under his leadership the Pentecostal revival was to spread around the globe. After the Bible school session was over in the middle of February, Seymour left for Los Angeles to pastor a newly formed Holiness congregation. However, his first sermon in that church on the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues caused a great stir. When he returned for the evening service, to his surprise the doors of the church were padlocked. Then Richard Asberry, who lived on Bonnie Street, provided Seymour with accommodation in his residence where both Seymour and the Asberrys experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit themselves, including speaking in tongues.

The news about the charismatic experience and gifts spread far and wide and soon large crowds began to converge and experience the Spirit baptism at Asberry's home, eventually forcing them to look for larger facilities. They finally found a stable and warehouse, which used to be a Methodist Episcopal Church, at 312 Azusa Street in downtown Los Angeles, where they held their first meeting on April 14, 1906. Recognizing his own need for the power of the Holy Spirit and his continual guidance, Seymour spent much of his time in subsequent meetings praying behind the pulpit, with his head inside a shoebox.<sup>7</sup> As a result, great revival broke out. On April 18, *The Los Angeles Times* published a story on the front page about the spiri-

tual awakening that had occurred on Azusa Street. The cover story read: 'Weird Babble of Tongues; New Sect of Fanatics Is Breaking Loose; Wild Scene Last Night on Azusa Street; Gurggle of Wordless Talk by a Sister.'<sup>8</sup>

This revival continued for about three years until 1909. Hence, the notable western church historians, Vinson Synan, Cecil Robeck, Jr., and Walter J. Hollenweger, all trace the origin of modern Pentecostalism either from the dawn of the 20th century, January 1, 1901 or to the Azusa Street revival under the leadership of William J. Seymour. Synan writes, 'On January 1, 1901, a young woman named Agnes was baptized in the Holy Spirit...and she received a startling manifestation of the gift of tongues and became, in effect, the first Pentecostal of the 20th century.'<sup>9</sup> He further states that this humble event triggered the worldwide Pentecostal movement. However, Hollenweger seems to take a different stance from Synan and ties Pentecostalism to Azusa Street. He contends that if one considers Pentecostalism to be an oral missionary movement, with spiritual power to overcome racism and chauvinism, then one can cast one's lot with Seymour as the founder of Pentecostalism.<sup>10</sup> Robeck shared a

<sup>7</sup> Eddie L. Hyatt in *2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity* (Chicota: Yhatt International Ministries, Inc., 1996), p. 155.

<sup>8</sup> Vinson Synan, *The Holiness Pentecostal Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> Vinson Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal Charismatic Renewal*. (Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Allan H. Anderson and Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostals after a Century: Global Perspectives on a Movement in Transition* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 42-43.

similar idea when he lectured on Azusa at Regent University in 2006 during the week of centennial celebrations of the Azusa Revival. In contrast, Donald Gee, in *Wind and Flame* (1967), and Paul Pomerville, in *The Third Force in Missions* (1985), argue that the Pentecostal movement originated in a series of spontaneous and universal beginnings in different parts of the world and no one should restrict its commencement to any one particular geographical location, such as Azusa, or to one particular leader.

The early Pentecostals from Azusa Street were fully convinced that their experience of Spirit baptism would spread all over the globe as the promised last-days revival prior to the Second Advent of Christ. 'The fire is spreading. People are writing from different points to know about this Pentecost, and are beginning to wait on God for their Pentecost. He is no respecter of persons and places. We expect to see a wave of salvation go over this world.'<sup>11</sup> However, Stanley Burgess argues that in Europe there had been numerous pre-20th century Pentecostal-like movements, including:

the Quakers in 17th century England, the Shakers in 18th century England, the Moravian Brethren in 18th century German states, the early Methodists in the 18th and 19th centuries in England, the Awakened in 18th and 19th century Finland, the Irvingites in 19th century England

and participants in the West of Scotland Revival in the 1830's.<sup>12</sup>

He further points out that these Pentecostal-like outpourings were not exclusive to Europe, but also occurred in 19th century Africa and Asia, and especially in India, which also witnessed such outpourings (according to research of such scholars as David Barrett and Gary B. McGee). McGee contends that:

Pentecostal and Pentecostal-like movements in India preceded the development of 20th century Pentecostalism in North America and Europe by at least 40 years. Apart from the revival under Edward Irving in the U.K. in the early 1830s, the most prominent revivals of the 19th century characterized by the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit occurred in India. When modern Pentecostalism began there in 1906, it developed independently from the influence of similar revivals in the West.<sup>13</sup> (emphasis added)

Paulson Pulikottil aptly comments that postcolonial historiography is purely Euro-centric in nature, and the conviction that Pentecostal history began with Topeka and gained momentum at Azusa will limit historians from exploring the possibilities of the work of the Holy Spirit in the rest of the world, and the ways in which people in

<sup>11</sup> The Apostolic Faith, Los Angeles, 1:2 (October 1906), 1, quoted by Allan Anderson in *The Origins of Pentecostalism and its Global Spread in the Early Twentieth Century*.

<sup>12</sup> Stanley Burgess, 'Pentecostalism in India: An Overview' in *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 4:1 (January, 2001), 86.

<sup>13</sup> Stanley M. Burgess, ed., *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 2002), p. 118.

diverse parts of the world experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit and responded to the Spirit's manifestation. He further argues that the work of the Holy Spirit is universal and it is not limited to a particular place or time.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Eddie Hyatt admits that Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity is not solely a 20th century phenomena but rather that it has been in existence continually since the first Apostolic Church. However, like other western historians, he attributes the origin of the Pentecostal movement to Topeka in 1901. Hyatt states that 'there has been a veritable explosion of charismatic Christianity in the twentieth century. Beginning with the Pentecostal Movement in 1901, and revitalized by the Charismatic Movement beginning in 1960 and the Third Wave beginning around 1980, this explosion of charismatic Christianity has gained momentum and permeated every facet of Church life.'<sup>15</sup>

## 2. Earlier Movements in India

A. C. George, a prominent Pentecostal church historian in India, points out that:

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed powerful revivals in India: one in 1860,

another in 1873 and a third in 1895. In all of these revivals people experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit with diverse manifestations including glossolalia. However, the recipients of these experiences did not know that they were speaking in unknown tongues as a result of the baptism in the Holy Spirit as taught in the book of Acts.<sup>16</sup>

The reason for this ignorance was the fact that the Bible was a foreign book to many Indian believers, because they were illiterate. Moreover, they had little or no teaching on spiritual matters and biblical doctrines from their clergy.

### Pentecostal Revival in Tinnevely (Tirunelveli) 1860-1865

The first Pentecostal revival took place in India in the state of Tinnevely (Tirunelveli, present-day Tamil Nadu) from 1860-65 among the 'Shanars', low caste people, under the leadership of John Christian Aroolappen, a native evangelist who had been trained as an Anglican catechist by Carl T. E. Rheinius, who was a Prussian missionary sent by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1814, and Anthony Norris Groves, an independent missionary from England who arrived in 1833. Aroolappen read about the revivals that occurred in the United States,

<sup>14</sup> Paulson Pulikottill, 'As East and West Met in God's Own Country: Encounter of Western Pentecostalism with Native Pentecostalism in Kerala' p. 2 [cited 23 May 2006]. Online: <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj10/paulson.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Eddie L. Hyatt in *2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity* (Chicota: Yhatt International Ministries, Inc., 1996), p. 155.

<sup>16</sup> L. Sam, *Pastor A.C. Samuel: A Brief Biography* (Trivandrum: Bethel Assembly Publication, 1983), 10. Cited in A.C. George in 'Pentecostal Beginnings in Travancore, South India' *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 4:2 (July 2001), p. 221.

England and Ulster in 1857-59 and was greatly influenced by them. Then he earnestly prayed for similar revival in his native land. To his surprise, a great revival broke out in Tirunelveli on March 4, 1860. On August 8, 1860, Aroolappen recorded: 'In the month of June some of our people praised the Lord by unknown tongues, with their interpretation... My son and a daughter and three others went to visit their own relations, in three villages, who are under the Church Missionary Society, and they also received the Holy Ghost. Some prophesy, some speak by unknown tongues with their interpretations.'<sup>17</sup>

McGee states, 'The phenomena in the revival included prophecy, glossolalia, glossographia, and interpretation of tongues, as well as intense conviction of sin among nominal Christians, dreams, visions, signs in the heavens, and people falling down and/or shaking. Other noted features were restoration of the offices of apostle and prophet, evangelism, conversions of unbelievers, prayer for the sick, and concern for the poor.'<sup>18</sup> Ashton Dibb, a CMS missionary, reported that in Aroolappen's church, 'there was a baptism of the Holy Spirit which filled the members of this church with a holy enthusiasm; and caused them to go everywhere preaching the gospel, in

demonstration of the Spirit and of power.'<sup>19</sup>

As a faith preacher, Aroolappen did not depend on western money, but travelled to many places and preached the gospel in many Syrian churches without any salary or pledged support, thus bringing the people to deeper spiritual life. And, like Aroolappen, many indigenous missionaries and evangelists, including Ammal Vedanayagam, David (known as Tamil David), and David Fenn, followed the pattern of New Testament apostles and evangelists.

### Revival in Travancore 1873-1881

These travels led the itinerant Tamil preacher, Aroolappen, to Travancore (the southernmost region of present-day Kerala) a decade after the Tirunelveli revival began. He brought the revival message not only to CMS churches, but also to Syrian churches in Travancore. As a result, a revival took place there which lasted for about 9 years. The two prominent leaders of this revival were Koodarapallil Thommen and Yustus (Justus) Joseph, who had been converted from a high caste Brahmin family under the ministry of CMS missionary Joseph Peet. Justus later became a CMS priest.

A. C. George indicates that thou-

<sup>17</sup> G. H. Lang, ed., *The History and Diaries of an Indian Christian* (London: Thynne, 1939), pp. 23-28, 114-145. Cited in Gary B. McGee in 'Pentecostal Phenomena and Revivals in India: Implications for Indigenous Church Leadership', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 20 (July 1996), p. 113.

<sup>18</sup> Burgess, ed., *NIDPC*, p. 118.

<sup>19</sup> Anthony Norris Groves, *Memoir of Anthony Norris Groves, Compiled Chiefly from His Journals and Letters* (London: James Nisbet, 1869), 616. Cited in Gary B. McGee, 'Pentecostal Phenomena and Revivals in India: Implications for Indigenous Church Leadership' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 20 (July 1996), p. 113.

sands of people were attracted to Justus Joseph's ministry because of its Charismatic nature, including visions, prophecies, revelations and the like. However, he was branded as a heretic by the CMS when his prophecy that Christ would return in 1881 (stated as six years after May, 1875) was not fulfilled. Consequently the Revival Church, which he founded in 1875, began to decline and his followers came to be called the Six Years Party or the Five and a Half Years Party.<sup>20</sup> McGee adds that at the beginning, missionaries applauded what they viewed as positive aspects in the movement but later they looked on it with suspicion because of glossolalia and other spiritual phenomena. 'They also detected lingering traces of heathen culture in the lack of emotional restraint among the participants. Complaints also included Anglican criticisms of independent and unordained clergy, the establishing of the prophetic office, the pronouncing of controversial predictions, and the growth of schismatic congregations.'<sup>21</sup> However, the Revival Church started by Aroolappen continued into the 20th century, although in diminished proportions.

A. C. George provides three major factors that contributed to these powerful revivals. First was the New Testament-style preaching by native preachers; second was the availability of the Bible in two major South Indian languages, i.e., the Tamil Bible translated in 1715 by Bortholomaeus Ziegenbalg (the first Protestant missionary to India) and the Malayam Bible translated by Benjamin Baily in 1841. These Bible translations brought new life into the hearts of the Christians and new understanding of Christianity. Third, the congregations of Syrian Christians were tired of dead ritualism and mere formalism, characterized by traditions, ceremonies, and festivals honouring the saints of the church. These examples alone show that Pentecostalism in India preceded the Western Pentecostal movement by at least 40 years.

### Revival in the Mukti Mission, Pune 1905-1907

Sarasvati Mary Ramabai, known as 'Pandita' Ramabai, was born in an upper caste Hindu Brahmin family. Her father was a scholar in Sanskrit as well as Indian literature, hence, he decided to give Ramabai a classical Hindu education. She lost her parents due to famine when she was about sixteen and in 1880 she married Bipin Medhavi, who was from a Sudra, low caste family. She had a daughter through this union, named Manoramabai, in 1881. Unfortunately, Pandita became a widow at the age of twenty-three, when her husband died of cholera in 1882. Ramabai went to England for further studies the following year, where she and her then two-year old daughter, 'Mano,' were baptized in the Church of

20 Burgess, ed., NIDPC, p. 119. Cited in A. C. George in 'Pentecostal Beginnings in Travancore, South India' *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 4:2 (July 2001), p. 223.

21 W. S. Hunt, *Anglican Church in Travancore and Cochin, 1816-1916* (Kottayam, Kerala: Church Missionary Society Press, 1920), 160-68. Cited in Gary B. McGee, 'Pentecostal Phenomena and Revivals in India: Implications for Indigenous Church Leadership', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 20 (July 1996), p. 114.

England.<sup>22</sup> Ramabai visited the United States in 1886 at the invitation of the American Episcopal Church and spent two and a half years there. While she was in the U.S. she formed the Ramabai Association and also published her book, *The High-Caste Indian Woman* (1887).

Upon returning to India, she started a home and school called Sharada Sadan ('Home of Learning') for child widows in 1889. She expanded her mission of mercy in the late 1890s, because of bubonic plague and famine, to accommodate not only the high-caste Hindu child widows but also all widows and orphans, especially from Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, regardless of their caste or creed. In 1899, Ramabai founded Mukti Sadan, ('Home of Salvation or Liberation') at Kedgaon, near Poona, which soon became a haven for hundreds of child widows and orphans and a place for education, vocational training and religious outreach.

In 1905, a revival which grew out of a prayer meeting broke out in the Mukti mission. Each morning, women at the Mukti mission met for prayer, asking God 'for a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all Christians of every land'.<sup>23</sup> As a direct result, on June 29, 1905, several women experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit at the Mukti Mission. Some were slain in the

Spirit and others experienced a burning sensation. The revival continued into 1906 and 1907. Methodist missionaries Minnie Abrams and Albert Norton were said to be baptized in the Spirit at the Mukti Mission during this time. Abrams published her book, *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire*, in 1906. In the same time period, some of the girls at the Mukti Mission received a call to preach the gospel and others experienced glossolalia. In 1907, Ramabai wrote about the revival:

I have seen not only the most ignorant of our people coming under the power of revival, but the most refined and very highly educated English men and women, who have given their lives for God's service in this country, coming under the power of God, so that they lose all control over their bodies, and are shaken like reeds, stammering words in various unknown tongues as the Spirit teaches them to speak, and gradually get to a place where they are in unbroken communion with God.<sup>24</sup>

Allan Anderson indicates that Ramabai understood that the Mukti Mission was the means by which the Holy Spirit was creating an independent and indigenous Indian Christianity. He further states that *The Apostolic Faith*, the periodical from Azusa Street, mentioned the news of this revival in its November 1906 issue saying, 'Hallelujah! God is sending the Pentecost to India. He is no respecter of persons.' However, the periodical mentioned no

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22 Howard A. Snyder, 'Holiness Heritage: The Case of Pandita Ramabai', *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 40 (Fall 2005), p. 31.

23 Ramabai, 'A Testimony of Our Inexhaustible Treasure in Pandita Ramabai Through Her Own Words', p. 320.

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24 Burgess, *NIDPC*, p. 1018.

missionaries or Ramabai's mission. Anderson contends that the natives who were simply taught of God were responsible for the outpouring of the Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit were given to simple, unlearned members of the body of Christ, although *The Apostolic Faith* failed to name the Indian people, not even the famous Pandita Ramabai.

The Mukti revival had other far-reaching consequences, according to Anderson. He points out that the Mukti revival penetrated other parts of the world untouched by the Azusa revival, especially South America. In 1907, Willis Hoover, an American Methodist revivalist in Valparaiso, Chile, heard about the Mukti Mission through a pamphlet by his wife's former classmate, Minnie Abraham. She had worked with Pandita Ramabai. Hoover inquired about the Pentecostal revivals in other places, including Venezuela and Norway. Then a revival broke out in his own church in 1909, resulting in his expulsion from the Methodist Church in 1910. Eventually this led to the formation of Chilean Pentecostalism.<sup>25</sup>

McGee aptly comments that the revival at Mukti from 1905-1907 challenges the common view that modern Pentecostalism traces back to Azusa. Even before news of the Azusa revival had first reached India, a Pentecostal revival was already underway on the

Indian subcontinent.<sup>26</sup>

This article will focus next specifically on the history of the Indian Pentecostal Church of God, an indigenous Pentecostal movement which originated on Indian soil, not as a spin-off from the Azusa Street revival.

### 3. The Indian Pentecostal Church and Its Roots

Vinson Synan states that modern Pentecostalism was developed from Catholic and Anglican mystical traditions, then on through John Wesley's second blessing sanctification experience, and through the Holiness and Keswick movements.<sup>27</sup> However, the Indian Pentecostal Church (IPC) emerged from the Syrian Christian Community, which claims its origin in C. E. 52, when Saint Thomas, one of the twelve original apostles, came to India. According to *The Acts of Thomas*, the Apostle Thomas went to undertake the construction of a palace for an Indian king named Gondophares, along with preaching of the Gospel to India. A. E. Medlycott argues that proof of the existence of this Indian ruler came when coins of Gondophares inscribed in the Indian Pali language were found in Afghanistan in 1834 by Masson. (Today these coins of Gondo-

<sup>25</sup> Allan Anderson, 'The Origins of Pentecostalism and Its Global Spread in the Early Twentieth Century' p. 18 [cited 23 May 2006]. Online: <http://www.ocms.ac.uk/docs/Allan%20Anderson%20lectue20041005.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Gary B. McGee, 'Latter Rain Falling in the East: Early- Twentieth-Century Pentecostalism in India and Debate over Speaking in Tongues', *Church History*, 68, No. 3 (September 1999), 650. Cited by Allan Anderson in 'The Origins of Pentecostalism', p. 17.

<sup>27</sup> Vinson Synan, *The Holiness Pentecostal Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.,1997), p. x.

phares are housed at the Bibliotheque Natiaonale and the British Museum.) An inscription of Gondophares was also discovered at Takht-i-Bahi, dated in the 26th year of his reign.<sup>28</sup>

According to the Indian tradition, St. Thomas came by sea, and first landed at Maliankara near Cranganore about the year 52 C.E. He converted high caste Hindu families in Cranganore, Palayur, Quilon and some other places, and visited the Coromandel Coast making conversions. He also crossed over to China and preached the gospel and then returned to India and organized the Christians of Malabar under some guides from among the leading families he had converted. He erected few public places of worship.<sup>29</sup> When the Apostle Thomas came to the southwestern Malabar Coast, he met Hindu priests who were performing their rites in the water-tank and sprinkling water from it on the people, believing that the water was sacred and would wash away their sins.<sup>30</sup>

Saint Thomas was not only astonished at their customs, but also pitied their innocence and ignorance. He set forth a challenge for the Hindu priests,

to which they agreed. The challenge was: if a groove would remain in the place where they collected the water from tank, and if the waters would not fall back when they threw it into midair,<sup>31</sup> then he would follow their god; otherwise the Hindu priests would follow the Lord, Jesus Christ, whom Saint Thomas was serving. The Hindu priests tried a number of times to meet the challenge, but without success. To their surprise, Thomas the Apostle was able to perform the miracle against the law of gravity and the law of surface tension. Then the Hindu priests fell at his feet and attempted to worship him. Saint Thomas protested against their error and pointed them to Christ by preaching the gospel to those high caste Hindu Brahmin priests, many of whom became Christians. The names of the Brahmin families that were converted by Thomas were identified as Kalli, Kaliankara, Sankarapuri, Madapur, Vympilli, Muttedal, Kottakar, Panackamattom and Pakalomattom.<sup>32</sup>

Later he planted seven churches there on the Malabar Coast in the various centres of his missionary work, such as Maliankara, Palayur near Chavakad, Kottakayal near Parur, Kokkamangalam or South Pallippuram, Niranom near Thiruvalla, Chayal near Nilackal, and Kurakkenikollam (Quilon).<sup>33</sup> From there he went to the

28 A. E. Medlycott, *India and The Apostle Thomas: An Inquiry, With a Critical Analysis of the Act A Thomae* (London: David Nutt, 1905), pp. 1-3, 13.

29 H. C. Perumalil and E. R. Hambye, *Christianity in India: A History in Ecumenical Perspective* (Alleppey: Prakasam Publications, 1972), p. 18.

30 Still Indians believe that taking a ritual bath in rivers like Ganges will cleanse people from their sin. In the State of Andhra Pradesh, during the time of 'Pushkarams', thousands of Hindus come to the sacred rivers Krishna and Godavari to take a dip.

31 P. M. Samuel, *Autobiography* (Vijayawada: Zion Printing House, 1980), p. 4.

32 C. V. Cheriyan, *A History of Christianity in Kerala: From the Mission of St. Thomas to the Arrival of Vasco Da Gama, A.D. 52-1498* (Kottayam: CMS Press, 1973), p. 1.

33 C. V. Cheriyan, *A History of Christianity in Kerala*, 2.

East coast and established more churches. In 72 C. E., some high caste Hindu Brahmins speared Thomas to death. His tomb exists to this day on a mount in a place called Mylapore (modern-day Madras) in the state of Tamil Nadu, presently known as St. Thomas Mount.

The Indian Pentecostal Church founders, P.M. Samuel, K.E. Abraham, and K.C. Cherian, came from the Syrian Christian Community which Saint Thomas founded. P. M. Samuel, the first president of the Indian Pentecostal Church, trained to become a Syrian Orthodox priest in their seminary. (It is commonly held that K.E. Abraham was the founder of the IPC; however, my research indicates that he was only one of its founders.) Abraham was a schoolteacher, and was raised to become a Syrian Orthodox priest. He became president of the IPC later, in 1939, and continued in that position until his death in 1974. After the demise of Abraham, P. M. Samuel was president until he died in 1981. K. C. Cherian was also from the Syrian Orthodox Church and a teacher in the church-run school.

These three Syrian Christian leaders left the Syrian church and formed the South India Pentecostal Church of God in Aranmula, Travancore (in present-day Kerala). This is considered to be the first indigenous Pentecostal denomination in India.<sup>34</sup> As this indige-

nous movement began to grow and spread to other places, such as Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh), Mysore (Karnataka), and Madras (Tamil Nadu), the leaders of the South Indian Pentecostal Church of God decided to change its name to 'The Indian Pentecostal Church of God' in 1934.

#### 4. The Origin of the IPC in Andhra Pradesh

P. M. Samuel was born in Keekozhoor in the State of Kerala on July 1, 1903. His parents belonged to a traditional Mar Thoma Syrian Church. He had seven sisters and was the only son in the family. He was saved in August, 1920, at the age of seventeen. Two years prior to his conversion experience, he married a Syrian Christian named Mary. By 1924 he had completed his theological training to become a priest. In 1926, he was baptized in water, which created a conflict with his parents, and as a result, he was excommunicated from his family. His excommunication led him to become a street evangelist in Ranny, six miles away from his hometown.<sup>35</sup> On September 20, 1929, he received the baptism of the Holy Spirit in a convention at Lunav in Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka) where he had been invited by Pastor Paul (the founder of the Ceylon Pentecostal Church).

Later, he heard the clarion call, 'Samuel, Samuel, go to Andhra Pradesh and preach the Pentecostal

<sup>34</sup> Paulson Pulikotttil, 'As East and West Met in God's Own Country: Encounter of Western Pentecostalism with Native Pentecostalism in Kerala' p. 1 [cited 23 May 2006]. Online: <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj10/paulson.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Roger E. Hedlund, ed., *Christianity is Indian: The Emergence of an Indigenous Community* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2004), p. 362.

truth,<sup>36</sup> in a special fasting and prayer meeting in 1932. As he was contemplating his call to Andhra, suddenly he received an invitation from Brother T. P. Gurupadam from Bandaru (Machilipatnam) urging him to come to Andhra. The same year, Samuel left Travancore and came to Eluru in Andhra Pradesh, along with Brother R. Coal. They started preaching the Pentecostal message in a rented house. Many accepted their message, including Brother A. Manoharam, K.R. John and B.S. Lukeson, who were pioneer supporters of their ministry. In 1935, K. E. Abraham and P. T. Chacko reached Eluru after their preaching tour in North India, and met P. M. Samuel, who had just returned from his tour of Tamil Nadu.

On December 9, 1935, they registered an organization called 'The Indian Pentecostal Church of God' with the government of India under the Societies Act XXI of 1860, with the registration number 9/1935-1936.<sup>37</sup> Samuel, Abraham and Chacko were assisted by Bro. Lukeson, a clerk in the Registrar's office, and Bro. John, a superintendent in the Irrigation Department, in the registration process. All three shared the registration expenses. Samuel was chosen to be the president, Cherian, vice-president and Chacko, secretary.<sup>38</sup> Hence my contention is that P. M. Samuel was the co-founder of the IPC along with

K.E Abraham. This was the genesis of The Indian Pentecostal Church of God denomination in India. Samuel writes in his autobiography:

I (P. M. Samuel) was ordained by God as His apostle and I was sent on His service to Tamilnadu in 1930. God spoke to me and ordered me to spread the gospel in the east side where there were few Christian churches. Pastor K.E. Abraham was working in the midst of people who speak Malayalam (Kerala). Pastor Cherian was sent to the Kannada-speaking people. We started the Indian Pentecostal Church of God in 1934 and we gave this new name out of great enthusiasm for the revival and glory of our Lord. It was registered in 1935. Before registration, it was known as the Indian Pentecostal Church of South India. (emphasis added)

Chacko moved to Eluru in 1936 with his family and worked with Samuel. In 1937, Samuel purchased a house in Eluru with the funds received from Swedish believers through Cherian and Abraham when they went on a mission trip. The house soon turned into a worship centre and became the first church of the IPC. Thus, the IPC church in Eluru is the mother church to all other IPC churches, both in India and other parts of the world.

## 5. Conclusion

Even though the IPC was started among the Telugus in Eluru in the State of Andhra Pradesh, Eluru was never made the national headquarters of the denomination because the founders of the IPC were Malayalis

<sup>36</sup> P.M. Samuel, *Autobiography*, p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> *Hand Book: The Indian Pentecostal Church of God* (Kumbanad: IPC General Council Office, 1999), p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> *Hand Book: The Indian Pentecostal Church of God*, p. 9.

from the State of Kerala. Later on, Samuel moved to Vijayawada in 1940, about 40 miles from Eluru, and made it the state headquarters for the IPC in Andhra Pradesh. Nevertheless, the IPC originally began in Eluru with one church, and today it has nearly 4,000 churches in both India and abroad, including the Gulf countries, the United States, Canada and Australia. And in the State of Andhra Pradesh alone, the IPC currently has 660 churches with nearly 86,000 adherents.<sup>39</sup> As Hedlund aptly says, Andhra Pradesh is the main centre of indigenous movements in India today, more so than Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, along with numerous indigenous Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal denominations,

the Indian Pentecostal Church (IPC) being prominent among them.<sup>40</sup>

And even after the demise of the first and second-generation leaders, the IPC in Andhra Pradesh is still experiencing rapid numerical growth. At present, about every six days a new church is being pioneered. From this article it is evident that the Holy Spirit has been at work all over the world, both in the U.S. and in India and other parts of the globe simultaneously. Scholars from the East and the West alike need to continue to do research to bring to light other non-western Christian traditions which have also played a major role in the global Pentecostal movement like IPC. I hope this article will be a stimulus for such explorations.

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39 *Hand Book: The Indian Pentecostal Church of God*, p. 38.

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40 Burgess, ed., *NIDPC*, p. 782.

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