

## Partnership Training for Oral Cultures

by Joe Handley

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**I**t's often helpful to tell the end of a story first. Pastor Nariram Luhar, a leader in western Nepal, shares:

*When I returned home from Tree of Life training, I took a burden for my village, Brahmdev, which is located in a remote area of Nepal. With prayer, I did a survey of what I could do for my village. God showed me one very significant thing. In the rainy region there are many seasonal rivers from the mountain. On these seasonal rivers good wood was floating to India every year. The wood goes by our village and the village has no benefit. I felt strongly I have to do something about this problem.*

*I started visiting people in our village, especially those in high positions. I shared the problem and they said it was a good thought. "So what do you want to do?" they asked. I replied, "We can cut the good wood to sell in the village and to market people in Nepal. We*

*will get money, and at the same time we can protect the jungle."*

*We formed a business called Brahmdev ban Shanraksha Samiti (BBSS). We agreed that 20% of the money we received would go to the government and the rest of the money we would use in the village for development work by the grace of God. Within six months we were able to build a good road in the market. As a result of the success of BBSS the board came to me and said, "Brother, you did good job! It was great idea you had, so we will give you free wood to build your church building."*

*The organization now provides 30-40 people with jobs with the BBSS so a lot of people are getting a benefit. At the same time BBSS is distributing help for toilets and cooking gas for the village poor people. From this work God has given me honor and respect among the*

*people. I have 35 house churches in my care and am mobilizing all the churches to get trained to transform the community.*

Pastor Nariram is one of many emerging leaders with a passion to grow God's kingdom in parts of the world dominated by oral learners. These are leaders who are oral learners themselves and are leading oral people to accomplish great things. These are leaders who need access to orality-based training programs that they can then replicate in the areas they serve as the oral Bible churches they lead mature.

The Tree of Life (TOL) oral partnership training was developed in 2008. It was the result of a collaborative effort with two Western ministries—visionSynergy and Scriptures in Use—working with the Bridges Training Network in South Asia. Leaders involved saw a challenge clearly emerging in north India and Nepal, a challenge Phill Butler, visionSynergy's senior strategic advisor and co-author of the course, describes this way:

In a geographic area of 100 villages, there were maybe 15 small, emerging oral Bible churches. So we asked, "What would happen if the local leaders of these 15 oral Bible churches understood both the

**WHY** and the **HOW** to work together in partnership to:

- Do evangelism and church planting among the other 85 villages.
- Bring economic viability and sustainability to their own 15 villages and in turn be a witness to the other 85 villages.
- Address issues such as public health and basic education in the 15 villages and in turn be a witness to the other 85 villages where there is no church.
- Address social justice (the 15 villages and their leaders collectively dealing with persecution issues), bringing credibility and strength to the Christian cause rather than an ineffective, 'go it alone' approach."

The result of the collaboration was Tree of Life. TOL is a course that can be taught over three or four days. During the training, participants interact with scripture stories selected to provide a biblical foundation for the importance of collaboration and to present practical partnership principles. The class learns these stories by creating dramas, songs, and retelling the stories. They discuss the stories using simple questions as they develop a model they can follow in their home villages.



The training ends by challenging the leaders to use these principles to empower partnership among local churches for evangelism and church planting, economic development, community and social development (health and education), and social justice (religious/social persecution) projects.

During the last five years, more than 2,700 leaders have participated in TOL trainings in India and Nepal. And today, hundreds of oral Bible churches in these countries are working together to change their communities using the partnership principles taught.

The training is designed specifically for areas where oral Bible churches have been planted and local leaders are maturing.

While it's helpful if the oral leaders attending TOL training are already part of a network of ministries working together to plant oral Bible churches, this is not essential.

The reason that I, Joe Handley, as convener of the lab on leader development for oral learners, chose this model to share is because of how TOL incorporates the best principles for developing leaders among oral preference learners. Their use of collaborative learning, storytelling, drama, and song are prime examples of what makes their training fruitful. Ministries familiar with the principles and practices of oral approaches for evangelism and church planting can receive a free copy of the TOL manual.

