

ANNIE BUDH SINGH – my Pakistani colleague

Vivienne Stacey, January 1968

Budh Singh had the choice of remaining a Sikh like the rest of his family, or of becoming a Christian like his parents. He chose to become a Christian. Right to the end of his life he was a keen evangelist. One of his daughters, Annie Budh Singh, joined the staff of the United Bible Training Centre in 1951.

Annie Budh Singh received her college education at the Kinnaird College for Women in Lahore. She later trained as a teacher and became a high school teacher in Delhi. She grew up as a Christian, but it was the catastrophic experiences of the partition of the sub-continent into India and Pakistan in 1947 which caused her to seek reality in Christ. Her father's home and farm were near the new border. Her Sikh relatives were in danger of their lives and during the weeks of violence she and her parents hid many Sikhs in their home and helped them to escape massacre. At night Annie dreamt her guidance for the next day. When things settled down she went back to her high school teaching. She now had a post in a Christian school in Sialkot, a town just inside the West Pakistan border.

Miss Marion Peterson, an American missionary, had founded a Presbyterian Bible Training Centre in Rawalpindi for training women evangelists. She too had been a high school teacher. When a number of her pupils found new life in Christ they enquired where they could train as evangelists – there was nowhere in their language area and so the staff prayed about the matter and God guided Miss Peterson to start the Centre with the help of an able Indian called Mrs Samuel. The first five pupils called themselves by the names of the five rivers of the Punjab, declaring that their purpose in life was to bring the water of life to a thirsty land.

That was in 1939. There was no adequate building – the classroom was a garage – but the greatest need was supplied: staff and students with vision. By 1947 churches of several denominations and some mission groups in what was to be the new Pakistan indicated their desire to co-operate in this Centre, and so it was named the United Bible Training Centre. It moved its location to Gujranwala, partly that the staff might accept the request of the United Theological Seminary to teach the wives of the theological students.

In 1951 God called Annie Budh Singh to come and join the staff. In July 1965 she obtained a passport and visa to enable her to spend her summer holiday with her Indian brothers in Delhi. The next month, tensions between India and Pakistan increased over the long-standing Kashmir problem, and hostilities broke out. As an alien she was not free to leave India and return to Pakistan. Near her home village in Pakistan raged the largest tank battle fought since World War II. After seventeen days a ceasefire occurred and the whole border between India and Pakistan was put under the surveillance of the United Nations.

Miss Budh Singh, together with others like herself who had been caught in India, was permitted to return the following year. On her arrival in Gujranwala she found that the UBTC had been requisitioned by the Pakistan army since the previous September. For eight months, until May 1966, no courses could be held on the premises and the staff were without a home of their own.

Meanwhile it became evident that although there was the same need for evangelism, direct evangelism could not be carried on quite so openly; also the churches had not yet awoken to their responsibility to support their pastors adequately, let alone women evangelists. So Annie Budh Singh shared in the reassessment and evaluation of the UBTC and in 1966 a clear-cut programme for expansion had been drawn up. The two-year course with which the Centre had started in 1939 was closed, and more stress put on short courses, extension work, writing and translation, and on a new Christian Education course.

With more staff available – American, British and Australian – the class of 25 was divided into two sections, making it possible to adapt the teaching to different levels of attainment and ability. Miss Budh Singh taught these future-pastors' wives subjects like how to run a Christian home, how to teach a Sunday School class and how to lead a Women's Fellowship. One of the most outstanding needs in the Christian church in Pakistan today is that of preparing qualified teachers to be specialists in Christian Education. Miss Budh Singh was, therefore, very glad when the new, one-year, course in Christian Education started in April 1967.

Annie Budh Singh is tied by her duties as Matron to the Centre itself, and she keeps very busy catering for long and short course students. However, she watches with prayer and interest the developing extension ministry. Since October 1967 one staff member has visited various parts of West Pakistan, participating in conferences and institutes, and training leaders in schools, hospitals and Sunday Schools. Annie Budh Singh herself reaches many people outside the Centre as she translates the Scripture Union Notes from English into Urdu to help Urdu Bible readers in their daily devotional study.

During her eighteen years in the Centre, she has helped and taught many students. One student whom the Lord is using was dedicated as a child to God's service. Later, as a trained teacher, she came to the UBTC for training as an evangelist, and then served as a hospital evangelist for three years. She then joined the staff of a Christian High School to teach Scripture to the Christian pupils. In the holidays she is ready and eager to help with youth camps. Asked if her widowed mother would miss her during one Easter holiday camp, she replied "My mother is very happy. She dedicated me for such work and prays for me!"

This teacher and Annie Budh Singh knew full well the difficulties of belonging to a minority community, but they are prepared to grasp the opportunities which exist in Pakistan.