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The Contribution of Christian Missionary in the Field of Education and in the process of socialization of North East India – An Analytical Study

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ABSTRACT

‘Never pity missionaries; envy them. They are where the real action is – where life and death, sin and grace, Heaven and Hell converge’ – are the echoing words of Robert C Shannon on the impact of Christianity and the missionaries in human life. The 19th century saw the consolidation of British rule and the impact of western ideas on the social, political and religious life of all Indians in general and the people of North East in particular. In India Christianity is a minority religion. This status has not undermined its output in the society, it had always been the main instrument in building up the Indian nation through centuries in the field of economy, education, social services, health care etc. The Christian religion enlightened the Indian nation not only in the area of spirituality but in all aspects of the Indian people. The spread of Christianity in India came with the advent of the Europeans from the institutions, especially in the areas of education and social life in India, which has been recognized and appreciated not only within the church, but even by the secular society and the state. This paper is also an attempt to discuss and analyse the education imparted by Christian institutions and its impact and relationship realized in the renewal of personal and community life as the ultimate goal. It also aims to look at the path the Christian institutions have tread, assess the present and look forward to the future.

Keywords: Christianity, North East, Institution, Church, People

1 Literature Review

The contribution of Christianity in India and in different parts of India is noteworthy and praiseworthy. Scholarly journals, articles have also be written by many men of letter in this regard. One such seminal article has been penned by George Grierson. The name of the book is the ‘Linguistic Survey of India’ where the author has beautifully sketched the contribution of Christianity in enhancing English language and study among the Indians.

2 Objectives of the study:

The objectives of this paper can be –

1. To point out how did Christian Missionaries slowly and gradually attach with Indian life.
2. To point out how did Christianity and the Missionaries assist in the process of socialization.
3. To chalk out the new waves of Christian Missionary in the arena of India education.

3 Introduction

India's culture is extensive, profound and mysterious and has made immeasurable contributions to the progress of the world and civilization. There have been several articulations and re-articulations of the Christian identity in Education. Christian institutions in India have sought to impart liberal education, relating the knowledge of science and technology, to knowledge of humanities, reinforcing it with the values of Christ's teachings as a source of meaning for life furthering the process of learning and building a society that transcends caste and creed. Through this paper we will intend to evaluate the rich contributions of Christian institutions, especially in the growth of culture and education among the Garo Tribe in Meghalaya.

Ideally Christian missionaries hoped to make schools the spiritual and religious centers. Through education they hoped to eradicate the practices and behaviors of natives like idol worship, polytheism, bigotry, polygamy and many superstitions which were considered by them to be much uncivilized. Their ultimate aim was to proselytize the native population and prove the falsehood of the native religions. Regular Bible lessons were supposed to become the norm in the schools of Christian missionaries whereas the reality at the ground level for Christian educational missionaries in India turned out to be otherwise. Bellinoit says that the examination preparation was given priority at the expense of the time needed to engage in spiritual and religious lessons. During the colonial period, Government was the only source of the employment for the educated. Administration, governance and military were the only sectors where the employment was generated. These sectors reached the saturation very soon.

Christian missions had a huge impact in the Northeastern region of India. This impact combined with western (British) colonization, produced a synergy that changed the entire landscape of the Northeast. The primary catalyst was the translation of the Bible into local languages, and a highly successful education program that every mission and denomination implemented from the very beginning. That brought about an awakening and renewal of societies across the Northeast. The greatest change occurred within the tribal societies. It gave rise to a national identity movement, which continues to this day. This was aided by a stable British colonial administration, which provided the basic structure and framework for new tribal political states that would emerge decades later. New problems and challenges came with these changes. Foremost among them was the question of political sovereignty. Some tribal groups rose in rebellion against the national government of India and fought violent insurgent wars at various times. Some of those had come to a peaceful end, while others remain unresolved. The study also deals with the impact of Hindu religion and colonization in Northeast India, a process that was occurring long before Christian missions.

The influence of Christianity and the Missionaries of North East India can be summed up thus :

Impact of Christianity on Society of North East :

1. Christianity has helped to lay the foundations for a wider and deeper fraternity based on love, justice, forgiveness and solidarity.
2. The Christian message has helped to unite the different peoples of the Indian Subcontinent, made them aware of their self-worth, opened up a wider horizon as large as the globe.
3. An area where the church has made notable contribution is the education of the indigenous people the 'Adivasis' and 'Tribals'.
4. Due the dedicated service of the Christian mission/church in the field of education and production of literature, the literary rate in most parts of the subcontinent specially South and the North East India are good.

4 Eradication of Social Evils

Christian missionaries from the beginning of their mission work attempted to abolish the social evil practices and anti-social systems in India – sati, strangling and robbery of travelers, female infanticide and human sacrifices, purdha and polygamy. Missionaries realized that only social reforms could not help the people in their plight, and they convinced that education would be the most effective and lasting instrument for the liberation of people. Serampore mission attempts in this regard are highly appreciable. Christian missionaries tried to abolish caste discrimination in society.

Christianity attacked the evils of caste system and contributed immensely to loosening up the system through preaching the formation of an egalitarian society based on self respect and social justice. It helped in uplifting the victims of the oppressive caste system. In matters of legal justice and civil rights, it encouraged the values of equality, equity and universalism as opposed to those of status and hierarchy. In India, Christianity has been one of the important factors of modernization and economic development. Christian missions were instrumental in the cultural revitalization of the country for which the Serampore Mission played a pivotal role. It has been one of the earliest agencies of social welfare. Through the vast network of social services, it has been able to provide educational and medical facilities to the relatively isolated regions of India. The cultural renaissance of Bengal in nineteenth century marked the beginning of the awakening of the people of India to a new sense of human dignity and the emergence of a new cultural identity. Christian-Hindu encounter challenged Hinduism to re-emphasize the complex tradition of Hinduism as depicted in the Upanishads. It was mainly women belonging to the bhaki tradition who stepped forward in self-expression of Indian Christianity. The contribution of South and the North East India are commendable compared with the national average.

It has been seen that in the areas of North East, 85 percent of the health care institutions are run by Christian Church/Mission. This is the real means of the Christian life and mission to be at the service of the last, the least and the lost. For the tribal people like 'Garo' and 'Khasi', Christianity became a liberator from spiritual and social demons.

5 Christian Missionaries to enhance rich heritage of Indian culture :

The fact is that Christian mission/church in India has played a unique role in contributing to the Indian culture. As India is composed of various cultural traditions, their contribution to the Indian culture varies from one state to another. One of the important things that the Christian missions emphasized was the humanization of life in all aspects of all people regardless of caste, religion, race and region. Hence Christian gospel is a source for humanization.

6 Influence of Christianity in the field of Religion :

Religion has historically influenced Indian society on a political, cultural and economic level. There is a sense of pride associated with the country's rich religious history as the traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism all emerged out of India. Moreover, while a majority of people in India identify as Hindu (79.8%), the medley of religions that exist within the country continually impact contemporary society. In India, religion is more publicly visible than it is in most English-speaking Western countries. This becomes evident when considering the numerous spaces that are thought to be sacred and holy. Examples include 'ashrams' (monasteries or congregation sites) consisting of large communities of scholars or monastics, temples (mandir), shrines and specific landscape such as the Ganges river. There is a rich religious history visible in architecture, and it is not uncommon to find various places of worship, such as a Hindu temple, Muslim mosque and Christian church, all next to each other. Hence Christianity never asked Indians to be narrow in religion or force Indian to adopt their religion. Rather it makes Indian liberal regarding religion.

7 Contributions of Christianity to Social Change

The church agencies first rendered their services in the field of education and later extended their services to the areas of socio-economic development. The Christian communities are the bases from where the missionaries reach out to all sections of the people through the services rendered in the field of education, medical aid and social aid. The church opened stations in remote areas and has been undertaking literacy campaigns, adult and child education, relief work, social service, health care services, family visits. The entry of the Dalits and backward classes into Christianity has become a means for dignified life and higher status in the society. One of the significant aspects of Christian contribution among the people is linguistic unification. Besides education, books and literature denouncing social evils helped break down caste barriers. The more important among these books were the 'Jati Vicharana' by Dr. Moegling and journals like 'Satya Deepika', 'Sbhapatra' etc.

Christianity in North East India was a liberative force from the caste ridden society, particularly to oppressed and lower castes of the society. A purposeful and concerted attempt in ameliorating the conditions of the untouchables was made by the Christian missionaries. Thus, there created an ever-increasing movement of Depressed Class children to missionary education centers, which later termed as "the mass movement of the mind". This helped Adi-Dravida to become a high official of the land outstrips and prided upon social respectability of is decent. Christians were against slavery. As a result of the sustained effort taken by the Christianity in North East India, especially Meghalaya was a liberative force from the caste ridden society, particularly to oppressed and lower castes of the society. A purposeful and concerted attempt in ameliorating the conditions of the untouchables was made by the Christian missionaries. Thus, there created an ever-increasing movement of Depressed Class children to missionary education centers, which later termed as "the mass movement of the mind." This helped Adi-Dravida to become a high official of the land outstrips and prided upon social respectability of his decent. Christians were against slavery. As a result of the sustained effort taken by the missionaries in this regard, the Raja of Thiruvithamcore issued a proclamation on June 24, 1855 emancipating all slaves and withdrawing legal recognition for all aspects of social changes in the states which served as groundwork for the ushering era of social mobility and to mitigate the evil traditions of the society.

8 Contributions of Christianity to Impact among tribes and Delits.

Most of the tribes like Garo, Khasi were under the clutches of money lenders causing to dispossess their land, lose control over their own community based socio-economic structure and indigenous culture. The scene is changed by the arrival of the missionaries. A strategy of purposive actions such as formal education, alternative employment, financial support through institutional means and so on for socio-economic uplift and liberation from fear of spirits was initiated by the missionaries. A significant and far reaching step towards making the tribes self-sufficient was the introduction of certain socio-economic measurers such as establishing Catholic co-operative credit society, cooperative societies, mutual help societies etc (established in Chotanagpur in 1909, 1913). Though substantial socio-economic changes had initiated among them they have retained their indigenous values of gender equality, dignity of women, consensual procedure in community, actions apparel, language, cuisine, traditional customs, indigenous festivals etc. The western education helped to bring out radical social changes in the states which served as groundwork for the ushering era of social mobility and to mitigate the evil traditions of the society.

9 Conclusion :

As per National Demographic survey Christian population in India is just 2.3 percent. But the contribution of this minority community in the field of education, health care and various social, political and cultural upbringing in India is unique and praise worthy. Hence one can safely conclude that right from the beginning of the Christian presence in India, it offered a unique and profound impact on the society as a result of the compassionate care and preferential option that members demonstrated to the sick, suffering and the less privileged and marginalized of the society.

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