



Christian Missionary Education and Social Change in India

Soprang Machiri*

*Research Scholar, Department of Christian Ministry from Sam Haggin Bottom University of Agriculture Technology and sciences, Allahabad, India.

*Corresponding author

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Introduction

Education is considered as the backbone of society. It is founded either by the government or by certain private undertaking for the benefit of common people. In the case of the Christian missionaries in India, they felt the need of education for the purpose of transforming Indian nation towards modern world. They decided to work against the illiteracy and ignorance of the people of the country. At the same time, they also realized that to succeed the work depend solely on full co-operation and involvement of the people of the country. In this paper, attempt has been made to view the Christian missionary educational activities and social change after the independence of India. However, I shall trace the social-religious and political conditions of the country before Independence so as to know the Christian missionaries involvement in social change through education.

1. Meaning

Social change simply means a shift in the fraction of society ascribing to a particular attitude or mode of behaviour.¹ Reformers and missionaries see change as transformation, liberation and deliverance. So to bring change in our society, education is needed and use as an instrument for total change and growth.²

¹ <http://www.ftp.iza.org/dp3485.pdf> (access on 7/5/17))

²Emmanuel Paik *Christian Education for Transformation and Growth*. Allahabad Theological journal Vol 5 (2015): 238.

2. Social- Religious and political condition of India before Independent

According to B.R. Purkait as cited by P.C. Gine

A strong conservatism grasped the whole Society. People lost their values. Women lost their liberties and status. The entire society lost progressiveness and dynamicity. Caste system was deeply rooted in the soil. Old and obsolete customs and prejudices held ground. Social rut was the inevitable consequence.³

Caste system, sati, infanticide, pardha pratha, child marriage, gender dichotomy etc were the main practice of those days in India. However, reformers, missionaries stood against social evils and to bring changes they established schools thinking that this would be the only means to fight against the social evils of India. On the other hand, political scenario of India was very unstable because of the downfall of Mughal empire.

According to B.R. Purkait as cited by P.C. Gine

After the downfall of the Mughal Empire, there was no centralized political authority in the country. This led to the rise of petty independent rulers in the provinces that had no cultural or educational taste.⁴

The independent rulers in the provinces were jealous each other and did not come forward to rescue each other from the invasion of any foreign rulers. This gave the opportunity to the British East India Company to exploit the situation and take advantage in internal conflicts among the native rulers and began their supremacy in the country.⁵

³ Pratap Chandra Gine, *The System of Elementary Education of the Serampore Mission* (Jorhat: ETC, 2001), 1.

⁴ Pratap Chandra Gine, *The System of Elementary Education* 1.

⁵ Woba James, *Major issues in the history of Christianity in India: A post colonial Reading* (Mokokchung: TDCC publication, 2013), 126.

3. Colonialism and Education

Lord Macaulay comments;

whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we should see the strongest reason to think that of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects⁶

They denied oriental languages, law, culture and religion and stop printing all native literatures in Arabic and Sanskrit. They also asked to close down all colleges teaching in vernacular and threaten to resign as Chairman of the Committee on Education if the government would not adopt their program. ⁷ Consequently, William Bentinck also issued an order to end the funding of all Oriental institutions and printing of native literatures. The money thus made available was used for promoting English literature and science through the English language.⁸ Commenting on Macaulays educational policy Purkait writes, this is a policy to create a class of person. Indian in blood and color but English in taste, in opinion, in moral, and in intellect. ⁹

Education in a simplest way can be defined as all round development. Lord Macaulay introduced education to the people of India, but ironically, instead of seeking all round development, in India it was introduced solely for the purpose of recruiting clerks and other officers to assist the British administration. The system is more of theoretical and less practical. What is more painful is even after several decades of independent India, we still

⁶ Jacob S Dharmaraj, *Colonialism and Christian Mission: Post Colonial Reflection* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 77-79

⁷ Jacob S Dharmaraj, *Colonialism and Christian Mission*, 78.

⁸ Dharmaraj, *Colonialism and Christian Mission*, 77

⁹ Purkait, Biswa Rajan, *Milestone in Modern Indian Education* (Kolkata: New Central Book Agency Ltd, 2002), 27.

cannot do away with the old system. The colonial ideology and the character of the colonial power influences the whole set of Indian society.

Therefore, many post colonial scholars today question the forces of colonialism. Under the name of civilizing, and modernizing the colonial power expanded their territories in India. Colonizer and missionaries sailed to India on the same boat. Anything which is not in corresponding to their thoughts and practices were condemned. They reinforced the superiority of the European culture and English education as the solid arbitrator of Christian tradition.

In the same vein Christian missionaries in spite of the good intention and work, they failed to understand and appreciate the religious and cultural ethos of the Indians in many respect. The message of repentance from sin and putting a break to ones past life served as the core theology of the missionaries. They give great emphasis on forsaking ones habit and lifestyle. In order to ensure that the new converts were free of influenced from the non converts, they made the converts settle in the newly found settlement often called Christian compound or village. Even to this day, in many NEI villages, the villages continued to maintain the division in spite of the fact that everyone has embraced Christianity.

4. Social Changes in India

The following are the changes that brought in society by the Christian missionaries and Christians in India.

4.1. Christian Educational institutions:

At the time of independence, India inherited an educational system, which was not only quantitatively small and scattered but was also characterized by regional, religious affiliation, gender, and caste imbalance. Only 14 percent of the population was literate and one out of three children was enrolled in primary school. Since 1950s the countrys formal educational system has changed. The well-defined objectives of Christian educational institutions in post-independent are.¹⁰

- a) To involve more fully in the process of social change
- b) To reach out especially to the poor and the under privilege
- c) To commit exceptionally to the work of justice
- d) To enlighten the conscience of human beings with the message of brotherhood and love and
- e) To partake and participate in the nation building educational programs.

Though India has achieved freedom in 1947, the spirit of patriotism cries out for her true emancipation from poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, nepotism, regionalism and religious fanaticism. Therefore, Christian missionaries fought not only against the caste system and superstitions but also motivated the natives by pertaining educational policy to stand against these evil forces. It aims is to contribute in transforming society without any discrimination.

¹⁰ P. Jagadish Gandhi, Christian Educational Institutions in post- Independent India: An overall Assessment, in *Theology for our Times*, Number 7(July 2000), 96-97.

Though government is making lot of efforts formulating curricula, teaching methods one after the other have left no impact in the society. Government schools are dying everywhere in India. I can give Manipur as for example. Last year i.e. 2016, 73 government schools in Manipur have zero class 10 pass percentage. Furthermore, there are 28 government schools that had just one student each who passed the examination. And there is not a single government school that has a student in top 20 achievers. What this clearly means is that government schools -- on each of which millions of rupees of public funds are being spent -- have been performing poorly as compared to the private schools especially Christian School in Manipur.

Today, Christian institutions and universities are taking active part in producing leaders which gradually transform the Indian society. We can be mentioned few universities taking active part in transforming the society of India.

4.2. Sam Haggin Bottom University of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences, Naini, UP

Sam Haggin Bottom believes that education is a source to liberate people and bring change.¹¹ Thus, he established agriculture institute at Naini in the year 1910 so as to improve agricultural methods and teaching of practical village industries such as wood carving, pottery, rug making, canning etc. This gradually led to pioneering institute in the field of agriculture in the whole of Asia and the fourth in the world.¹² This University is arranged and extends Scholarship to the poor and needy. His contribution was immensely great and brought light to many farmers in India. This is the role played in social change by the Christians and the missionaries in India.

¹¹ Emmanuel Paik *Christian Education for Transformation and Growth*. Allahabad Theological journal Vol 5 (2015): 238.

¹²On Campus prospectus 2014, *Sam Hegginbottom Institute of Agriculture, Technology & Sciences*, 10-11.

4.3. Serampore College (University)

William Carey¹³ believes that Jesus Christ's command to go into the whole world and preach the good news whereby reformation was possible in the society.¹⁴ Therefore, Serampore College was established on behalf of the Mission in 1818 with a view to imparting religious teaching to the local people under initiative leadership. One of the objectives of the college was to offer secular higher education so as to transform the society of India. Today, this university is producing many leaders and actively participating in transforming Indian society.¹⁵

4.4. Other Organizations

In India there are also Christian organizations who have been deeply committed and working for the welfare of the people of India. The following two organizations can be mentioned. They are:

4.4.1. Compassion International, India: Since 1968, Compassion International Ministry has been working in India providing a holistic child development for children under dire poverty. For nearly four decades have operated in India helping the poor children quarter of million to break through the cycle of poverty. Christian missionaries are immensely working in bringing

¹³ In the West he is often honored as the Father of the Modern Missionary Movement, the one whose example and ideas led to the creation of numerous missionary societies (the Protestants having finally gotten around to finding a substitute for the monastic order as the primary instrument of mission) and the launching of the most extensive and numerically successful missionary movement that the world has ever seen. Though this aspect of his work is not often appreciated, one of his most important contributions was the successful theological challenge to the Calvinistic orthodoxy of his day which had totally immobilized large sections of the Protestant Church in its exercise of mission. In India he is also honored by members of all religious communities, but for different reasons. There he is honored (even postage stamps have been issued by the Government of India commemorating him and the Serampore Mission) for his work as a horticulturist, a social reformer, as a significant force behind the modernization of Bengali literature and for the advent of the nineteenth-century Indian cultural renaissance (FS. Downs, *Eboscon Atlas.com* accessed on 5/5/2017 10:20)

¹⁴ Emmanuel Paik *Christian Education for Transformation and Growth*. Allahabad Theological Journal Vol 5 (2015): 239.

¹⁵ http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Serampore_Mission (accessed on 5/5/2017: 11:8)S

social change. One must deny the fact that missionaries contribution by educating the children in India.¹⁶

4.4.2. World Vision: In the year 1950, World Vision was born out of compassion and a heart for helping the child girl by Rev. Pierce. Initially he started with one child and later in response to the needs of hundreds of thousands of orphans at the end of the Korean War. In the 1970 onward they worked a broader community development model and established an emergency relief division. He further addresses the causes of poverty by focusing on community needs such as water, sanitation, education, health, leadership training and income generation. Now missionaries have been blessed to many in India. To this extend they have been contributing India to change the society.¹⁷

In my own context, we could also see how William Pettigrew played a major role in changing our society especially to the Tangkhul Nagas Tribe in Manipur through imparting English education. He came to India in 1890, eventually introducing western education in Manipur, and converting the Tangkhul Naga Tribe, inhabiting Ukhrul District to Christianity, "in masses".

William Pettigrew works among the head hunting Tangkhul-Naga tribe living at Ukhrul and started his work as an Educationist. On 19 February 1897, 20 students enrolled to learn western education. He also learned Tangkhul dialect from the village chief by name Raihao Hunphun Awungwo, which was followed by writing Tangkhul Primers, Arithmetic, and Catechism in Roman script, and finally translating the English Bible into Tangkhul dialect in order to make them change. This western education and establishing schools was swiftly

¹⁶ <http://www.compassion.com/india update.htm>(accessed on 7/5/17)

¹⁷ www.worldvision.org/our-work/country-profiles/india (accessed on 7/5/17)

spread to the surrounding villages. After learning basic western education people themselves changed their lifestyle. They were introduced to wearing of clothes and behaving differently. Later by imparting western education was followed by converting 12 Tangkhuls from their primal religion of nature-worshipping to Christianity on 29 September 1901. This day is regarded as the day, Phungyo Baptist Church, the first Church of Manipur, was born in the State. Thereafter, Christianity grew at a rapid rate, leading to the entire conversion of the Tangkhul Nagas into Christianity. This contribution has given the impact to society of Tangkhul Naga Tribe in Manipur.¹⁸

Conclusion:

We can say that missionaries were left unsuccessful in religious conversion even though they settled for a long period of time. However, the emergence of Christian missionaries marked a significant chapter towards the formation of a new educational policy. Their emphasis on the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction and also attempting to develop a holistic education was a very acceptable method in education. At the same time, Christian missionaries played a vital role in educating people by imparting formal and non- formal education in India and helping people to bring change in their lives. The native Indians did not only learn reading and writing but also other ways of life. Stitching cloth, weaving, construction of house, farming, etc. were sources of social and economic transformation of the people with whom they encountered.

Christian missionaries involvement in promoting societies through education and enhancing livelihood of the people of India has transformed and changed the post-independent Indian

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Pettigrew (accessed on 8/5/2017)

society. It is definitely not comparable with the kind of quality we have today but their contribution in shaping Indian society cannot also be ignored.

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