



History of Christian missionaries: A study in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract

The major Christian missions in India. Drawing their strength and impetus from the religious awakening all over the world during 19th century, these denominations found economically backward, socially downtrodden and religiously deprived community in India for their work. Not losing a single opportunity, they concentrated on their goals. They were encouraged even astonished by the stunning and surprising results that their work accomplished in these areas. At present Christians constitute four percent of total population of Andhra Pradesh. We compared with results of many of the others areas in India this figure is more striking. Social awakening is connected with mobilization and modernization of the society in all means. In the era of modernization liberty, fraternity and equality are given the importance. This awakening emerges in gradual and steady process in all the human societies. The social consciousness awakening and political identity in India gradually emerged as a continuation of the politico-social movements that took place in India owing to the impact of western political thoughts and growth of English education. As a prelude to the social awakening, the spread of political consciousness worked as a contributory factor. The introduction of western education, judicial system and administrative measures and reorganization paved the way for the rise of a new middle class initially this group consolidated itself into political associations in case based society like India. As time went on, the caste-Hindus who formed a pre-dominant social group in the state along with the de-pressed section worked against the brahminocracy. It resulted in the rise and growth of non-Brahmin movement. Though the two movements forged a head on parallel line, which ignited the people towards pro-new trends, which ignited the people towards pro-gressive thinking.

Keywords: christ of nazareth, christianity, roman catholic, missionaries, downtrodden communities, social evils

Introduction

Social services are a range of public services provided by government, private, and non-profit organizations. These public services aim to create more effective organizations, build stronger communities, and promote equality and opportunity. Social services include the benefits and facilities such as education, food subsidies, health care, job training and subsidized housing, adoption, community management, policy research, and lobbying ^[1]. Social service refers to activities to improve the quality of life of the disadvantaged section of the society. It aims at elevating the living condition of the poor, disabled, elderly, children, women, and depressed section of the society. Service to mankind is service to God. There are many people, who believe that "service to man is service to god". They do not let a single day pass without doing some act of charity, however small it may be. The sense of social service comes out of kindness of the heart and depends largely upon character. Many wealthy people live selfless lives. They spend anything for the good of their neighbours.

The history of Christianity in India is as old as the history of Christianity itself. India being the land of Religions, Christianity being an alien religion, a religion born in middle Europe, travelled to this oriental land and established its influence on the religious, social and cultural thinking of the people of India. Within the First Century after the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christianity spread itself into the greater part of the civilized world. The very concept of colonialism started with the voyage of Vasco Da Gama in

1498. However there are ample and undisputed evidences that there were Christians in India on the West Coast of India, namely Kerala and in parts of Tamilnadu more particularly Mylapore-Madras during the first century ^[2].

Christians believe that Christianity is the gift of the Heavenly Father, the God of the universe, Creator of everything that exists, the Master of the History of the universe and the destiny of mankind. Christianity is the revelation of God's unparalleled love for man in spite of man's great revolt and unrighteousness. It is not to be listed just as one of the religions of the world, however ancient, philosophical or comprehensive and complicated they may be. Christianity is the way of life - a new way based on the Truth ^[3].

Historical Background of Christianity

Christianity is one of the ancient religions of the world. It is the religion originated from Jerusalem and derived from Jesus Christ of Nazareth, based on the Holy Bible as sacred scripture and professed by Eastern Roman Catholic and Protestant Bodies. The travel of Christianity from Rome to India was made possible due to historic trade relations between the Roman empire and India in the first century A.D. Strabo, who lived during the time of Augustus, makes reference to trade between the Roman Empire and India ^[4].

Pliny the Elder (24/24-79 A.D) also mentions voyages from the Roman empire to India and the Pepper trade between these two countries during the beginning century of Jesus Christ, Christianity was brought to India by St. Thomas, one of the

twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. St. Thomas came to South India through Persia in 52 A.D. and reached Kranganur in Malabar (Kerala State) and started preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and converted four Brahmin families namely Kali, Kailankaru, Sankarapuri and Pakalomattam. These were the first Christian families in India during the first century. Within the First Century after the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christianity spread itself into the greater part of the civilized world ^[5].

The very concept of colonialism started with the voyage of Vasco Da Gama in 1498. However there are ample and undisputed evidences that there were Christians on the West Coast of India, namely Kerala and in parts of Tamil Nadu more particularly Mylapore-Madras during the first century ^[6]. The Indian Caste system is unique in nature and when we compare it with other societies in the world, is still continues to exist in the modern Indian society. The origins of the caste system can be traced to the 90th Sloka of 10th Mandala of Purusha Sukta of Rig-Veda ^[7]. The seed of caste has grown up with its deep root dividing human society of India resulting in the creation of unequal socio-economic, politico-cultural system. It widened the gap between upper castes and lower castes as well as perpetuated exploitative social relations. As per the Hindu religious practices, the entry of Dalits into temple is banned. But they do worship village gods and goddess such as pochamma, Maisamma and Mahkamma etc., to attained spiritual satisfaction ^[8].

The practice of untouchability is continuing even in the democratic society of India even after 69 years of independence. Therefore, untouchable communities were attracted towards other religions like Christianity and Islam where they could get equivalent socio-economic, politico-cultural opportunities.

The role of Christian missionaries in religious conversion and socio-cultural change as well as the development of educational, health and self-improvement schemes in modern India has been acknowledged by many historical studies. Recent studies on the growth of Christianity in modern India focused on the interconnection between conversion movements, social reform and social change. Christian missionaries were considering being the great institutions builders, since they pioneered works relating to social reform, language/literature/philosophy, socio-economic development of weaker sections. Hence, Christianity has been described as the "religion of the poor". In fact, education social uplift had become synonymous with Christianity in India ^[9].

As per the Charter Act of 1813, the Christian Missionaries of European continent were permitted to preach their religious gospel to the people of Indian society. While Christianity missionaries were preaching their religious gospel to Indians, they provided education, health and economic benefits and socio-cultural upliftment. In this process, Missionaries constructed schools, Hospitals, dispensaries, Teacher training centers, houses for orphans, hostels for women and children with free boarding and lodging facilities, which the Dalits communities could not enjoy in Hindu religion ^[10].

To provide such facilities, American Telugu Baptist Mission, Roman Catholic Mission, London Missionary Society, Canadian Baptist Telugu Mission, American Evangelical Lutheran Mission, Arcot Mission of the Reformed Church of

America Godavari Delta Mission, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary society, Features of Scotland Mission and, Hermannsburg Evangelical Lutheran Mission had come forward to serve Dalits in India. As per the Subsidiary Alliance agreement between East India Company and Nizam government, the missionary activities spread in to the Nizam's dominion also. As a part of the above American Telugu Baptist Missionary and Roman Catholic Missionary stations were established in Kurnool in 1873 and 1886 respectively.

The history of Christianity, Christian faith and Christian Church is a glorious saga of historical adventures, persecutions and challenges in India. The genesis, growth and activities of Church of South India in the southern part of India and its Rayalaseema Diocese in the most backward and drought prone districts of Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh is an another venerable milestone in the Indian Church history.

The Problem of Study

Kurnool district is one of the backward districts of Rayalaseema region in Andhra Pradesh, with a scheduled caste population of 17.81%. In spite of the constitutional guarantee and safe guards to the Dalit Christians, they never had an opportunity to enjoy the privileges like social equality, access to economic standardization and participation in the political and public life. The oppressive methods imposed on Christian Groups, once again establishes the upper caste dominance and political empowerment of caste Hindus in rural areas of Kurnool district. This clearly speaks, mere constitutional guarantees does not serve any purpose, unless and until the state and civil society feels it as a very important aspect to uplift of the Dalit. Hence, an attempt is made to study the role of Christian Missionary services in Kurnool and the growth and development of Christianity in Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh.

Objectives of Study

- To trace the origin and growth of Christianity in India.
- To study the growth, development and leadership of Christianity in Andhra in general and Rayalaseema region in particular.
- To examine the contributions of Christian missionary services to the development Andhra Pradesh society and culture as well as Kurnool district.
- To examine the socio-economic contribution of Christian Missionaries in upliftment of downtrodden communities through Education, Health and Employment in Kurnool district.

Method of Study

To fulfill the objectives, both primary and secondary sources Are used for the present study. The study covers different parameters and paradigms of Christian missionary services in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh. The literature brought out by the missionaries, the manuals, annual reports, magazines, souvenirs etc., brought out by the Christian associations are consulted. The secondary sources include published and unpublished material on Christian missionaries are consulted. The books like the development of Christianity, History of the world Christian movements, History of Christian missionaries etc., are consulted.

Significance of the Study

The Christian missionaries extended services to the poor and sick people of four districts including Kurnool district in Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh. The Christian missionaries introduced female education in Rayalaseema region. In fact, the London Missionary Society was the pioneer in the field of female education in Rayalaseema region.

The missionaries were of the opinion that educating a male person means educating an individual but educating a female means educating the whole family. Another important aspect of the encouragement of female education was that the missionaries thought that the educational activity among the females was an easy access to reach the homes of caste Hindus which was otherwise closed to them.

The London Missionary Society was the pioneer in the fields of promoting the welfare of the untouchables. Before the coming of Missionaries the untouchables namely Mala and Madigas had to live in worst miserable conditions and were not entitled for education and they were segregated and treated as virtual slaves by the upper castes. The missionaries besides their evangelistic work, concentrated on education and social work. They established many schools orphanages and hospitals for the sake of weaker sections of the society.

A new epoch was envisaged among the untouchables who became independent in thought and thus could break the chains of "bondage" to which they were subjected hitherto and led for socio-economic emancipation. The Dalit who were brought by the London Missionary Society Missionaries in later years emerged as eminent educationalists, administrators, Judges, Lawyers, Officers, Doctors, and Principals.

The beginning of the activities of Church of South India - Rayalaseema Diocese could be attributed to the London Missionary Society with its two Dioceses known as Cuddapah Diocese and Anantapur-Kurnool Dioceses administered by two different Bishops under one administrative body known as 'Telugu Combined Committee'.

Prior to the arrival of Christian Missionaries to India the Social evils such as Sati, Untouchability, Child Marriages, Devadasi System, Dowry, Plight of Widows, Burning the Lepers alive were prominent across the length and breadth of India drastically affecting the lives of Women, Children and other suppressed categories causing inequality in socio-economic and religious conditions. The human character of the Christian Missionaries attending to the needy and depressed laid a strong foundation for them at the right hour of Indian History.

The Missionaries started evangelized in different parts of Kurnool District particularly, Atmakur, Dornala, Kurnool, Nandyal, Adoni, Polakal, Nagalapuram, Guduru, Molakalu, C. Belagal etc. The Parishes established at Pattikonda, Devanakonda, Karivena, Kodumuru, Peddakaduburu, Nannuru, Lodipalle, Banaganupalli, Yemmiganuru and Nandikotkur.

The services rendered by Christian Missionaries in Kurnool district are priceless. The Churches, educational institutions, colonies, villages that we see even today stand testimony to the quality of service rendered by them.

Words often lose their power of explanation in relation to the success achieved by the Missionaries. It is they, who made a

good beginning for the modern education in India, laid firm foundation in the field of medicine, introduced latest methods in the agricultural sector, created ultra-modern trends in society and achieved remarkable progress in the arena of science. Christianity acted as a stimulus, an inner urge, creating in them a new dynamic force setting them on with a firm footage, leading to total transformation of personality and mindset.

It led to self-awareness and made the people conscious of their own collective identity. This kind of missionary service provided objective-based vision that went beyond one's village, clan or tribe and offered the world a divine opportunity to understand the service as the Christian message of love, equality and pardon and peace and justice.

Findings: The Christianity is one of the great religions of the world, with was established by Jesus Christ in Palestine in Asia continent. This is the most popular religion among the Islam, Hindu and Sikh etc. It gave equality in Socio-economic and religious context to the people. Jesus Christ says all are equal and same in the Universe. He trained 12 apostles to spread Christianity to world.

The Bible is the holy book for Christians, like the Quran to Muslims or Mohammadans, Adigranth to Sikhs, Pitakas to Buddhism and Bhagavad-Gita to Hindus. The Bible clearly says that about religious, socio-economic and cultural activities for all in equal sense. This Christianity spread from Palestine to India and given message about the Christianity to attracted the Dalit.

Later Portuguese, the Dutch, the English and the French companies established their colonies in India particularly in Andhra. They were maintaining close relations with the Dalit in both Telugu states also.

With their relentless efforts the Missionaries have seen Christianity attain regard and respect in India, worked hard to weed out social inequalities rampant in the past, developed moral values among people, made them understand the value of economy, and set an example to others by leading simple lives by themselves.

As such their way of living by example is ideal and worth of emulation not only for Christians but to humanity at large. The services of The Christian Missionaries spread throughout the district of Kurnool.

The education system in Andhra before the British was based on indigenous methods and was confined in most cases only to higher castes. Traditional education had a religious orientation and lacked rationalism and scientific attitude and failed to question social evils and practices.

The effects produced by the work of the Christian missionaries were of far-reaching consequences. Some appreciated, some tried to reform their own religion in the light of what they had learnt in the Bible classes and missionary institution, and others passionately clung to their ancestral faith.

The idea of social service is certainly derived in part at least, from the principles of Christianity and their application in practice by its followers. The option for the poor is also a rallying call to focus the spiritual, cultural, and physical energies towards saving society from social injustice to bring up social equality.

Another important fact of missionary work in this area was that wives of the Christian Missionaries used to accompany their husbands with equal zeal and interest. They shared the joy and sorrows of their husbands in their Christian service to humanity for many years.

Bachelors and spinsters also came all the way as young missionaries to preach and also for other services. Gospel preaching among women folk also taken up by the established Christian Missions and for that purpose women missionaries were also sent to Rayalaseema.

The Protestant Christian Community in Rayalaseema region was overwhelmingly drawn from the depressed classes which revealed that the mentality of the people was largely one of the subservience. For centuries, their social and economic environment had been such that they had developed a strong "begging" mentality; and even after over one hundred years of Christian influence there was little self-reliance, self-help or initiative.

Whatever ambition they had, they were dependent upon the help of others for fulfillment. There was general inferiority complex. There was a strong community sense, a family and group cohesion. Individuals were not free to do what they would like to do, especially if it involves any departure from their normal practice. These communities were desperately poverty-stricken.

The Rayalaseema Diocese immediately after its formation realised the need for building up of leadership in the Church and identifying missionary zeal among the youth so as to make use of them for missionary work. During pre-independence period the whole village education was managed by the London Missionary Society Schools and later by Church of South India, Rayalaseema Diocese. With the change in government policy on education all these schools were taken over by the State Government and only management was left with the Church.

Realising the economic backwardness of the Dalit who were converted to Christianity and whose children were enrolled in Mission Schools, for their advantage, the missionaries started Boarding Homes, Hostels attached to the schools. With this the children could pursue their education without any hurdle and break.

Another impact of missionary activity in Rayalaseema was the introduction of female education. In fact, the London Missionary Society was the pioneer in the field of female education in Rayalaseema.

The distress of women in Indian Society profoundly moved the hearts of missionary ladies and as such they for the first time started the efforts to wipe away the tears of ladies. They directed all their efforts to counteract the misconceptions about women and combating their ignorance.

The Christian missionaries all over India have been rendering unselfish service for the welfare of the poor, destitute, innocent people of the country, braving all odds including threats to their lives, with a never disappearing smile of on their faces, hoping to see the downtrodden and suppressed humanity grin and laugh with fellow sisters and brothers of the country.

To sum up, the Christianity in India has rich heritage from the first century AD onwards and there are several indigenous movements which helped Indian Church to survive in the

midst of opposition from the critics of non-Christians in India. Though colonial powers gave a wrong picture about Christian faith due to their dominant nature, we should acknowledge their service to Indian church and society.

A radical change is also needed in the five-star life style of leaders who must live closer to the poor and project the image of the suffering and servant church. Further, it is necessary that the authority inherent in these exalted positions be used for the purpose of renewing the church for mission, evangelism, service and human social development.

In order to provide the spiritual foundations for the unity of the Church of South India, all the members from the Bishop to the ordinary lay person in the local congregation must try to seek and find Power in powerlessness; Exaltation in humility; Spiritual bliss in material poverty; Fullness of divine presence in self-emptying; New life in authentic suffering and sacrifice. This kind of attitudinal and behavioral change among all those who are at the helm of affairs would enable the Church of South India - Rayalaseema Diocese to regain the past glory and commitment.

It is not too late to rededicate itself to fulfill the tasks ahead and achieve the goals of Spiritual, Ethical, Evangelical and Social Development in South India in general and Rayalaseema Districts/region in particular.

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