



Christian Missionary's Activities for the Educational Development of Tribal Communities with special reference to the Santals

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Abstract: *The role of missionaries as social reformers and their concern for the socio-economic plight of the tribal people indirectly made them conscious of their own right and encouraged them to finish to fight against social discrimination. The influence of Christian mission has undoubtedly been far greater than the mere growth of Christian population would suggest. Despite the spectacular increase in the number of converts among the Santals the converts still formed only a small proportion of the total Santal population. The missionaries have rendered services in the field of education, medical aid and social aid. Most of the tribes were under the clutches of money lenders causing them to dispossess their land, lose control over their own community based socio-economic structure and indigenous culture. Missionaries have undertaken different step towards making the tribes self-sufficient. The contribution of the church in the field of health services has been well appreciated by all sections of the people as well as by the government. Health centre's run by Christians originally meant to serve the poor.*

Index Terms: Christian Missionary, Conversion, Discrimination, Identity, Marginalized

I INTRODUCTION

Christianity, as other religions, has a distinct source of humanism. Christian missionaries are working sincerely in different parts of the country in developing economic conditions of the socially excluded and the poor. Many people from the untouchables, outcastes and lower caste groups in India were converted to Christianity. This conversion brought about social awakening of the oppressed groups in the country. Christianity provided opportunities of education, new occupations and a life with personal dignity and social acceptance for many. Dalits are socially excluded, in majority of Indian religions, having unequal access to labour markets and social protection mechanisms through formal and informal institutions, lower access to health and education, and lower returns to education and assets. They are more likely to be poor and socially excluded.

Christian missionaries are working sincerely in different parts of the country in developing economic conditions of the socially excluded. They have been playing an important role in cultural, social and economic development in India since long. They empower the marginalized people to claim their rights to employment in different parts of India. Deccan Development Society, for example, works with Dalit women in southern India to empower them. Many individuals from the untouchables, outcastes and lower caste

groups in India were converted to Christianity. This conversion brought about social awakening among the oppressed groups in the country. Christianity provided opportunities for education, new occupations and a life with personal dignity and social acceptance for these people. In India, Christian Missionaries played a pivotal role in the cultural renaissance of Bengal in the 19th century, which marked the awakening of the people of the country from all backgrounds to come to understand human dignity in a novel way and the emergence of a new cultural identity.¹

Christian Missionary activities initiated 'an unhealthy globalization of Christ' which remained intimately connected with western imperialism and 'world capitalism'. With the foreign funding and political power behind it the western and white dominated Indian churches, goes the argument, remained an alien force and could never be integrated with the Indian society.²

Missionary activities have undoubtedly changed the cultural dimension of the simple tribal society, since of all 'the people of outer world' missionaries had the greatest influence upon it. Missionaries, admittedly, 'Braved the distance, isolation, death and discouragement with indomitable courage and fortitude' and ultimately made 'invaluable contribution to civilize the rude tribes.'³ Although the main aim of missionaries was evangelization, the promotion of education through mother tongue and uplift of their socio-economic condition was considered as the preparation Evangelical. This paper is an attempt to analyse the beginning and expansion of such 'preparatory' work of the protestant missionaries among the Santals-'the largest tribe of Eastern India.'⁴ The Santal mission of the Northern Churches (formerly the Indian Home Mission) later became the largest among the tribal missions and attracted the widest notice in India and abroad.

II

The Church Missionaries almost entirely concentrated on education. To them education and evangelization were inter-linked and education was regarded as Preparation Evangelical. Their motto was : 'first remove the extreme ignorance of the Santals, and their moral and material prosperity would automatically follow'. The Indian Home Missionaries were not indifferent to education but were more interested in overall improvement of the Santal society. They showed a keen interest in some social and economic questions of Santals since they believed that encircled by an alien people and having no voice of their own, the Santals deserved their special attention.

The insurrection marked a turning point in the history of the Church Missionary Society's Santal Mission. In his evidence to the Government Officers, investigating its origin after its suppression in December 1855, Droese also emphasized, apart from some specific causes⁵ the 'extreme ignorance' and 'absurd religious beliefs' of the Santals. Reasoning from the non-participation in the insurrection of the Santals in his school areas he concluded that the spread of Christian education among them would be the 'surest way to a peaceful relation between the Santals and the British government'. R. B. Chapman, the inspector of Schools, Bihar shared this view. 'Utter want of education' and the 'gross absurdity' of the Santals' religious beliefs he believed, caused the insurrection. Hence the need not only to educate the Santals but also 'to root out their peculiar religious pursuit' and replace it by the 'human principles of Christianity'. For this, Chapman believed, the 'best arrangement' would be to entrust some 'missionaries of zeal and experience' with the work of educating the Santals.⁶ C. Yule, the commissioner of the newly created district of the Santal Parganas, also believed the spread of Christian education among the Santals to be the 'best security' against the recurrence of insurrections among them.⁷

The Government of Bengal requested the Church Missionary Society (Calcutta Committee) to prepare a plan for educating the Santals, and agreed to provide financial assistance for its execution. The Calcutta Committee confessed that they were 'in a great measure feeling our way in the dark'. Ignorant of the actual requirements of the Santals they found it 'impossible... to lay down any clear or well arranged plan which would prove satisfactory in its principal working'. The plan they submitted to Government was the confined to the suggestion of 'certain principal of procedure'. The Committee suggested that two kind of schools should be set up : the 'ordinary village day schools', and 'industrial school'. The latter would be designed to teach 'various arts, such as leather tanning, shoe making, rope making, carpet making and weaving *tusser* skills'. Missionaries believed that these kinds of vocational training would enrich the Santal economy and generate a spirit of self help among them. The introduction of female education - 'though in an extremely limited measure' was also thought 'desirable'. Infact, the Church Missionaries were the first to advocate the necessity of educating the Santal women. The Committee proposed that the Government should entirely pay the cost of secular

instruction (about Rs 1,000 per month 'at present') in the Santal Schools, fix the relevant syllabus and the Divisional Inspector (not 'inferior' and 'native' inspectors) should inspect the schools. The missionary-in-charge would submit a half yearly or quarterly return showing the expenditure of public fund of secular instruction, but Government should 'in no way' interfere with the religious instruction.⁸

In 1861 the government agreed to pay for Santal education and approved of the scheme which the Church Missionary Society submitted to Government in 1856. The society's scheme provided that Government should bear the entire cost of secular instruction, but Government now agreed to pay half the cost, according to the Grant-in-aid rules. In view of 'the difficulties with which the society has had to contend amongst an uncivilized tribe, speaking a barbarous and almost unknown dialect,' the Government agreed to relax other rules. For instance, the government did not insist on the payment of school fees and asked for a quarterly instead of the usual monthly return to government. The Church Missionary Society accepted the offer, but Puxley objected to the provision regarding the inspection of the Santal schools. The director of public instruction suggested the appointment of a deputy Inspector-'selected and recommended' by the Church Missionary Society-exclusively for those schools. But even the Puxley apprehended that an Inspector in-charge of a small number of schools would try to 'justify' his appointment not only by inspecting them but by, 'taking part of interfering' in their organisation. He would thus 'impair the practical independence' of the missionary-in-charge and 'virtually take the management of the school out of his hands, subjecting him to Government control'. Unwilling to be the 'mere paymaster and account keeper' of schools, Puxley refused to accept the grant.⁹

The Church missionaries would be the best group of people at the time for educating the Santal, Charles Wood, secretary of state for India, intervened. He instructed the Government of India not to insist on the arrangement suggested by Director of Public Instruction for the inspection of the Santal Schools.¹⁰ C. Beadon, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal personally assured Puxley that the Government of Bengal would follow this instruction and that beyond asking for a 'simple, general quarterly return' on the schools, Government would 'have not authority to call for accounts or explanation of internal arrangements of the schools.' The incessant efforts of missionaries had undoubtedly a role in this. The Santal students educated in missionary schools had also left 'a marked influence for the better upon the people of their own village'. A desire for knowledge manifests itself amongst old and young, and the whole tone of the community is raised.¹¹ This taste for education derived largely from the increasing awareness of the Santals that without education their social and economic conditions would scarcely improve. The Santals, who had suffered a great deal from the *mahajans* and *zaminders*, now felt that education would be an instrument by which missionaries themselves perhaps had a role, and their conviction became stronger after their recent revolt in 1870-1871. A. Stark of the Church Missionary Society wrote in 1871: The Santals 'having suffered from the *mahajans* and *zamindars* to qualify themselves, so that they can match their oppressors. Thomas Even, the Baptist missionary, (Secretary of the Indian Home Mission), also felt that the 'poor and oppressors.'¹² Santals looked upon education in the missionary schools as a means of getting rid of the 'rapacious' *zamindars* and *mahajans*.¹³ Similar was the opinion of A. Campbell, the free Church of Scotland missionary among the Santals.¹⁴ H. Woodrow, the officiating Director of the Public Instructions, also shared this view : There is at last a feeling gaining ground 'among the Santals that they must learn to write and do accounts if they are not to be the Hindu moneylenders.'¹⁵

It is also remarkable that during the 1870's a group of Santals longed even for English education. The missionaries mostly interested in elementary education for the masses were at first reluctant to 'waste' their time considered 'superfluous' English education. Even the fairly advanced syllabus in their training schools, did not include English.¹⁶ However, in view of the strong feeling (of the Santals) in favour of it' missionaries soon changed their opinion. If we wish to retain our hold of the very best and most ambitious of the Santals Storrs wrote in 1878, 'we must introduce it (English) to some extent though otherwise I would much rather have excluded it.'¹⁷ This decision was amply justified. Some Santal were so keen on English education that they were ready to pay for it. In 1880, for the first time in the history of the Santal education, forty students from missionary schools were admitted to higher English schools of Santal Parganas. This initial success encouraged missionaries to introduce the payment system in some of their advanced schools in 1880. The Boarding schools were turned into day schools-marking 'a great advance', as Stark remarked, 'on the old system of giving free board and lodging in addition to free education.'

The increasing interest taken by the Bengal Government particularly during the days of George Campbell (1871-74), in the growth of education among the Santals helped the missionaries a great deal. It was during Campbell's administration that tribal education

was first made a regular branch of the Education Department. Government had hitherto made no effort to educate the Santals beyond bearing half the cost of the Church Missionary Society's Santal Schools. A few Santal boys were admitted to the Government *Pathsalas* in Birbhum, Bankura and Madinipur, but these Bengal-medium schools failed to attract the Santals. Campbell, therefore, was eager to make 'every effort' for educating the Santals through Santali.¹⁸ In this, he had to rely on the missionaries. The reports of Director of Public Instruction had shown him that theirs were the only schools which instructed the Santal in their language.¹⁹ So after the decentralization of finance²⁰ he sanctioned a special grant and transferred a large number of Government *pathsalas* to be management of missionaries, particularly to the hitherto neglected Indian Home and American free Baptist missionaries. Such a measure, he believed was not 'a breach' of the Government policy of religious neutrality, since the policy applied only to the people with 'definite religious beliefs and institutions'. As the Santal 'have no religious at all' Government might 'consistently and properly aid the missionary efforts in educating them. The officers of the Education department entirely agreed with Campbell. Fallon, Inspector of Schools, North West Division, wrote in 1876 'If it is really intended to promote education among the Santals, I know no better way of effecting that object than to largely augment the grants now made to the Church Missionary Society and the Indian Home Mission', The Director of public Instruction and the Inspector of Schools Chotanagpur expressed a similar view.²¹ Thus to 1882, the task of educating the Santals was exclusively left to the missionaries societies. Even in 1882, when finding that the limit of the (missionaries societies) private resources has been reached' the education department adopted a scheme for directly educating the Santals, it followed the example of missionary societies. 'Our object', the Director of Public Instruction wrote, 'is to follow up the work 'in harmony' with those 'zealous, self-sacrificing, well-organizing and thoughtful' missionaries 'towards a common end.'²²The success of the Church Missionary Society in educating Santals was remarkable, In 1882, the society had 53 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 1 high English school, a divinity school, three training schools, and two girls' boarding schools at their five mission stations Taljhari, Godda, Hirampur, Bhagya and Bahawa in the Damin-I koh. Of them only the girls' schools had an unimpressive record.

III

The Indian Home Mission was, as we have noted, a joint enterprise of the Baptist missionaries and two Scandinavian missionaries Boerresen and Skrefsrud. The name itself is an expression of the original idea behind the formation of Mission. From its very beginning the missionaries connected with it wanted to make it 'independent of any aid from the Baptist Missionary Society and sought to 'obtain its primary support in India itself, thus making the work distinctly Home Missionary.' Hence the name Indian Home Mission to the Santals, an auxiliary to the Baptist Missionary Society, the Baptist Missionary Society approved of this decision, but continued to make annual grants for the maintenance of missionaries till 1877. The close connection between the Society and the Indian Home Mission is evident also from the fact that Thomas Evens, the Baptist missionary at Allahabad, worked as corresponding Secretary of the new Mission.

Home Missionaries, unlike the Church Missionaries, as we noted earlier, took far keener interest in social economic questions than in education, and the foundation of whatever success they achieved was their intimate knowledge of Santal life and society, and the active co-operation of the Santal converts, whose number was far large than those converted by the Church Missionaries. Their intimate knowledge of Santal life and society was by product of their particular evangelizing method. The method was to preach the Gospel in a most 'simple and ingenuous way' and the aim 'kept in a view is, as far as possible, to retain all the innocent social customs of the people, and to let the Christianity of the of the people, in its outward manifestations, take a Santali form.'²³ This necessitated a profound understanding of Santal life in its various aspects, and the missionaries, 'threw themselves entirely into the work. They ate with them, slept in their cow-houses, joined their hunting excursions, festivals, harvests, marriages, funerals and thus learnt their language and understood their institutions, habits, social customs and religious traditions.'²⁴ Skrefsrud-participated in the highest council of the people or the Hunt council of the Santals and used it 'as an opportunity for connecting the masses and the elite of the Santal people.' He became well known in the Santal society and his mission was referred to by the Santals as 'Kerap Saheb's Mission.

The Indian Home missionaries were more interested in the socio-economic questions of Santals society, but did not altogether ignore education. In his capacity as Secretary of schools of the I.H.M. Skrefsrud outlined an educational system which remained

effective throughout the period under review. The number of elementary schools established by them was 19 by 1882 and they also ran 27 government *pathsalas* translated some primers, composed a Santali dictionary and a Santali grammar which is still a classic in this field. The organisation of education had one distinctive feature, it was integrated into the Santal village community. The school teacher was one of the seven members of the community. The traditional Santal village community had seven officials-the *manjhi*, his four deputies and two priests. The Home missionaries replaced the last two by a Christian teacher and a preacher in the village under the Christian *manjhis*. The villagers provided them with a piece of land, a pair of oxen and a cow for their maintenance. The school teacher had not only to teach the children but also to deal with the zamindars and the *mahajans*.²⁵

The Home missionaries were primarily interested in 'practical education'. The syllabus included instruction in improved agricultural method, and in *zamindari* and *mahajani* accounts. In 1868, to enable the Santals 'to get a better means of livelihood then depending entirely upon agriculture as they do at present', the missionaries contemplated opening a handicraft school to teach them such skills as pottery, carpentry and brick laying. The Government agreed to bear half the cost. But unable to raise the other half they dropped the plan.²⁶ In spite of the fact that, there had been limited progress in literacy among the Santals, their achievements cannot be underestimated. Prior to 1882 the missionaries were the only agencies in the field of education for the Santals, and the Government later emulated their model in formulating their own educational plan.

The Indian Home Missionaries from the very beginning became familiar with nature of the exploitation of the Santals by aliens. Experience led them to take interest in some socio-economic issues of the Santals. The most important of them was the relation of the Santals with the *zamindar* and *mahajans*. They were far more aware than the Church missionaries of the sufferings of the Santals due to the exactions to the *zamindars* and the *mahajans*. The Church Missionaries believed that after the Santal insurrection of 1855, 'in many important ways beneficial legislation the extortion of the Hindu money lenders was checked, and the people, relieved from oppression, returned to peace and order.'²⁷ The second aim of the Indian Home Missionaries was to check excessive drinking, 'the bane' of the Santals, since it became the most powerful obstacle to their social and economic advancement. Missionaries were becoming increasingly worried over the growing intemperance among the Santals. The Santals were habitually 'hard drinkers' Pachwai or rich beer was indispensable at all their social and religious festivals, and the knowledge of this led Government to permit them to brew Pachwai 'for consumption at home but not for sale' in 1835.²⁸

The home missionaries emphasised both the moral and the economic implication of this growing intemperance among the Santals. The Christian Spectator remarked that intemperance became 'bane' of the Home Mission. It 'beat' back all their measures for elevating the Santal, 'ruined' their teachers and made the Santal 'indisposed to receive the Gospel.'²⁹ Excessive drinking also tended to impoverish a large number of Santals. They not only spent all that their wives and children had earned by cutting and selling wood, but also 'clothes brass utensils, cattle, grain and even land, for buying liquor 'leaving their families to seek their food in jungles'³⁰

The role of missionaries as social reformers and their concern for the socio-economic plight of the tribal people indirectly made them conscious of their own right and encouraged them to fight against social discrimination. Thus the 'social uplift' of the tribal's and outcastes, which is one of the principal objects of India Government today, was initially fostered by the Christian mission. The comment of the superintendent of the census operation in 1901 is noteworthy in this regard. 'But for these missionaries the humble orders of Hindu society will for ever remain unraised.'³¹ Christianity, some others have argued, provided the tribals with a new invigorating moral basis of life, and Christianity ideas of brotherhood 'broadened their mental horizon and brought them out of their seclusion and isolation from which they suffered for generation.'³²

Missionaries, however received at times ample assistance from the Government in this task of enlightening the tribals. We have already noted how the Government provided the Santal missionaries with a grand opportunity, for their evangelical work by giving them the charge of famine relief work (1873-74). Missionaries themselves admitted that these welfare services rendered by them were taken by people as illustration of Christian Charity and prepared them mentally for conversion. Missionaries, in general taught the converts to 'render to Caesar the things that are Casers' and opposed the growth of any kind of anti-Government feeling among them.

It is yet to be assessed whether and how far the social distance between Christian converts and ordinary Santals affected the solidarity of the tribal society. The Christianization of a certain section of people did weaken the social unity and tribal solidarity.

This created an estrangement between the Christian and the non-Christian sometimes amounting to mutual hostility. The effect of missionary work on tribal society can thus be summed up : 'Christian has too often brought not peace but a sword dividing father against son and a household against itself.'

IV

CONCLUSION

The influence of Christian mission has undoubtedly been far greater than the mere growth of Christian population would suggest. Despite the spectacular increase in the number of converts among the Santals the converts still formed only a small proportion of the total Santal population. The size of the Christian population in the Santal Society is not by any means a measure of the actual impact of the missionary work on this society. The missionary emphasis on the corporate philanthropic aspect of Christianity, and conviction that the social and economic advancement of the Santas should precede their spiritual uplift had a far more significant impact on tribal life and thought in general.

Education enhances the level of competence to cope up and have better living standards and social milieu. Further, education ensures opportunities for functional employment thereby empowering rural folk for more economic opportunities, growth and development. The better the skills in terms of human capital, higher is the income leading toward a better living standard and socio-economic structure. India has the second largest tribal population in the world and its women continue to be under-represented in formal training programmes limiting their gainful employment in a significant manner. As discussed in this paper, Christian missionaries played an important role in the expansion of education among the underprivileged class of people.

The Christian missionaries in the sphere of education helped in elevating the status of women by giving the lead in female education as well. Probably for this reason the incidence of poverty among Christians has been lower than Hindus and Muslims. The missionaries have rendered services in the field of education, medical aid and social aid. Most of the tribes were under the clutches of money lenders causing them to dispossess their land, lose control over their own community based socio-economic structure and indigenous culture. Missionaries have undertaken different step towards making the tribes self-sufficient. The contribution of the church in the field of health services has been well appreciated by all sections of the people as well as by the government. Health centre's run by Christians originally meant to serve the poor. Many well-equipped and well-established hospitals render service in rural areas too. However, the structural discrimination still remains among different social and religious groups, particularly among the weaker and marginalized sections of the society.

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