



Tribal Development in Koraput – A Ground Breaking Role of Adivasi Mission Board in post independence Era

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Abstract:

Koraput district is the nature lovers' paradise and it is the natural inhabitant of number of colourful tribals. Out of 67 tribal communities in Odisha, 23 tribal groups live in undivided Koraput District. They are called adimjati or Adivasi and live amidst the picturesque region of Koraput. Forest is their lifeline. Due to inaccessible nature of the region, they lived in isolated from the mainstream for long periods of time and remained illiterate, indigent, superstitious and undeveloped. Nobody had paid attention to their upliftment. It was the missionaries who for the first time came closer to this neglected people and decided for their improvement. The astounding progress of non-tribal Christianized people inspired the Adivasi to give a thought to the Mission's mission and by the help of Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Adivasi Mission Board was established in 1974 for their all round development. The AMB established schools, healthcare centres, introduced minor irrigation and constructed dams for improving agriculture and so on. After independence, the entire Koraput area came under the provisions of Schedule -V of the Indian constitution, which devolves social, economic and political power to the indigenous people to shape their vision for their society through tribal self rule.

Keywords: Tribal, Missionaries, AMB, Health, Education, Agriculture.

Introduction

Among the districts of South Odisha, the undivided Koraput is the largest one and it is a district of meadows, rolling mountains, hills and green forests, difficult terrains, plateaus of varying heights, roaring rivers, meandering streams, rapid waterfalls, lakes and vast stretch of water reservoirs. It is the natural abode of several tribal communities known as adivasi, adimjati, girijan, vanavasi, vanyajati or aboriginals etc which identified them as autochthons, original, primitive people. They love to live in the picturesque environ consisting of multifarious beauties of bounteous nature. Tribal habitats nestle around such topographical features with scenic beauty but due to lack of cultivable lands, they were fully dependent upon forest. The tribal people were the indigenous people of this vast forest territory and therefore, called the “Adivasis.” There were many sub-tribes of the Adivasis and had their own identities, cultures, languages, philosophies of life, spiritualities and community life. Living isolated and confined to their limited locality in the forest and hilly terrain, they had little or no outside contact till the first half of the 19th century. Consequently, they remained backward, illiterate, indigent, superstitious and undeveloped. They were considered uncultured, uncivilized and outcaste and leading very miserable life. Out of recognized 67 tribal communities in Odisha, there were 23 tribal communities settled in Koraput District.

1. Advent of Missionaries to Koraput and their contacted with the Tribals -

It is no use reiterating that, the tribal were leading very isolated life. Their joys and sorrows were linked to nature. Their attitude, behaviour was primitive by nature. They could not adjust with the developed society. By the by, they believed in witchcraft and other superstitions. For them, the God of Nature, Earth goddess and Dumas were prominent.

In the face of such an unfavourable ambience the Breklum Missionaries of Germany came to Koraput on date 1882 A.D. and heralded a new epoch for the tribal people. Having settled comfortably, they took a drastic measure for motivating the tribal. They moved to the remote areas, established friendship motivating them and providing medical help without uttering the word conversion. By such measure, they could conquer the hearts of the tribal by dint of their continuous selfishless service by 1908 A.D.

First of all Rev. Timmcke undertook a journey to reach the tribal communities dwelling in these mountainous regions and interact with them. The Adivasi came into the fold of Christianity after long days because they waited and watched the missionary activities which had then been worked on other communities especially scheduled caste and upper caste people and its effects and benefit on the converted Christians. Their apprehension was that converted people would incur the provocation of gods and goddesses of Hinduism but nothing of that sort happened rather they were in better position in comparison to them in the sphere of social, educational, health and religious life and above all were free from caste prejudice.

However, the initial effort for social development of the tribal was taken up by the early missionaries of Breklum Mission which saw the establishment of mission stations at Laxmipur (1908 A.D) and Doliambo (1911 A.D). Today, the tangible result of upward social mobility of the tribal communities of these areas is the contribution of these mission stations (now Deaneries) over the past several years. Immense and profound was the love of Rev. R. Tauscher and Rev R. Speck for tribal people. Rev. R. Tauscher was affectionately called called Baba (father) by the tribal. He never hesitated to take the food of the Adivasi and it is said that Baba Tauscher lost his life by eating mushroom. Thereafter Rev. R. Speck and Rev. Kleinig took a lot of pain for for the development of the people. After proper motivation, the mass proselytisation of Adivasis took place in the year 1934 A.D. and the process or tribal development was accelerated.

2. Need of tribals's own Organisation –

Time changes and so changes the dynamics of a society. India got Independence in 1947. The socio-political conditions gradually took to a steady change. Local leaders elected in the Silver Jubilee Synod of Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1954 took over the responsibility to manage the affairs of JELC from Breklum missionaries. Thereafter missionary activities among the Adivasis were carried out by Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church.

History has reason to reply to the question why the Adivasi wanted to form a separate Board for them. The Pro-Christians (Scheduled Castes) developed much better than the Adivasi in respective of social, educational and economic fields.(In addition to this, the food habits, dress, rites, rituals, festivals and ceremonies were also totally different from the Scheduled castes).(The bracketed point is not clear). The Adivasi pastors also did not like to work under the non-Adivasi Deans. That's why, the Adivasi, the inborn lovers of socio cultural belongingness felt their comfort zone only under the local leaders.

In the meantime, the Adivasi leaders who were well trained in pastoral studies in 1973 A.D. felt the great need of missionary work among their own people and wanted to establish a separate Mission Board. The missionaries minutely studied the cause of the Pastors and accepted the proposals of the Adivasis to form a separate institution for them and two pastors Prabhudan Pangi and Moses Macho were invited to Germany by the Nordelbisches Missions Zentrum (NMZ) which is the present name of the Schleswig Holstein Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society. A consultation was held there in 1973 A.D. in the presence of the JELC Bishop Rev. A.C. Kondpan and NMZ officials. It was agreed to form a separate board to spread the Gospel of God among the Adivasis.¹ The two representatives enlightened them on the need of establishing separate board for tribals and appealed to provide necessary funds to carry out evangelical work among their own people. At last, the SHEL M Society accepted the proposal of the pastors and allowed to set up a separate organization exclusively for the tribal. This is how Adivasi Mission Board (AMB) was born on 1st March 1974 after 20 years of Indian leadership to grow in their own culture and own language.²

Since then missionary work among the Adivasis has been carried out freely in the Deaneries of Doliambo, Laxmipur, Nandapur, Mirabali and Baghlamti. This Board was established for all round development of the tribal.

3. Objectives of Adivasi Mission Board:

The basic objectives of AMB were the spread of evangelistic work, eradication of illiteracy, economic upliftment of people by introducing minor irrigation, construction of dams and establishment of agricultural farms (Laxmipur), awareness of health and hygiene by establishing health clinics, mobile health service and building hospitals (Kotpad, Nabarangpur, Bissam Cuttack, Doliambo etc), protection of tribal communities from exploitation of upper class people, local money lenders and oppression from government employees (Bethi and Goti system) etc.

P. Pangi, the first president of AMB, made the aims and objectives of the formation of Adivasi mission Board comprehensive by adding some more like preaching the Gospel of God fruitfully in their respective languages. Further, Pangi reports that, 'the objectives of the AMB are to preach the Gospel to people, to educate adults children and women in common schools, to provide health care system and to impart theological training.'

All the Adivasi workers shouldered the responsibility to work dedicatedly for the upliftment of their own people. Several new pastors took leadership under the banner of the newly organized Board. Tribe like Kondhs, Gadabas, Jhudia Porajas, Pengo Porajas, Doras, Gond, Koyas, Didayis, Bondas, Malis, Ronas and Bhattaras (Bhatras) came forward with renewed spirit of dedication and pastors were selected among them.³

Pastoral stations were established in the villages. Besides the four main deaneries, Doliambo, Laxmipur, Mirabali and Baghlamti, the AMB established other nine pastoral stations in eight years. In these stations emphasis was given on adult education. Many young boys and girls learned to read and write for personal development and employment opportunities. For education and lodging of children, four hostels were established where students from 1st to 11th Standards were lodged and taught. Consequently, a tremendous improvement was observed among the Adivasis within a short period of time in the field of education.

The medical mission is listed as the second most priority of the AMB. This service was rendered in many villages through which the Adivasis were benefited and realized the love of Christ. Some health clinics were established under the Jurisdiction of the AMB for the treatment of both Christians and non-Christians. Doliambo had a weekly visiting clinic having a 16 bedded hospital. Two weekly clinics were at work at Sapta Maha and Laxmipur. Apart from these, Mahaguda, Borabandh and Alubadi clinics were maintained by 40 Adivasis village health workers.⁴ Apart from that the AMB had established Christian Rural Health Programme (CRHP) and Mirabali Community Health Project in this tribal areas.⁵

The wives of the Pastors and Preachers voluntarily engaged themselves in preaching and teaching women in their respective areas. The Adivasis accepted Christianity easily as the Gospel was preached in their own languages.

4. Exemplary Dedication of Missionaries -

The contribution of missionaries to the development and popularity of AMB is highly appreciated. In this regard Rev. P. Pangi again observes that,” the AMB is proud of receiving services of our western workers within these eight years and rendering valuable work for the tribal are Pastor Dismeyer, Mrs. and Pastor Kruse, Pastor Starke, Pastor Hoiker, Pastor and Mrs. Kleinig, Mrs. and Dr. Dismeyer, Miss Barbara Kloss, Pastor Johannes Solture, Pastor Rolls, Matigie, sweisswinkel, Pastor Harri Meyer, Pastor Hymann, Mrs. Elisabeth Amon, and Mrs. Annelore Nichols.”⁶

The missionary brothers and sisters of the Home Board used to work in different fields of the AMB for three months each in these villages like Tankua, Sahuput, Tikrapada, Bodapadar and Badsandubadi. They rendered service with body, mind and soul. Even missionary like Rev.R.Tauscher sacrificed his for the sake of tribal.

Table-I

Adivasi Mission Board at a Glance

Year of establishment	No. of Deanery	No. of Parish	No. of Pastors	Headquarters
Ist Mar.1974	06	29	29	Tauscher Bungalow Koraput

Sources: (Collected from Souvenir 125th Years Jubilee of JELC (1882-2007).

The statistical report of the Adivasi Mission Board shows the progressive work.⁷

Table-II

Sl. No.	Workers of AMB Deanery / Institution	Pastors	Pastor Candidates	Evangelists	Total
1.	Doliambo Deanery	6	1	55	62
	Laxmipur Deanery	5	1	48	54
	Nandapur Deanery	4	1	30	35
	Mirabali M. Field	2	1	21	24
	AMB Office	1	(Office Staff)	4	4
		17	4	154	184
2.	Schools				
	UP School at Doliambo and Gotiguda –	2			
	L.P. School at Hat Suku -	1			
	M.E. School at Doliambo -	1			
	High School at Doliambo -	1			
3.	Doliambo Boarding Homes – Doliambo, Nandapur, Sindhiput and Laxmipur –	4			
4.	Adult Education Centre – Doliambo and Laxmipur -	2			
5.	Health Centres – Doliambo, Sapta Maha, Laxmipur, Mahaguda, Bodo, Alubadi under CRH Project.				

Sources: R.Tauscher, Schleswig-Holstein Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society, p. 153

Great workers who claim mention for their unforgettable love and services in AMB were Rev.R.Tauscher, Rev. R .Speck, Miss Agnes Hertz, Rev. Ian E. Kleinig, Sister Ane Maari, Sister Ericka, Rev. Dr. F. Dubnei, Dr. Jacob Dhoraraj, Mr. Israel Khyudra, Bishop Anthon Asha, Bishop A. C. Kondpan and Dr. Mosidas Suna.⁸

5. Environmental Protection of AMB –

The Missionaries were not lagging behind in the preservation of environment too. Rev. F. Huebner, Bishop of Kiel, Germany started a programme in 1975 known as the Adivasi Afforestation Ashram Bhai Bhouni (AAABB)⁹ taking the help of the villagers around the Deomali hill which is divided into two peaks side by side locally called Bhai Bhouni (brother and sister) and has earned the credit of being the highest peak in Odisha(5486ft) Afforestation programme was carried out under the direct supervision and guidance of a dynamic retired government agricultural officer Mr. Gregar Rath. In this programme, besides the preservation of environment, plantation of the trees like Eucalyptus, pines, Acacia was done. The other objectives of this programme were to generate the income of the people by growing the grafted mango, guava, cashew and coffee etc., and generation of employment during their off seasons.¹⁰

The first term of AMB's work which had been sanctioned for five years only was reviewed by the Synod in 1979. Satisfied, it recommended an extension of the term as for another five years. With the march of time AMB has taken a lot of beneficial measures for the development of Tribal in the field of agriculture, finance, education and eradication of health hazards.

The AMB continued from 1st March 1974 to 1984. The second mission consultation was held at Jeypore in the year 1984 when the name AMB was christened as Adivasi Christiya Samaj (ACS) by the effort of the then President Rev. Moses. Its byelaw got the approval at the ACS Synod held at Doliambo from 5th to 8th May 1984 A.D. The renaming won wide acclaim by the tribal as they found their primitive culture and language reflected in it.

Table -III

The statistical Report of 1984 of the Adivasi Christiya Samaj shows the progressive mission work.

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6. Conclusion:

The work of the Breklum mission in the sphere of tribal development was innovative and epoch making. It broke the isolationism of the tribal society and initiated benevolent measures which the government took up in the later period. The steps taken for the improvement and amelioration of the tribal by the local leaders and the missionaries were praiseworthy.

This mission was the first one to establish a close rapport with the tribal society by bringing a handful of welfare schemes. The phrase ‘missionary’s spirit’ even today, symbolizes the devotion and self-sacrifice of the alien Christian missionaries in the remotest hills and forests. The welfare activities taken up by the Mission was called the ‘work of mercy’. They dedicated and sacrificed their valuable lives for the betterment of the aboriginals of this region.

After independence, the entire Koraput area came under the provisions of Schedule V of the Indian constitution, which aims at conferring social, economic and political power to the indigenous people and grants autonomy to shape their vision for their society through tribal self rule. ACS as tribal social Institution must utilize these opportunities for total upliftment of their people as well as their fellow communities. At present, Government has adopted such measures for the development of tribal and other poor section of the society of which the missionaries were the forerunners.

7. References:

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