

CHRISTIAN MISSIONERIES AND THEIR ACTIVITIES FOR THE UPLIFTMENT OF DALITS IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

The term 'Dalit' is from Marathi language, literally means "the broken and oppressed". Arya Samaj, a hindu reform movement and Dr.B.R.Ambedkar were the first to use this term to designate the members of formerly untouchable castes. Dalits were excluded from the four-fold Varna system and they formed the unmentioned fifth Varna, and so were also called Panchama. While Scheduled Castes (SC) is the legal term for those who were formerly known as "untouchables", the term Dalit also encompasses Scheduled Tribes (ST) and other historically disadvantaged communities who were traditionally excluded from the society.

Dalits are a mixed population, consisting of groups across South Asia. In India, the status of Dalits is associated with their occupation. They are regarded as ritually impure, as they do leatherwork, butchering or removal of rubbish, animal carcasses and human waste. Dalits work as manual labourers cleaning streets, latrines and sewers.

KEY WORDS: Christian missioneries, Dalit, Hindu, Socio-religious, Social activities

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Introduction

The term 'Dalit' is from Marathi language, literally means "the broken and oppressed". Arya Samaj, a hindu reform movement and Dr.B.R.Ambedkar were the first to use this term to designate the members of formerly untouchable castes. Dalits were excluded from the four-fold Varna system and they formed the unmentioned fifth Varna, and so were also called Panchama. While Scheduled Castes (SC) is the legal term for those who were formerly known as "untouchables", the term Dalit also encompasses Scheduled Tribes (ST) and other historically disadvantaged communities who were traditionally excluded from the society.

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Dalits were commonly banned from participating in Indian social life. They were physically segregated from the surrounding community. For example, they should not enter a temple or a school and were required to stay outside of the villages. Other castes took elaborate precautions to prevent incidental contact with Dalits. But now the scenario has been changed. Many measures have been taken up by the Government of India after Independence to uplift the dignity of Dalits and some of them have become doctors, engineers, or even IAS officers.

Social reform activities

Untouchability was practiced, more or less throughout the country. Therefore the movement to abolish it came into existence in almost all parts of the country. However some of the revolutionary socio – religious reformers of Andhra Pradesh in their individual capacity have also strived to alleviate the sufferings and the pitiable conditions of the unfortunate Dalits. Among them are Brahma Naidu, Vemana, and Veerabrahmmam.

Brahma Naidu :

He was a radical socio – religious reformer in the 12th century. He was the minister of Haihayas and belonged to Velama caste. He championed Vira Vishnavism in Palanadu and allowed Dalits into Lord Chennakesava of Macherla temple. Even before becoming the minister he used to travel through villages to know the sufferings of people and delivering lectures on Vishnavism in a radical manner. In this process many people including Dalits became his followers. He organized Chapakudu or Sahapankthi Bhojanam (the common meal on the mat) where people of all castes ate with equal status. He even adopted Kanukula Kannamaneedu, a dalit (mala) boy as his son. Balachendrudu or Baludu, the son of Brahma Naidu always called, Kannama as his elder brother. A temple was dedicated to Kannama, an untouchable dalit hero, at Karampudi. His soldiers were of all castes from Brahmin to dalits. Gosangis (Madiga) were very strong warriors.

Vemana:

Vemana was undoubtedly one of the outstanding social reformers of Medieval Andhra history belonging roughly to the 17th century. Basically Vemana was a philosopher and poet. A Telugu scholar Rallapalli Anantha Krishna Sharma stated that Vemana spent the best part of his life in Cuddapah and Kurnool districts. He opposed caste system.

As a social critic he attacked and disposed upon human concern with externals, that is ritual, image worship, caste prejudices etc. He questioned the meaningless caste distinctions and the Brahminical customs. He was very much serious about the high caste traditions and against the idea of caste based occupations.

Vemana said an honest untouchable is nobler than a dishonest Brahmin. He questioned that “if the beef eating is the cause to be called untouchables, what will be the castes of those who consume faeces eating pigs and chicken?”. He also asked people “why vilify a mala again and again. Aren't his flesh and blood are the same as yours?”. After putting so many questions regarding caste he concluded “the mala is not an untouchable at any point of time in this world. Instead of considering a person who cannot keep his word as untouchable, who calls him a mala is a bigger mala [penumala]. There is no doubt that Vemana's literature criticised the caste system, taught equality of all human being and reformation in society and propagated such

human values, as social equality and social justice. His literature laid a formal foundation stone for the future non – Brahmin and social reform movements in Andhra Pradesh.

Potuluri Veera Brahmam:

Potuluri Veera Brahmam was known as the saint of Andhra Pradesh and belonged approximately to the 17th century. He was also considered to be a social reformer who strove to elevate the social status of the Dalits. He conceded his Dalit (Madiga) disciple an equal status on par with his other disciples. He was born in a kamsali family at a village called Potuluru in Cuddapah district of Andhra Pradesh. It was believed that he did many miracles and predicted impending cast astrophies and ultimate end of the world, the Kalagnana.

He propagated the message of Virabrahmmam among the dalits and many of them became his followers. He strove hard to put an end to the social discrimination and tried to uplift Dalits equal o other communities.

The first conference of the depressed classes was held at Vijayawada in November, 1917 under the presedentship of Shri Bhagya Reddy Varma, the pioneer of Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh and later was so many conferences were held at various places. In all these conferences the resolutions were unanimously passed urging the concerned Government to reserve adequate seats in the decision making bodies and to throw open the schools for the depressed classes.

Thereafter the Harijan Sevak Sangh, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and the Scheduled Caste Organizations under the leadership of Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar spread their network, as in other states, in Andhra Pradesh also. In Andhra Pradesh Dalit leaders like Shri Gurram Joshua, Gottipati Brahmayya, Kusum Dharmanna, Damodaram Sanjeevayya, Smt. J.Eshwari Bai and many others worked for the uplift of the Dalits.

It was because of the efforts of the leaders of the Dalit liberation movement, the process of the eradication of untouchability had started in the state. Shri M.V.Bhagya Reddy Varma (1888 – 1939) was the pioneering leader of the Dalit movement in the entire Andhra Pradesh. He led the Adi – Hindu movement, through which he could bring about a new awakening among the dalits

in Andhra Pradesh. After his sad demise, the Dalit liberation movement, led separately by Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi was active in Andhra Pradesh.

Social activities by Christian missionaries

Christianity marked its beginning in India with the arrival of St.Thomas, one of the Apostles of Jesus Christ, in 52 A.D. The presence of Christianity in India is aged almost two thousand years commencing from the arrival of St.Thomas, who was martyred in 72 A.D. in Chinnamalai, Mylapore Chennai. Since then Christianity spreads its roots in different parts of the country mainly in south India.

Commenting the contributions made by Christians Dr.Rajendra Prasad said on December 18, 1955, “Remember, St.Thomas came to India when many of the countries of Europe had not yet become Christians, and so those Indian who trace their Christianity to him have a longer history and a higher ancestry than that of Christians of many of European countries. And it is really a matter of pride to us that it is so happened”.

The Christian missionaries offered wonderful service for the Dalits in Andhra Pradesh. Christian missionaries came from Canada, U.K, America, England etc. and noticed the social evil and felt that this evil could be eradicated from the society by providing good education, economic upgrading and social status. They preached the gospel and built schools, colleges and hospitals. Especially the Roman Catholic Church had brought out tremendous task in providing good education. They also provided training centres for the graduates as well as under graduates and appointed them as teachers in their schools headed by these Christian missionaries.

C.S.I (CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA) :

The Church of South India (C.S.I) is the successor of the Church of England in India after the Independence of India. It combined the South India United Church (Union of the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians) and then fourteen Anglican dioceses of South India and one in Srilanka and the South Indian district of the Methodist church with a membership of over four million. CSI is one of four united churches in the Anglican communion.

The Anglican presence in India dates back four hundred years to sixteen hundred when queen Elizabeth I was on the throne of England from that time until with in living memory British chaplains and missionaries arrived in ever increasing number and were the first missionaries to the expatriate British community. The Diocese of Calcutta was promulgated in 1814. Its territory included not only India but also those countries known today as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Srilanka and also. With the foundation of the Dioceses of Madras in 1835 and the Dioceses of Bombay in 1837 the Indian church was formed into a province, with the bishop of Calcutta being metropolitan ex-officio.

LUTHERN CHURCH:

Lutherism spread through out Scandinavia during the 16th century. As the monarch of Denmark - Norway (also ruling Iceland and the faroe Iceland) and the monarch of Sweden adopted Lutherism. Through Baltic – German and Swedish rule, Lutherism also spread in to the Baltic countries of Estonia and Latvia. Since 1520 regular Lutheran services have been held in Copenhagen. Under reign of Fredrick (1523-33) Denmark- Norway remained officially catholic. Although Fredrick initially pledged to per secure Lutherans, he soon adopted a policy of protecting Lutheran preaches and reforms the most significant being hanstavsens etc.,

Missionaries contributed unimaginable services to the Dalits today they are called Dalit Christians, a new name upgrading respect for the suppressed people in the society. All the missionaries of the above said denominations established holistic centers for the Dalit. Dalit Christian nurses were trained by the missionaries and had been offering selfless services to the society in the hospitals. The entire society had been benefitted and praised the services of Dalit Christian nurses.

Even in the schools and colleges the Dalit Christian teachers have been offering great services to the students with great dedication sincerity and hard work. It is all because of the Christian missionaries and their preachings of the teachings of Jesus Christ, who said “LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THEY SELF”. As a result, inspite of the caste atrocities, these people have contributed so much for the Indian society especially in Andhra Pradesh.

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH:

The history of the Catholic church begins with the teachings of Jesus Christ, Who lived and preached in the first century AD in the province of Judea of the Roman Empire. The Church says that its bishops are the successors to the apostles of Jesus, and that the Bishop of Rome, is also known as the Pope, is the sole successor to Saint Peter , who is believed to have been appointed as the head of the church who is said to have ministered in Rome. The early Christian church was very loosely organized, resulting in diverse interpretations of Christian belief. A more structured hierarchy evolved by the end of the second century and bishops began congregating in regional synods to resolve doctrinal and policy issues. By the third century, the Bishop of Rome began to act as a court of appeals for problems that other bishops could not resolve.

In Andhra Pradesh the Roman Catholic Mission established schools, colleges, hospitals and orphanages at different places.

Dalit Christians were given seats and some of them were given free education. Though the schools and colleges, hospitals and orphanages were established for Dalit Christians, a good number of students from other minority communities as well as students from upper communities were also provided good education and provided treatment in the hospitals as well as old age homes provided shelter for all communities and love and care was given to them. This way Roman Catholics did great service not only for Dalit Christians and also for other castes.

SALVATION ARMY :

The Salvation Army was founded in London's East in 1865 by a Methodist reform church minister William Booth and his wife Catherine. Originally Booth named the organization as the East London Christian Mission, The name the Salvation Army developed from an incident during 19 and 20 May. William Booth was dictating a letter to his secretary George Scott Raitton and said "we are a volunteer army". Bramwell Booth head his father and said "volunteer, I am no volunteer, I am a regular". Raitton was instructed to cross out the word "volunteer" and substituted the word "salvation". It was modeled after the military, with its own flag and its own hymns. "Army" would wear the armies own uniform for meetings and ministry work. The ministers were given appropriate ranks as officers and the members were termed as "soldiers".

Contributions of Christianity to Reformation, and Modern democracy

The modern social awakening of the oppressed groups in India had its beginning with the conversion of untouchables, outcastes and lower castes of people into Christianity.

It strived against existing inequalities. The marginalized were mainstreamed and gained opportunities for education, new occupation for life with personal dignity and social acceptance. The modern elementary school system was almost entirely supported by Christian mission. In the education sphere, the opening of schools, colleges and hospitals for Indian women was undoubtedly the effort of the Christian mission.

Christians raised voice against evil practice of widowhood of child widows before attainment of 18 without her consent to be a widow. Thus Christian contribution in the country marked with: Democratization of the government, women empowerment and pro-democracy movement, pioneering force in nationalization.

Contributions of Christianity to Social education and media.

The Nazrani Deepika established in the year 1887 is a clear example of Christian contribution in the field of literature and art field. The contribution to the culture through the scholarly work of Christians is to be appreciated. Max muller, Herman Gundert etc were prominent figures in the field. The concept of one country was possible through the spread of English as medium of communication. The Indian vocabulary was enriched with contact to the foreign languages. New ideas and ideals, institutions and establishments, types and styles and genres in literature (eg: Novel, short stories etc.) and government were introduced to the Indian life by them. The effective establishment of Indian journalism was due to the missionaries of the Serampore. In 1818 missionaries began to publish a weekly newspaper in Bengali and English; and following their example Indians took up their profession in earnest. The modern sciences, educational pattern, manners, customs and practices relating medicine, health, hygiene and cleanliness, food habits and dress,- all found their way into Indian Society and culture and were often blindly imitated and often, irrelevantly copied and propagated, the contribution of both native and foreign Christians of the country.

Contributions of Christianity to Education:

Educational service of the Christianity has been admitted as highly valued service to the nation. In spite of oppositions they function well and almost 90% of the beneficiaries of such institutions are non-Christian brothers and sisters. In India there are thousands of schools and hundreds of colleges offer accommodation for poor children as well as provision for free education. Thus the Christian mission in the education sphere helped in elevation of the status of women by giving the lead in female education. Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddi comments about the Christian contribution to the women emancipation,“ I honestly believe that the missionaries have done more for women’s education in this country than the, government itself.” The mission sponsored education among the weaker sections of the society facilitated alternative more remunerative and higher status employment. Educational contributions have helped to form a literate culture among the Christians and the nearby community to follow. Christian education has also fostered the formation of students’ movements which has an impact in the universities. For eg. World Students Christian Federation, All India Catholic University Federation etc. social services and social service camps have also been a regular feature of many Christian colleges.

The employment generating training institutions, financial institutions like credit societies and mutual help societies have helped the improvement in the life standards of the Christians and neighboring people. The educational quality promoted occupational mobility and societal mobility in the caste ridden society. Obviously, educational mobility led to occupational mobility. Christians are pioneers in the field of education in Kerala. It is impossible to find out from the decrees or any other reliable source the exact nature of these schools or how far they have conformed to the requirement of any organized system of education. But it has produced remarkable changes in the society and culture.

Contributions of Christianity to Social Change

The church agencies have 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 basis 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 has 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 have helped break down caste barriers. The more important among these books are the Jati Vicharana by Dr. Moegling and journals like Satya Deepika, Sbhapatra etc.

Contributions of Christianity to Centers of Mercy

There are hostels and orphanages for boys and girls attached to educational institutions to help the children of poor parents. Great care is given to deaf and dumb, mentally retarded, aged, destitute, lepers, AIDS patients etc. there are thousands of such centers and committed persons doing voluntary services in the field. Amidst oppositions it runs rehabilitation centers for HIV/AIDS infected persons, mentally ill, prisoners etc as an expression to the commitment to humanity.

Centers of Conscientization

Conscientization is one of the three levels of social concern expressed by the Christians - Beneficence, Development and Conscientization. Conscientization to execute justice, develop the socially backward, downtrodden and marginalized. For this purpose technical schools and nursing centers are run by Christians.

Today, Christian centers have become centers of conscientization which is a process of awakening the total person to a fresh discovery of his or her dignity and potentialities. Special efforts are made for female education. These centers brought about awareness, an insight, a cultural transformation and offered opportunities for a better standard of living and scope for creativity. It also led to the opening up of the villages and gave them an exposure to the outside world leading to social transformation. Conscientization is one of the new ventures of Indian Christians. This is clear from the famous 'breast-cloth' agitation in Travancore in the early nineteenth century, which met with a measure of success. As early as 1812, Colonel Munro, the British Resident of Travancore, issued an order that permitted 'women converted to Christianity to cover their bosoms as obtained among Christians in other countries.

Contributions of Christianity to Medical Mission

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 government. Quite a few church personnel are fully involved in public health services, nutritional programmes and hygiene and sanitation programmes. There are mobile clinic and awareness programmes run in the rural areas. In the field of medical care the contribution of the Christianity is meritorious. The healing mission received some priority in the agenda of the missionaries and churches. Health centers run by Christians originally meant to serve the poor. Many of well equipped and well established hospitals render service in rural areas and slums others do not reach

The pioneering endeavour of Christian inspiration, initiated both by the missionaries and others, in the educational, literary, medical, social, moral and religious spheres was highly productive and, on the whole, the missionaries and Christian institutions in the state have rendered immense service to the advancement of the Dalits. Christian missionaries from foreign countries have come and established their institutions in almost all the districts of Andhra Pradesh.

They uplifted by providing good education and economic stability. When women are educated it is a great benefit to the entire family. C. Rajagopalachari once said “A graduate mother is equal to 5 graduate fathers” it is true. The educated women of the Dalit Christian families have been looking after their children concentrating on their education. The fruits of the hard task of the Christian missionaries are seen today in the society. Many I.A.S. officers , I.P.S. officers, Doctors, Engineers and professors have come forward from these Dalit Christian families, establishing respect and recognition for them in the society. Thanks to the Christian missionaries.

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