

**GROWTH OF MISSIONARY ORGANIZATION: A
SOLID CORNERSTONE FOR THE EVANGELIZATION
IN UNDIVIDED KORAPUT DISTRICT**

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Abstract:

The undivided Koraput district is the district of natural scenery with rolling mountains, meadows, roaring rivers, dense forests, rapid falls and valleys. It was the homeland of primitive and colorful inhabitants i.e. the aboriginals. The environment with its mystery and enchantment panorama of flora and fauna has made Koraput undoubtedly a "Nature Lovers paradise". This district constitutes the middle part of the mythological 'Dhandakaranya' as narrated in Ramayana, where Rama wandered for long 14 years in exile with his wife Sita and brother Laxman. In spite of that, this district was isolated from outside world for centuries together and remained backward due to its inaccessible and hilly region. The denizens of this district were illiterate, ignorant, indigent and superstitious. There was no healthcare and educational system in this area. The economic standard of the people was very miserable and deplorable. There was rigidity of caste system and untouchability in the society. The lower caste people were considered outcaste, uncivilized and untouchables. In this unhealthy ambience, the missionaries of Breklum Mission in western Germany came to Koraput on 15th May, 1882 A.D. and heralded a new epoch by established missionary organization and did evangelical work among the helpless people.

Keywords: Bastar, Koraput, missionaries, Breklum mission, churches, seminary.

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Introduction:

The arrival of **Christian missionaries** marks a new chapter in the history of Koraput district. With their noble motive, they rendered valuable services in this region in all aspects and heralded a new epoch both for the people and this area. The first two missionaries named Rev. Ernst Pohl and Rev. Hermann Bothmann came to Koraput on **15th May 1882 A.D.** and since then, the missionary activities of Koraput district was begun. Initially, Bastar, the capital of Jagdalpur, was their first chosen mission station but the hostile nature of the Bastar Maharaja **Bhairam Deo**, proved blessing in disguise for this hilly region of Koraput. God's plan is beyond understanding. Neither the **Breklum Mission** nor the pioneer Missionaries had thought that Koraput would be the first mission station and the missionary activities one day bring a sweeping change in this area.

❖ **Christian Missionaries : Missionaries** - missionaries are the members of a religious group sent into an area to promote evangelism or ministries of service, such as education, literacy, social justice, health care and economic development. The word derived from the Latin Missionem (nom. missio) was first originated in 1598 when the Jesuits sent members abroad. *Missionem's* meaning "act of sending" or *mittere*, meaning "to send". The word was used in the light of its biblical usage; In the Latin version of the Bible, Christ uses the word while sending the disciples to preach in his name. The term is most commonly used for Christian missions, but can be used for any creed or ideology. The missionaries of Koraput District were the missionaries of Breklum mission of West Germany, who came to this district on 15th May, 1882 A.D.

❖ **Breklum Mission: The Breklum mission** - It was built on the foundation of **belief and prayer**. It was the brain child of the Rev. Christian Jensen, a peitist of Breklum in the Northern part of West Germany. He was a very devoted servant of Lord Jesus Christ - the only Saviour and Redeemer of Souls, The theme of his prayer was '**Jesus Saves Souls**'. His entire work planned for mission work was 'founded on **faith and action**' and his motto was '**Beten and Arbeiten**' (pray and work). To produce missionaries, he set up 'a Breklum Mission Seminary' on 10th April 1877 A.D. This institution served a great purpose in producing missionaries which fulfilled the aim of Christian Jensen. To begin with, 12 members were admitted and dedicated for the Lord's service and two out of the 12 were the first missionaries to India – Koraput. They were

Rev. Ernst Pohl and Rev. Harmann Bothmann. Bothmann was a man of practical bent of mind and master builder whereas Rev. Ernst Pohl was a Lutheran Theologian and Artist. They came to Koraput District on **15th May, 1882 A.D.** This great mission set to doing missionary work not only in India but also in Africa and South America.

The missionaries deeply studied people, their disposition, temperament, religion, caste, likes, dislikes, behavior and customs without uttering the word proselytisation. After minutely observation, they could discover the various problems of people such as acute health care system, gross illiteracy, miserable economic condition and unhealthy social aspects and planned to introduce and implement some welfare schemes for their benefits and improvement. First of all, they developed contact with the local people and tried to interact with them through conversation and progressive work. The most important problem for the missionaries to communicate with them was the language. So, they learned local languages i.e. Odia and kuvi came closer to the people and preached Gospel of God through these languages.

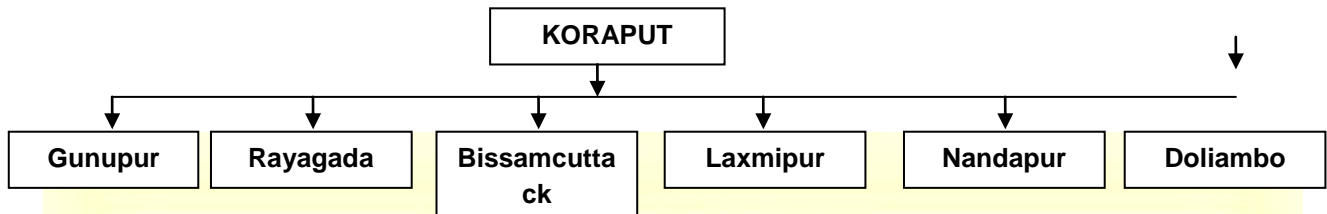
They started evangelical work in this region with noble motives but initially stunt opposition and harassment from the royal officials, policemen and high caste people came their way. However, the missionaries did not lose their hearts, rather marched forward to continue their missionary work at any cost (Waack : 235- 277). First of all, they decided to establish churches for the people because Church is the agent of God's mission in the world to preach His Gospel. The central theme of the Church is the salvation of God through Jesus. The Holy Spirit is active in the Church. So, Church connects the people and God together. The whole mission of the Church is motivated by the power of Holy Spirit which initiates the non-believers for proselytisation.

Table-III

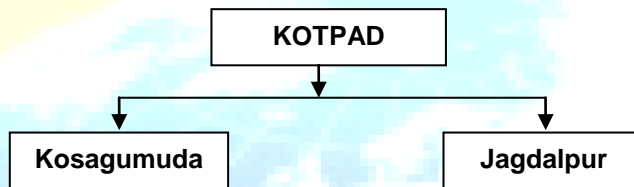
ORGANISATION

PLACES OF CHURCHES: KORAPUT DISTRICT

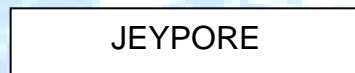
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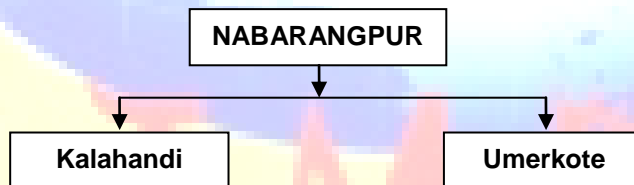
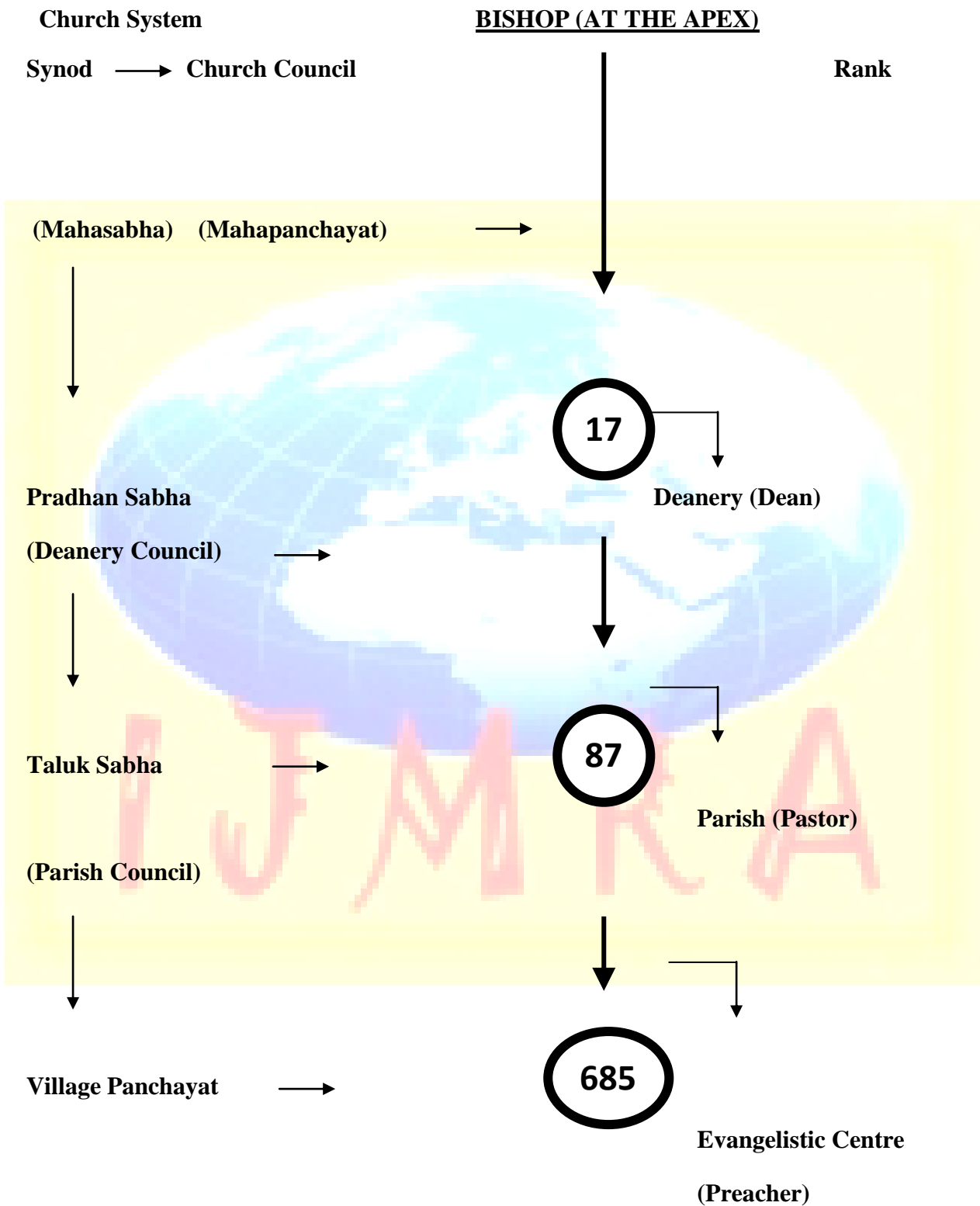


Table-IV

**JELC THE CENTRE OF MISSIONARY ACTIVITY IN KORAPUT DISTRICT
(ADMINISTRATIVE HIERACHY OF JELC ORGANISATION)**



2. Koraput Mission Station – 1884 A.D

Bastar (now in Chhattisgarh district of Madhya Pradesh) in central India was the prime choice of missionaries to establish the first mission station. But due to hostile attitude of the Jagdalpur Maharaja, Bhairam Deo, the Pioneer missionaries Rev. Ernst Pohl and Rev. Hermann Bothmann were compelled to move, on 15th May, 1882 A.D. to the adjacent district of Koraput situated in the Jeypore estate which was then under Madras Presidency. At that time only three English Officers known as the Collector as Government President and two Police Superintendents were residing here. Above all, it was the only route for the missionaries to escape from death.

During that period, Koraput was a very small town consisting of five important small villages namely Kanhiput, Maliput, Porajaput, old Koraput and new Koraput. It was divided into two parts, old Koraput and new Koraput according to the administrative structure set up by the British administration. The old Koraput consisted of around 200 inhabitants and in the new Koraput approximately 700 inhabitants were dwelling (Asha: 31). First it was found only for British Officer Mr. Turner, the then Collector from Vizagapatnam (The District headquarters from the year 1803). This place was full of natural beauty. The roads were straight and clean. In order to decline malaria, eucalyptus trees were planted on the both sides of the road.

Unfortunately, the pioneer missionaries suffered from Malaria and went to Madras (Chennai) for their treatment. After long 70 days of medical treatment each of the missionaries got recovered but was not allowed to return to Koraput. The Breklum mission instructed them to go and settle at Salur, in Andhra Pradesh to start missionary activities there in lieu of Koraput District. So, the missionaries went to Salur in the end of March 1883 A.D and started evangelical work there. It was from that Salur, the evangelical activity of Jeypore estate was carried on.

On the other hand, the Breklum mission did not despond nor lose its spirits fairly, took keen interest to resume missionary work at Koraput. That's why, it again sent missionaries to this land one after another to disseminate the Gospel of God among the neglected, isolated, ignorant, illiterate, indigent, innocent, untouchables, uncivilized, outcastes and helpless people.

Thus, Rev. A.J.M Reimers and Rev. Christian Thomson came from Germany to Koraput in 1884 A.D. They reached Koraput on 17th of October, 1884 A.D. and stayed in the rest house until a mud house was ready. But these two missionaries also could not escape

from the grip of Malaria and suffered like the first missionaries Pohl and Bothmann. Rev. Thomson left Madras left for home on 15th January 1885 A.D. Rev. Reimers was also very serious and went to Salur for his treatment. After recuperation from fever, he returned to Koraput along with Rev. Hermann Bothmann in the month of February, 1885 A.D. and embarked upon his activities with much difficulty. Thereafter, the mission sent a stream of missionaries to Koraput one after another from Germany to continue the evangelical work in this district.

A site was for the construction of a house. They took a site on the rocky hillock near by the Government building on lease from Government and started erecting a mud house but they faced labour crisis. The people of this region were simple, innocent, timid and religious minded and without the permission of authority from the state officials, they could not get them engaged in work and for bringing building materials. However, in spite of such difficulties the mud house could be ready before the commencement of rainy season.

Rev. Reimers spent all of his strength and time for building the mission house between April 1885 A.D. and April 1887 A.D. Not until November 1885 A.D. did Rev. Harless come to assist him. Rev. Reimers was suffering very much from attacks of fever during this time and Harless got transferred to Parvatipuram on health ground. Due to frequent unhealthy situations and anti missionary atmosphere, the Executive Board decided to give up Koraput as a main station till 3rd June 1889 A. D. (Waack : 238). Rev. Rermers in his mission reports has described that “Koraput is a very hard ground” and “the most painful child of our mission.”

On 20th April 1898 A.D. the foundation stone was laid for a small Church at Koraput, which was named as the ‘**Chapel of the Redeemer**’ (JELC: 9). After that, their noble work and motivation converted a good number of people to Christianity. As the number of converts grew, the missionaries realized that from Koraput mission station it was not practically feasible for them to reach out to the entire district. Hence, division of areas under the jurisdiction of the Koraput mission station was necessary. Consequently, new stations were founded such as in the North Gunupur in 1901 A.D., Laxmipur in 1908 A.D. and Bissam Cuttack in 1908 A.D. In the South, they established Nandapur mission station in 1909 A.D. and in the East Doliambo mission station in 1911 A.D (Ibid).

In the organizational system, thus the old Koraput district was divided into 6 work fields (see-Table-III). Accordingly, the need for more missionaries and Catechists

increased. Therefore, training courses were imparted regularly to the existing staff and teachers. In addition to these, formal disciplinary norms for the regulation of mission and related issues of the Church were also introduced then. The Church proved to be too small when converted members increased. Hence to accommodate the increasing number, the foundation stone to build another church was laid down on **11th January, 1906 A.D.** in the presence of Mission Inspector Rev. Bahnsen. Rev. Hubner was in charge of building the Church and the new Church was dedicated on **18th June 1908 A.D.** (JELC: 10). Koraput mission station grew vigorously and became one of the important centres of undivided Koraput district.

Presently Sunabeda and Koraput Deaneries are proposed to form the Koraput Zone. This zone constitutes 17 deaneries, 11 parishes having 106 villages, eight pastors have the responsibility of nurturing a total population of 11, 11515 (Waack: 244).

3.3 Kotpad Mission Station – 1885 A.D.

Kotpad was a small town about 14 kilometers away from the border between Jeypore estate and Bastar (present Chhattisgarh district of M.P). Having closed proximity with the borders of Bastar and sandwiched between Jeypore and Jagdalpur, the missionaries considered Kotpad as an important and strategic location for the establishment of a mission station. The missionaries Rev. Ernst Pohl and Rev. Hermann Bothmann first arrived at Kotpad on 10th May 1882 A.D (JELC: 11) after they had fled from the wrath of the Maharaja of Jagdalpur. Later missionaries Rev. W. Ahrens and Rev. J.Timm came to Kotpad in December, 1885 A.D with a motive of establishing a mission station to extend their missionary activity in Jagdalpur

Rev. W. Ahrens and Rev. J. Timm acquired a site to the South of the town, which was a dense forest. Human bones and ribs were found scattered over there and noise of the wild lives like tigers, bears and Jackals were often heard (Ibid). These missionaries also suffered from fever and went to Madras for their treatment. After returning to Kotpad, they began to clear the bushes and selected a site to build houses for the missionary work. They lived in the tent for months and after completion of a mud house, they shifted there. The old chapel was ready on 24th March 1886 A.D.

In the beginning of the year 1887 A.D. Rev. Von Frieling came to Kotpad to join them. He prepared all the materials for the building of the first pucca mission house. Bricks

were made and lime stones were brought from the river Kolab. A part of roofing materials was brought from Madras. Rev. W. Ahrens had brought a tile press (Flat tile) with him from Calicut. The first mission Bungalow was completed in July, 1887 A.D. and dedicated to Church on **26th June, 1888 A.D.** (Asha: 38) Rev. J. Timmcke was the master builder of this Bungalow.

Although Koraput was the first established mission station, it was Kotpad that witnessed the first convert who accepted Jesus Christ as his savior on 23rd **December, 1886 A.D.** This day witnessed the baptism of the first convert, a lady named **Asumoti Behera**. She was 55 years old woman baptized by Rev. J. Th. Timmcke at her village Joba (Ibid: 39). However, the years 1892-93 A.D. saw an upsurge in member of the congregation in and around Kotpad. The rising in catechumen, baptism and members were on rapid. Then more Indian staff was made available to help the foreign missionaries. So, a huge Church was required and bricks were mooted. The foundation stone for a concrete Church was laid down on **1st February 1897 A.D.** in the presence of Bahnsen building.

It was quite clear for the missionaries that, there would be Indian Church workers in missionary work for the growing congregations. So, it was imperative to setup a **Theological Seminary** for the training of native members to become teachers and catechists. That's why, in 1896 A.D., the Executive Board in Breklum gave permission to the missionaries of Kotpad to go ahead with the seminary. The seminary was named as **Jensen Theological College**.

Now, Kotpad zone comprises of Kosagumuda and Jagadapur. There are 11 parishes having 101 villages. 11 pastors nurture a population of 11, 107 (Padhi: 7).

3.4 Jeypore Mission Station- 1887 A.D.

After Koraput and Kotpad, Jeypore was the 3rd mission station established by the 'Schleswig Holstein Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society' or Breklum Mission. Jeypore means 'victory town'. It was the capital of Jeypore Maharaja. The town was also the centre of the British administration. The most significant feature of the town that impressed the missionaries was the unusually wide road running in a North-South direction with small side streets leading off it. By the decision of the Executive Board, Rev. Wilhelm Ahrens came to Jeypore on 15th April 1887 A.D and stayed in a house, which the Maharaja had allotted.

During the arrival of first missionaries to Jeypore estate, Maharaja Rama Chandra Dev III (1860-1889) A.D. was the ruler who permitted missionaries to begin their activities in this place and even he provided a piece of land to them(Waack : 22)

Rev. W. Ahrens was permitted to begin work at Jeypore. On 15th April, 1887 A.D., Rev. W. Ahrens arrived there and lived in a house which the Maharaja had put at his disposal. He immediately began clearing the jungle so that the foundation stone for the mission house could be laid down in October. W. Ahrens and Von Frieling had set up the tent and made plans for building of Mission Bungalow and preparing to preach the Gospel to the Heathens. The first Chapel was built in **1893 A.D** (Ibid: 253).

After that, missionary activity started in this estate. In order to facilitate their work, they divided jurisdiction of the Jeypore mission station into two sub-divisions namely the North and the North-Eastern part and the South and South-Western part.

During 1897-98 A.D. the second bungalow was built on the mission site at an estimated cost of Rupees 6,000. In 1903 A.D. a surrounding wall was built encompassing the whole plot of land. In 1908 A.D., the Executive Board accepted the building plan, put forwarded by the Mission Council for a large Church. 18000 -19,000 Marks were estimated as necessary for the completion of the Church. In 1909 A.D., the Deaconess Hermine Knuth came to Jeypore. She took care of the “**Out castes Asylum**”, treated sick patients in her home and visited many houses and taught women of high caste(Ibid : 256).

Jeypore mission station was of special importance in two ways. First was the establishment of Schools and a Training School for teachers and second was working among the outcastes people for their development. In 1902-03 A.D., a **leprosy asylum** was built on a piece of land donated by the Maharaja which was able to accommodate 32 persons (Ibid: 257).

The missionaries started to build the Church of Jeypore in 1909 A.D. and dedicated it on 14th June 1911 A.D. After that, Jeypore was chosen as the central office for administration. However, with the first Synod in 1928 A.D., the constitution of the institutional Church was formed. The representatives of the congregations came together and formed an assembly which met at first without any laid down rules or regulations They decided to form a joint constitution and gave themselves a name and to understand them as one Church. This was the genesis of **JELC** (Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church).

Presently, the Pohl and Bothmann Bhavan stand as the Central Office. Apart from schools and widow home, the station has the department of mission and development, under which Lutheran's Institute of Vocational Training, Women and Children Desk and the Youth Desk are functioning. A Church based organization, the Liberation Education and Action for Development (LEAD, NGO) working among rural and tribal people of the nearby villages is also stationed at Jeypore.

The Jeypore zone has its fold Malkangiri and has 10 parishes with 71 villages and 11 pastors nurture population of 11550 (SHMB: 116).

3.7 Nabarangpur Mission Station -1889 A.D

The founding of the fourth mission station was a logical continuation of the mission strategy. To work from main centres to cover and reach the whole area, Koraput, Kotpad and Jeypore centres had already been established in the East, the South and the West of the district. What was missing was the North East, the area to be spoken of in connection with Laxmipur, Gunupur, and Bissam Cuttack and also the area of the North West that could not be reached from Kotpad. For the work in the far reaches of the North West, two places that came under consideration for founding mission stations were Nabarangpur and Umerkote. The Executive Board suggested to the Extended Board that they should agree to establish further stations. In spring 1887 A.D., Rev. W. Ahrens undertook a "reconnaissance trip" to Umerkote. Out of two places Nabarangpur was preferred because it was much closer to Kotpad and it had facility of post office and was adjacent to Kalahandi district. So, decision was taken to establish mission station at Nabarangpur towards the end of 1888 A.D.

Theodor Ahrens, the brother of Wilhelm Ahrens, had arrived in India on 21st September 1889 A.D. He and Timmcke arrived at Nabarangpur to find a mission station. A plot of land 200 x 200 meters had already been granted to the mission by the Maharaja of Jeypore and Patta Mahadevi of Nabarangpur. One of the reasons for founding the mission station at Nabarangpur was that, it was said to be the "**Key to the North.**" This proved to be quite true, as from the town it was possible to travel throughout the district. Thus, the missionaries started to make trips in the region sometimes together and in turns.

For first few weeks, these two missionaries put up in a traveler's house of the higher officers of the Government. After the rainy season, in the month of October, they fixed tent and shifted there. Windows and doors were supplied by the missionaries of Salur by the bullock carts. Rev. Th. Ahrens made 1, 60,000 bricks and burnt them with his own hands for

mission house and he dug also dug a well. On 22nd January, 1890 A.D. the foundation stone was laid down and by 16th May, 1890 A.D. the roofing work with wild grass was over. Later on tiled roof was made. It was the first bungalow to the East of the mission compound near the shawl wood forest. The second mission bungalow to the South west of the Church was built in the year 1897 A.D (JELC: 14).

In the year 1893 A.D. a chapel of 8^{1/2} metre long and 4^{1/2} metre wide with brick walls was built. Its roof was covered by wild grass. In this chapel, Sunday worship, evening prayers and a small school in day time was conducted. Until it was ready, Sunday worship was held in one of the rooms of the first mission Bungalow. The chapel had a small tower made of bamboos on the top of which a cross was fixed and inside the tower a small Bell was hung. After that a big church was begun and it was dedicated on 26th November of 1902 A.D. The Nabarangpur mission station is also significant due to the Christian Hospital that was setup by the missionaries on **31st January 1952.**

Presently Nabarangpur zone consists of Kalahandi and Umerkote. It has 18 parishes having 137 villages. Twenty pastors' work and nurture population of 17497(Ibid: 16).

Besides above churches, the missionaries also set up Adivasi Mission Board in 1974 which contributed a lot for the progressive outlook of the tribals. This Board was established for the all round development of the tribals

Conclusion:

The establishment of missionary organization in this hilly region gave a ray of hope among the lower caste people. The organization did an outstanding job for the neglected and hopeless people by introducing and implementing a number of handfults of welfare schemes such as consciousness of health and hygiene, eradication of illiteracy, economic upliftment, social mobilization and champion of gender identity etc. The superstitious people gave up believing sorcery and magic spells and free from the local physicians Dissaris, Gurumains, Bejjus and Siras. The missionaries protected converted Christians from the hands of policemen, Sahukars, Zamindars and went against Bethi and Goti system which was the inhuman practices in the society. This religion believes in fatherhood of God and brotherhood of mankind and emphasizes on monotheism and caste free society. There were no hard and fast rules of this religion and elaboration of rites and rituals. This is the religion of poor and lower caste. That's why, the people accepted this religion spontaneously due to socio – economic and religious causes and the evangelization work rapidly progressed in this hilly

area. Thereafter, the missionary activities heralded anew epoch in this inaccessible region and added another new chapter in the eventful history of Koraput district.

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