

DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN LITERARY WORK – A BEDROCK FOR THE PROSELYTISATION IN KORAPUT DISTRICT

Dr Raghmani Naik*

Abstract:

Education plays a vital role in determining the Socio - economic development of the society. However, this important branch had been totally neglected in the undivided Koraput District for a long period of time. So, the people remained illiterate, ignorant, backward and superstitious. They were spiritually captivated and blind. In this critical situation, the Christian Missionaries of Breklum Mission set their feet on this land on 15th May, 1882 A.D. and heralded a new epoch in the field of education. They were obliged to do because the converted Christians were grossly illiterate and they even could not read odia book. The missionaries realized that without providing education to these people, their mission of God would not be fulfilled. So, they not only introduced education but also development Christian literature to reach the message of God. These literary activities helped immensely to convince the people mentally and open the path to Christianity. They established printing press and set up translation committees to translate tribal language like Kuvi in English or Odia. Besides that, they also published a magazine called Christian Mitra and circulated among the converted Christians. Development of Christian literature helped enormously to proselytize the people.

Keywords: Illiteracy, Missionaries, Christianmitra, Press, Kuvi, Translation committee literature

* Head, Dept. of History, NSCB Jr College, Sambalpur

Introduction:

The **Christian missionaries** not only paid attention towards the development of socio-economic-educational and health aspects but also took special interest in the growth and development of Christian literary work in this district. When the educational standard of the people increased, it felt the need of producing literature to communicate the Gospel among the people in simple language writing moral stories and important life history and incidents of Jesus Christ. It was seen that maximum people could not understand much that was printed (Tauscher: 159). The missionaries also planned to propagate Christianity by distributing printed Bibles to the common mass. In this way, they took keen interest for the development of Christian literary works among the converted and non – converted people of this hilly region.

❖ **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. *mission*) 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 when 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.

Tauscher writes, "In the Oriya field, little literature was available because a few people had the opportunity to read and utilize the value of literature" (Ibid). The standard of the newly converted people was lower than the usual standard of the town people. Even they could not follow the higher standard in Oriya. The mission also wanted that new converts should know the content of the Gospel and learn Bible stories in a simple language. Therefore, the need of more Christian literature was greatly felt (Ibid).

Not only literature was needed for communicating the Gospel but also there was an indispensable need for the translation of Bible stories for the mission school and seminary, catechism, for enquirers and liturgy and Christian Hymns for the main worship (Asha - 91). Many books were written so that, they could understand the Bible easily. Hymns and liturgy for

Sunday worship services were also published and taught to the members of the congregations. A **Translation Committee** was formed whose main intention was to translate Bible stories, Hymns and the small catechism of Martin Luther.

The first Translation Conference of the Missionaries was held respectively at Koraput from 3rd 5th December 1888 A.D, at Kotpad on 30th October 1890 A.D and at Jeypore from 10th - 17th April 1891 A.D (Ibid).

It took more than Five years to translate the small catechism of Martin Luther. Then this manuscript was sent to the Cuttack Mission Press for the print of 1000 copies (Ahrens: 1894). The Christians started learning the small catechism. Mean while, many German hymns were translated into simple Oriya language and were taught by the Missionaries to the congregational members. Many Oriya tunes were added with the Baptist Hymnal.

Number of total translated and composed hymns was 50. Another 50 Hymns were selected and added from Baptist hymnal book. Many songs were composed in ancient Indian tune and a teacher was appointed to teach them. Interestingly, Indian tunes were appreciated by the German congregations and Rev. Lueckfeld took the responsibility to teach them. Gloyer described in his report of 1894 A.D. that, the liturgy of the Lord's Supper was like a crown of the festival (Ibid). People were very much interested to study the published books because of their simple format.

The Rev. S. Speck stressed the necessity of writing in a still simpler style. He translated the periscopes, wrote some of the Bible stories and got them printed. Both these books were gratefully accepted by the Christians (Tauscher: 154).

Many books were printed. One was a famous tract named "Swarga-Bata" (the way to Heaven). This tract was highly popular among both the Christians and the non Christians. Until 1931 A.D, all the printing was done in the "**Baptist Mission Press Cuttack**(Ibid : 93) .Though it was expensive to send all the manuscripts to Cuttack yet, one of the Missionaries had to go there for proof reading.

In the year 1911 A.D. it was decided to begin a monthly magazine and named '**Christian Mitra**' (Christian friend) which was started by **Rev. Larsen** (Asha: 93). This magazine helped the Christians to get information both an inside and outside of the church. It was duplicated by carbon paper and circulated among the workers as there were a number of

teaching sermons and other information in it. It was regularly brought out for the workers and other literate Christians.

When the American Missionaries were looking after the SHEL Mission field in the absence of the German Missionaries during the First World War and after a big volume of Hymnal book along with worship books, collections of periscope and small catechism of Dr. Martin Luther were printed in the year 1924 A.D. in the “**Orissa Mission Press at Cuttack**”.

The Hymnal book contained a total number of 472 hymns (Church council: 15&264).

Besides that, many books were printed and circulated among the people like-

- a) Christian Mondoliro Gito (Hymn translated from German language and few national hymns)-174.
- b) Bissramobaro ro pathosala (Sunday school Hymns translated from English to Oriya)-79
- c) Dhormo Geeto (Hymns for Divine worship) - 274.
- d) Nutono Dhormo Geeto (New Religious Hymns)-45

In the year 1931 AD an old printing press of the Schleswig Holstein Evangelical Lutheran mission was set up at Koraput by Rev. R. Tauscher and that solved all the printing problems. Since then Christian Mitra had been regularly printed and circulated among the people. Most of Christian literature like Bible stories, small catechism, hymnal books, Worship books and other Christian books were revised from time to time and were printed. The latest revised hymnal book and catechism were printed in the following year and numbers of copies printed were 5000 and 7000 respectively. In the year 1974, the name of the press Schleswig Holstein Evangelical Lutheran Mission Press was changed to “Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church Press”.

Books and the magazines were printed and sold at cheaper price so that Christians could easily buy. Moreover booklets and tracts were bought in good number by non - Christians during preaching camps.

Besides that, former publications were also reprinted like the volumes of Old Testament and New Testament stories (1932 A.D.), the order of service (1932 A.D.) and several tracts such as ‘The way to Heaven’ by Rev. Timmcke in 1935 A.D. and printed 10 thousand copies, the Rules and Regulations for Church staff” karjyo Karimanonkoro Niyomabali” were published in Koraput in 1932 A.D and the Church Constitution ‘Mondoliro Niyomabole’ in 1938 A.D. The Christian calendar was published every year since 1932 A.D. onwards.

In the context of Christian literature, special mention must be made, without doubt of commentary on St. Mathews Gospel by Rev. A. Andersen. It was printed in Cuttack in 1936 A.D. The first volume on St. Marks and St. Luke's Gospels were published in 1967 A.D which was the first theological commentary in Oriya.

Again Tauscher, in this report has mentioned that in 1929 A.D. the hymnal book was thoroughly revised and a good number of new songs were added. In later years plenty of German Hymns were translated by Rev. E.Gloyer. Rev. J.Timmcke was fond of learning Oriya melody. Hence, he compiled a first hymn in Oriya melody called "Jesus Asile Sworgoru" (Jesus came from Heaven) this is a very popular hymn sung by the Nationals, as well as by the German Missionaries.

There were number of tribal groups in Koraput District and among them, the Kuvi tribe was in the majority. The first conversion of this tribal group took place at Ontalguda in 1934 A.D. From that day onwards, other tribals' people joined in greater number. So, Kuvi Translation Committee was formed to translate word of God in their language. Congregations were also encouraged to take an active role in writing articles to publish and these were to be sent to Rev. H. Meyer. Many gifted composers composed good songs and sent them as per direction. The following decisions were also taken as further encouragement that pastors, preachers and Elders of the church should try to increase the number of Christian Mitra readers.... If there was any news or dedication of the church building, they would be most welcome and should be sent to Rev. N. Helms, the editor.

This language was given much importance because it was the language of the majority people of Adivasi especially the Kondhs. Hence a Kuvi Translation Committee was formed so as to enable the Kondh tribes to have the word of God in their own language.

Translation work in the kuvi language in the Koraput District was started by Rev. R. Tauscher in the year 1962 A.D. After his death, Rev. I. Kleining, a missionary from Australia (served in the mission field 1965-1976), continued this work. After he had left India for good, it was resumed by Miss. A. Hertz (serving in the Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church from the year 1950 A.D. – Souvenir) and considered untouchable and uncivilized till she returned to her home country. It was a great blessing for the Kuvi Christians that the following books were translated and published in Kuvi language (Waack: 266 & 374).

These were -

1. John Subarta (John's Gospel)
2. Kuvi Tole Dhormo Shikshya (a small catechism – 1963 A.D.)
3. Jisuri Kata (life and work of Jesus -1966 A.D.)
4. Jesuti Pusponi (A Short story of Jesus – 1966 A.D.)
5. Na Hathitasi (my companion -1966 A.D.)
6. Krushoti Kata (The story of the cross- 1966 A.D.)
7. Pacha, Pacha joyo pacha Rabati (sing of Victory song joyfully -1968 A.D.)
8. Kuvi Gito (Kudi song -1968 A.D.)
9. Podovi Ano (Easy Kuvi Primer - 1969 A.D.)
10. Kuripachupoti (Kuvi hymnal book with Lord's Prayer and Ten Commandments) – 1972 A.D.
11. Na Tana wadu (come near to me - 1973 A.D...)
12. Luke (Being ready for print - 1976 A.D.)

The following books were printed for the use of seminary students and school children. Bible stories (New Testament and Old Testament), Church Hymn (1st Part) small catechism, Sunday worship booklet, Gospel according to St. John, and Book for adult education.

In 1936 A.D. - Hindu Bicaró (Evolution of Hinduism) and the Gift of the Gospel (E. Tauscher) only gives this title in German)

Conclusion:

Schools, Theological seminary and Churches were established by the missionaries as the centre of education but with the growth and development of Christian literature, revolutionary changes were brought in the field of propagation, congregation and popularization of Christianity. The literate people could know the essence of Christianity, its principles and its importance and spontaneously came to the fold of this religion. Christian literary activities were a milestone for the growth of Christianity in the hilly and inaccessible region of undivided Koraput District of South Odisha.

References:

1. Tauscher, R. (1939) Schleswig Holstein Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society: 159
2. Ibid
3. Ibid
4. Asha, Anthon. (1982) Church History from Breklum to Koraput: 91
5. Ibid
6. Ahrens, Wilhelm. *2nd Quarterly Report 1894* Trans by Asha
7. Ibid
8. Tauscher, R. (1939) Schleswig Holstein Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society: 154
9. Ibid, 93
10. Asha, Anthon. (1982) Church History from Breklum to Koraput: 93
11. Church Council, *2nd Session (4th Nov.1954) Christian Mitra* (March, 1955):15 and
Waack, Otto. (1997) Church and Mission in India, Vol- II: 263-264
12. *Souvenir Silver Jubilee (1982)* Adivasi Christiya Samaj., Koraput.
13. Waack, Otto. (1997) Church and Mission in India, volume –II, ISPCCK, Delhi: 263-266
and Waack, Otto. (1997), Church and Mission in India, Volume –I: 367-374