

## CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES AND THEIR ROLE IN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN IN ORISSA

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### **Abstract:**

*Education plays a vital role in determining the development of human personality. It modernizes of one's behaviour. Though women are the integral part of society and an inseparable axis of man – woman pole they have been deprived of education for long period of time. They were not allowed to attend educational institutions due to conservativeness of the parents and the prevailing of unfavourable social conditions. So, they remained grossly illiterate and backward. It was the missionaries who for the first time took keen interest to literate them and established a number of schools, orphanages, Girls' hostels and training schools for their educational development. They even, introduced Zenana system for high caste Hindu and Muslim women and disseminated education to them. The objective of missionary teaching was to make them sensible, moral, industrious and pious so that they would make good housewives for the native Christians. The missionaries were the pioneer of female education in Orissa. After that, the government followed the foot prints of missionaries and took a number of steps for the development of women education in Orissa. Introduction of female education was one of the outstanding contributions of missionaries to the neglected section of the society.*

**Keywords:** Women, missionaries, Schools, Zenana, Orphanages, Training schools.

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## 1. Introduction:

Woman is the integral component of the society and manifested as mother, sister, Goddess, lover and wife in all. The creation of the creator would be incomplete without creating woman. She is inseparable part of man as well as society. Development of society means development of both man and woman. However, woman has been facing all sorts of suffering since time immemorial and fighting for her right in the male dominated and conservative society. She has been treated as a commodity and always under the domination of her counterpart. All rules and regulations are applicable only to them. In case of education, she was far behind of man and remained grossly illiterate and ignorant. There was no educational opportunity for women, especially of lower and poor sections. Above all, the social barriers, conservativeness of parents and poverty stood like a wall to check all sorts of their movement. So, there was a dark period of women before the coming of Christian missionaries to Orissa. Their contribution added a new chapter to the eventful history of Orissa.

## 2. Social Debar for Female Education

The female education in Orissa, did not progress due to lack of governmental support and conservative attitude of the Oriya people. The East India Company did not have any well – established policy in this regard. Neither special fund had been allotted for the purpose. The entire amount was earmarked for general education only which did not include female education<sup>1</sup>. Apart from this, intemperance, gross superstition, social taboos, prejudice against girls attending school among conservative Oriya parents, poverty and social objections to the employment of girls also prevented or had largely delayed the spread of women's education.<sup>2</sup> The system of early marriage had also posed an insurmountable barrier to their education. They had no access beyond primary stage. Besides that, there was no – availability of female teachers.

## 3. Advent of Christian missionaries and beginning of female education in Orissa –

Prior to 1803, education was imparted in the pathasalas (Elementary Schools), where the Abadhan or the teacher was teaching the students. The teacher was untrained and not paid properly. The pathasalas were maintained by the influential members of the society like Rajas and Zamindars and the basic education imparted to them was nothing else but reading, writing and arithmetic. The common women and the poorer section of the society were debarred from getting the benefit of education. It was purely a private arrangement and totally averse to the ideas of giving education to women in public institutions.<sup>3</sup> Due to lack of liberal education

social outlook was parochial and narrow. So, practically, female education in Orissa was not existent during this period. A Sutton gives a very touching description of the state of women in Orissa. As he says, “That interesting period of female life in which the girl passes into the state of womanhood and becomes fitted for the discharge of those duties, which in the course of providence, may be expected to devolve upon her is unknown in India. She is scarcely a girl before she is a wife, a mother and perhaps a widow. In Orissa she is often betrothed in mere infancy, without any power of her own to choose or refuse, and before she enters her teens has been married and conducted to her husband’s house for life. According to that vile level on woman so sedulously inculcated by heathen wisdom a woman must always be dependent first on her parents next on her husband’s and when he dies she should burn on his funeral pile. Thank God for the abolition of suttee.”<sup>4</sup>

Before the coming of the Christian missionaries the land was checked with superstitions and age- old traditions. The system of ‘purdah’ prevailed among the higher classes was a great obstacle for them. On the other hand, the mothers among the lower classes who generally desired their daughters to help them domestic chores prevented many of the girls from pursuing their education after primary stages. So, the growth of education was very the expansion of education was greatly hampered. Besides that, there had been long standing, strong prejudices in the native mind against instructing and educating their females. They were prohibited from learning because attainment of knowledge would become “**unbecoming of the modesty of the sex.**” So, it was impossible for the females to become learned. All the established native institutions existed for the benefit of the male sex only and the whole of female sex was deplorably confined to ignorance and left without even the semblance of provision for their instruction. The condition of woman of higher and wealthier classes of Hindus was like a toy having no choice of her own. She was to waste her time in decorating with ornaments to please her husband and Lord.

Such was the prevailing critical circumstances of women when the Baptist **missionaries** of America set their feet on Orissan land. Their arrival assured of a long cherished dream coming true in the field of women education.

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**Missionaries\*** - “A **missionary** is a member of a religious group sent into an area to do evangelism or ministries of service, such as education, literacy, social justice, health care and economic development. The word "mission", originated in 1598 when the Jesuits sent members

abroad is derived from the Latin **missionem** (nom. missio), meaning "act of sending" or **mittere**, meaning "to send". The word was used in the light of its biblical usage; In the Latin translation 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.”

In 1813, at the time of renewal of the charter, the East India Company had been asked by the British Parliament to take measures for the ‘introduction of useful knowledge and religious and moral improvements of the Indians. The company decided that “a sum of not less than a lakh of rupees should be set apart each year and spent towards to the revival and improvement of literature and the encouragement of learned natives of India.<sup>5</sup> The act also gave the Baptist missionaries opportunities to impart education to the women of poor and neglected section of the society. From June 1822 to December 1823 within a period of 18 months, fifteen schools were established for both boys and girls at Cuttack and nearby places, with a strength of 305 boys and 63 girls.<sup>6</sup> The first native school founded by the missionaries was at Cuttack in May, 1822.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore by 1823, the Baptist missionaries set up as many as 15 schools in Cuttack and its adjoining places in Orissa where 63 girls were enrolled.<sup>8</sup> The Cuttack Missionary School played very key role in imparting English education in Orissa. The school which was set up so carefully and assiduously was closed down in 1841 due to lack of fund. After that, several girls’ schools were established at other places like Balasore, Bhadrak and Puri. These activities were supplemented by the efforts of the missionaries who had not only initiated but also carried out the movement for female education with considerable zeal and earnestness. The missionary Schools were found to be better organized than the Hindu Girls Schools as they taught the girls up to a higher standard than the latter.

It was also marked that the missionary schools were getting government aid like the Sutahat Baptist Mission Female orphanage Middle Vernacular School was received Rs.50/- per annum. Similarly the Santipur Mission School, Jaleswar and Balasore Mission Schools used to receive grant of Rs.15/-, Rs.20/- and Rs.30/- respectively from the Government.<sup>9</sup> The missionaries took first step towards providing facilities for the education of Oriya girls in 1836 A.D.

Under their initiative and patronage, a large number of special schools and orphanages had been established in Cuttack and Balasore districts. These institutions had helped in disseminating

education to Oriya girls of middle class and lower class families. The Christian missionaries encouraged Oriya girls to join in primary schools. Much effort had been made by the missionaries' to encourage female education. For example, missionary J. Phillips had taken steps for the education of Santhals girls in Orissa through his institution at Balasore but it had not yielded any result. During the period of famine (1865-66), the Christian missionaries had established several schools and orphanages in Cuttack, Pipli, Jaleswar and Balasore, which had developed into centres for female education.<sup>10</sup>

For providing proper knowledge to the girls, two Training Schools were opened to train the teachers at Cuttack under the management of the Baptist Missionary Society; as a result 45 lady teachers could be produced. This training school managed by the mission society was higher type of school which imparted training for both junior and senior certificates.

The missionaries provided education to both non – Christians and tribal learners. The efforts of the missionaries for the spread of female education and the removal of women backwardness were really praiseworthy. It had been generally acknowledged that women's education in its early phase was pioneered by the Christian missionaries. In this way, vigorous attempts were made for improving the condition of female folk in Orissa. Girls schools thronged with young wives and betrothed girls.

As the higher class natives were reluctant to send their girls to public schools, a new technique was taken by a missionary lady named Mrs. Smith who had formed a **Zenana** Association at Balasore in 1869 to impart education to the ladies of higher castes at their homes. As per the provision of British Government it had helped to accelerate the process of female education by providing financial assistance to these mission schools and orphanages.<sup>11</sup>

**Zenana System**\*: "The Zenana system of education along with day schools and orphanages was the third most significant form of education which the Christian Missionaries promoted in all the presidencies. This kind of education was meant for the upper caste women who due to social customs could not receive formal schooling. It was also meant for Muslim girls and women who had no formal schooling. Rudimentary education and learning western manners which their husbands wanted was provided in the Zenana or the women's apartment. This kind of education became very successful in the 18th and 19th centuries. Gradually regular examination was held behind the purdah. It was the Zenana education which made women conscious of medical and



other professional education. Perhaps, in the long run this kind of education was imparted by the Deaconess”.

In the Zenana school at Cuttack, the teaching was performed by a peripatetic teacher. It had the strength of 18 women. The Baptist Society at Balasore enrolled to 105 women. The Zenana school at Cuttack added two more women but the Zenana school at Balasore recorded a reduction both in teachers and students. However, the number of Zenana schools increased at Balasore where the number of girls was 84. Besides, training schools, the missionaries managed two Industrial Training Schools for women in the state. The Shelter at Cuttack was run by the American Missionary Society with some governmental aid. The missionary also managed one High School at Balasore. In 1869, they started the first zenana teaching in Balasore.

Female missionaries tried to train the young daughters of respectable Oriya families in the path of piety. Besides plain education meant for the boys, girls were to be trained in knitting, sewing and spinning so that they would be sensible, modest, industrious and pious young women fitted to be helpmates to their husbands.

#### 4. Orphanages - Home food and learning

The missionaries also opened orphan asylums. A number of day schools were established at the very commencement of the mission. They were taught by heathen masters. Religious books were substituted. The missionaries concluded that they were bound to give the best education in their power to the children of the native converts. At the first phase, the converts were very few and they were scattered in different distant villages. So, the first step was to locate and bring them to boarding establishment. So, they were determined to establish an asylum for both boys and girls where they could accommodate and educate all under Christian influence. To start with, one such institution in the name of the Board School was started in 1829 at Cuttack to provide accommodation to native Christian children. All of them were poor and generally orphans. As such they were neglected by their relatives or friends with regard to their welfare.<sup>12</sup>

A similar Asylum was also established at Berhampur in May 3, 1836. The school was opened with six boys and three girls but many more joined it subsequently. Several factors were onus for the increase in number of students in the asylum. 1. Due to the occurrence of famine many parents sold their children. Many poor and unfortunate children were abandoned by their famine stricken parents and wandering here and there in hope of obtaining sustenance. The missionaries purchased many of these children.

2. Some other children were picked up from near hospitals and relief camps where food was distributed.
3. Some children also came of their own accord.
4. The poor children left by their parents during the car festival were sent to missionary asylum.
5. The human sacrifice called Meriah prevalent among the Khonds of Orissa was also onus to a great extent in filling up the schools. Children were kidnapped from their native villages and were sold to wild Khonds, who used to sacrifice them in their turmeric field.
6. British govt tried to suppress the practice and about 800 victims were rescued and they were placed in the mission at Cuttack, Balasore and Berhampur.

The students in the asylum were taught to read and understand the Bible books and some other works like church history, geography and astronomy. David B. Smith the sanitary commissioner of Bengal was very much satisfied with the working of the orphanages in Orissa. He has recorded his impression in his diary published in 1868, after visiting two orphanages on July 7, 1868 located at Peyton Sahi in Cuttack .One was for the males and other was for the females. W.W. Hunter has also recorded his impression on the working of the above two orphanages. In the district of Koraput also the missionaries of Breklum Mission had a superb step to literate the Girls students. There was no school exclusively for girls nor were there any mixed schools for them.

After 1871 Koraput witnessed a noticeable change and development in education in the Southern Orissa. Up to the year 1873 - 74 A.D, there were no girls receiving education in these schools. It was the social system that prevented the female section of the population from their right to education. It was the missionaries who took keen interest to literate the girls and set up not only schools for them but also hostels and boarding homes for their accommodations. A hostel for girls was started in 1901 A.D at Kotpad with 16 girls by Mrs. Timm. In 1904 A.D a girls' school was built just outside of the hostel campus. There were 100 girls in 1906 A.D and 125 girls in 1913 A.D.<sup>13</sup>Special care was taken for hostel students both in studies and in their biblical knowledge. A primary school for the girls was established at Kotpad and further the Girls Upper School at Kotpad was upgraded to a Middle English School. The number of girls' students increased to 367 in 1932,533 in 1933,411 in 1934 and 353 in 1937.<sup>14</sup>

This percentage of girls' pupils' became overwhelming due to incessant work of American missionary Agatha Tatge at Kotpad girls' school. This enabled the two Deaconesses Otty Jessen

and Mathilde Jespersen to take up where she had left off. After the two Deaconesses had left India on account of differences of opinion with the Missionaries and the Mission Boards, the station Missionaries Rev. Gloyer, Rev. Meyer and Rev. R. Speck took responsibility of this school.<sup>15</sup> Besides that, for the development of female education, the missionaries took various steps in this region. The wife of Johannes Timm, was teaching Bible stories to women as early as 1893 A.D.<sup>16</sup> It was observed that, women were very much interested to learn from the missionaries. The wives of Rev. Timm and Rev. Gloyer were teaching to some girls and women in their respective places. Those who were qualified to read and write were given special training in the seminary for the future ministry of the Church.

The missionaries suggested the authorities of the Schleswig Holstein Evangelical Lutheran Mission regarding their special ministry among the women of the Jeypore Estate to send some women missionaries for guiding the women. So, the authorities were very much satisfied with such activities and sent first two **deaconesses** in 1905 A.D. and next two ones in 1909 A.D. respectively to Koraput District for carrying out women work vigorously and more efficiently. One of the deaconesses was in charge of the Christian hospital at Nabarangpur and another was in charge of girls' boarding school and training of Women in Bible. The third looked after the work among the women in the villages. The three were stationed at Kotpad. The fourth took up Zenana work in the town of Jeypore.<sup>17</sup> Mrs. Speck was young and experienced in Oriya language to teach the girls' students of the Seminary. Mrs. Gloyer was in charge of instructing the women. The wives of the missionaries were also joining their husbands in preaching camps. The Missionaries were preaching to men and at the same time their wives were preaching to women. This kind of combined preaching was fruitful for the extension of the Gospel. Mrs. Leuckfeld was always with her husband during his camp and was teaching the women.<sup>18</sup> The sister of Rev. W. Ahrens had opportunity to keep relationship with the Muslim women and had a dialogue with them about their Lord Jesus Christ. So, many non-Christian families were converted to Christianity through this kind of personal contact.

**Deaconess**\* - "t is a non-clerical order in some Christian denominations which sees to the care of women in the community. That word comes from a Greek word diakonos (διακονος) as well as deacon, which means a servant or helper and occurs frequently in the Christian New Testament of the Bible. Deaconesses trace their roots from the time of Jesus Christ through the 13th century. Deaconesses existed from the early through the middle Byzantine periods in



Constantinople and Jerusalem; although the office may not have been in existence throughout the European churches. The female diaconate in the Byzantine Church of the early and middle Byzantine periods was recognized as one of the major orders of clergy. A modern resurgence of the office began in the early nineteenth century in both Europe and North America. Deaconesses are present in many Christian denominations at the present time”

Certain steps were taken by the Church Council and the Synod to prepare women for the future Ministry of the Church. It was realized that, women were the only source to approach the non-Christian women. Therefore, much attention was given for the development of women not only educationally but also spiritually.

### 5. Conclusion:

Introduction of female education in Orissa by the Christian missionaries was a revolutionary step. Women activities were solely confined to hearth and homes and they were not allowed to participate in other activities of the society due to conservativeness of male dominated society and remained illiterate, ignorant and backward. They were considered enjoyable things for the men and as machine for producing children. On this context, the Christian missionaries were their messiah who did an excellent job by imparting education to them. The purpose of missionary for was to make them useful members of the society and to educate them morally, intellectually and physically. The girls' students were imparted training in tailoring, weaving, gardening, printing and book binding to make them independent. Besides that, they were also given training in household matters. They were taught to sew, knit and spin. The objective of missionary teaching was to make them sensible, moral, industrious and pious young women so that they would be good housewives for the native Christians.

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