

# CHRISTIAN CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

In India Christianity is a minority religion. The Christian religion enlightened the Indian nation not only in the area of education but in all aspects of the people of India. This paper highlighted the contribution of Christians to Indian Education by establishing many schools in India. Moreover it explains how Christian educational institutions have played a great role in eradicating the social evils from the Indian traditional society.

## INTRODUCTION

In India Christianity is a minority religion. This status has not undermined its output in the society; it had always been the main instrument in building up the Indian nation through centuries in the field of economy, education, social services, health care, etc. The Christian religion enlightened the Indian nation not only in the area of spirituality but in all aspects of the people of India. Right from the beginning of the Christian presence in India, it offered a unique and profound impact on the society as a result of the compassionate care and preferential option that members demonstrated to the sick, suffering and the less privileged and marginalized of the society, imitating the life and teachings of the *Saviour Lord*. During the period of Renaissance, there emerged a number of outstanding Hindu leaders who were strongly influenced by the teaching Jesus Christ and they considered Jesus as the key to India's progress. Western liberal and the nationalistic ideas imparted through western education and the Christian social activities played an important role in the nineteenth century Indian renaissance. Besides all these significant contributions, Christian contribution to Indian education has been marvellous and it paved the way for the eradication of all the social evils in India.

## EVIL PRACTICES IN THE INDIAN TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

Some of the evil practices of Hinduism are casteism, women oppression, child marriage, etc.

**a. Caste system in India:** The invaders were the Aryans, classified people groups according to their tribe, profession and language. The Aryan society had four groups of Varnas. These

were occupational groups based on skill. These four groups were: Brahaman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. Brahamans were learned men who performed rituals. Kshatriyas were the warriors. Vaishyas were mainly agriculturists, artisans, and merchants. Shudras served the other three<sup>1</sup>. This division became like a hierarchical system in their lives. It had been developed and connected with Hinduism throughout their history.

Each caste has its own duty and responsibility. Since they believe in reincarnation, they are faithful in their own caste life. Tribal origin was founded by caste<sup>2</sup>. Most native people were kept in the low castes by the invaders. Among them, the lowest people are called as untouchable people.

**b. Sati:** Hindu widow who burns herself after her husband's death believes that this sacrifice will lead ultimately to blessing and happiness on her family. It was a very powerful belief that it was a difficult matter to deter them<sup>3</sup>. It was abolished by William Bentinck. He made an order declaring 'sati' as illegal and criminal<sup>4</sup>.

**c. Dowry:** A bride is required to bring money to the bridegroom for the wedding. Unless the bride brings the proper amount, it will be the cause of divorce or the suicide of the brides<sup>5</sup>.

**d. Women's oppression:** The status of woman was very low and they were considered to be slaves to men.

**e. A lot of superstitions and superstitious practices:** A lot of these practices are unscientific and enslaved the poor and downtrodden. Hinduism had shaped Indian society and the mentality for thousands of years and all the aforementioned evil practices had the religious sanction and sanctity.

**f. Mode of Indian Education:** Traditional Indian Education too became a vehicle to propagate and strengthen these social evils. This has a long history which dates back to the time of the Aryans where the development and the practice of Gurukula, a system of ancient education which was very unique to India<sup>6</sup>. It was a formal setup amidst by nature, a calm and serene area where the Sishyas (disciples, pupil) were under the leadership of the Guru (teacher) who was their spiritual mentor. The pupil lived in the Gurukulam – dwelling place of the teacher<sup>7</sup>. In this type of education under the caste system, the chance of study is given to high caste only.

## **BIBLE'S INFLUENCE ON INDIAN SOCIETY THROUGH CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

Jesus came into this world to give the fullness of life to every human being (John 10:10). This was the focus of education offered by Christians in India. The later part of this paper presents the history of evangelization in India but evangelization in India was mainly done through education. This Christian education based on the Biblical values of love, universal brotherhood and sisterhood, justice, equality, human dignity, compassion, truth, etc. was instrumental in uprooting all the aforementioned social evils from the Indian society. This educational pattern has opened a new phase where all castes have access to education especially the under privileged, downtrodden and the socially oppressed classes of people. New opportunities for education and occupation expanded through Dalit education in mission schools<sup>8</sup>.

### **SPECIFIC THRUSTS OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

Swami Vivekananda, an Indian thinker and a sage said: Education is ‘man-moulding’. It is ‘shaping’ the ‘whole person’, an ‘all round development of the body, mind and soul of the individual’. The educational schema included under the broad heads of physical, culture, aesthetics, classics, language, religion, science and technology’. It is with a purpose to learn, to understand, and to live in a particular context (including facing challenges) and to make meaning to a wider society. This was the specific thrust of Christian education.

Education consists of those experiences which enable an individual to bring forth every ability, skill and capacity to the fullest extent. It involves the whole man’s effort in the harmonious development of the individual. Personal formation is a crucial importance in ministerial training<sup>9</sup>. Education is not merely the knowledge of facts and events, but of a deep understanding of the meaning and value of everything. Education is the moulding of the totality of one’s personality to walk in the way of truth and life. Education is the continuation of the creation of human beings enabling them to grow and really become human beings as the image of God. Christian education addresses the areas of moral, ethical, and character formation by following the example of Jesus<sup>10</sup>.

Christian education affirms the radical goodness of the world ‘charged with the grandeur of God’ and it regards every element of creation as worthy of study and contemplation, capable of endless exploration. It probes the meaning of human life and concerned with the total formation of each student as an individual personally loved by God. Christ is proposed as the model of human life. Everyone can draw inspiration and learn about commitment for the life and teaching of Jesus, who witnesses to the love and forgiveness of

God, lives in solidarity with all who suffer, and pours out his life in the service of others. In this, success is measured in terms of progress in the quality of life. The aim of Christian education is the formation of principled, value-oriented persons for others after the example of Jesus Christ. Intellectual formation includes a growing ability to reason reflectively, logically and critically. This enables each one to recognize and respond to the message of divine love; seeing God at work in his or her life; in the lives of others, and in all creation; then responding to this discovery through a commitment to service within the community. Christian institutions are engaged in reaching out to the weaker section of the Indian society mostly in rural and tribal areas.

### **CHRISTIAN CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN EDUCATION**

Christianity in India dates back to St. Thomas, one of the twelve disciples of Christ, who arrived in India around 52AD. But while the Christians have been here for the last 21 centuries, their presence is known mostly through their service, and their contributions to society largely reflected in the communities and villages they dwelt in. They have chosen to live in a well-assimilated manner and most recorded history of their contributions start some four hundred years ago. With the stress and importance given to the social needs of education and health, it is not surprising to see the high literacy rates of states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu, which were part of the early areas of Christian growth. In his last book before his death in 1963, renowned historian and devout Hindu K. M. Panikkar said “Christianity in India has a history extending to over 1,900 years, for the ancient tradition witnessed as early as AD 192 by Pantaenus of Alexandria about the existence of a Christian community in India<sup>11</sup>.

The 19th century saw the consolidation of British rule and the impact of western ideas on the social, political and religious life of Indians through the medium of English language. Christian missionaries were pioneers in education. The *Santa Fe School* in Goa, founded in 1540 by the Franciscans was the first formal Christian educational enterprise anywhere outside Europe. In 1542 it was taken over by St. Francis Xavier and in 1548 it was raised to the status of a college and renamed as St. Paul's College. Soon more missionary schools appeared in other parts of India — at Bassein (1546), in Cochin (1549), at Punnaicayil in Tamil Nadu (1567), in Madurai (1595), in Pondicherry (1713), a High School in Tamil at Ellacurichi in Tamil Nadu (1731) and a Sanskrit School at Mannanam in Kerala (1846)<sup>12</sup>.

However, it was only during the British rule that education spread in a somewhat organized manner in India. The western ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity began to attract the educated youth. The period 1813 — 1833 can be termed as, the period of Elementary Schools wherein the focus was on elementary schools and primarily teaching was done through the medium of vernacular language. By 1818 the Serampore Missionaries established more than 100 schools with about 10,000 boys. However, in the period 1833 — 1857, the emphasis was shifted to secondary schools and colleges imparted through the medium of English language. It was during this period that some of the outstanding Christian colleges came into the forefront in India — St. Xavier's College in Kolkatta (1835), the Madras Christian College (1837), Robert T. Noble at Masulipatnam (which later was named as Noble College) (1843), Hislop College at Nagpur (1844), and St. John's College in Agra (1853)<sup>13</sup> are highly reputed to this day. Till the beginning of the twentieth century Christian educational institutions had played a dominant role in the education of young Indians. After independence there has been a substantial involvement of the Christian missions and churches in education. In 2000, Christian colleges number about 250 out of the 11,089 colleges in India<sup>14</sup>.

These pervasive institutional commitments encouraged Christians and non-Christians alike who entered these colleges to be sensitive to the needs of the society and aware of social evils. CMS College in Kottayam, Kerala State (f.1817 by the Church Missionary Society), came first and established the trend. Its motto, “Thy Word Is Truth”, speaks of the vision of the founders. The demand for colleges required many leading educationists, both Protestant and Catholic, to make the commitment of dedicating their life skills and talents to an education-hungry India. Other well known Christian colleges, established during this period were Scottish Church College (Kolkatta, 1830), Wilson College (Mumbai 1832), Madras Christian College (Chennai 1857), St. Joseph's College (Tiruchirappalli 1844), St. John's College (Agra, 1850), Christ College (Kanpur, 1866), St. Xavier's College (Mumbai 1869), Baring Union Christian College (Batala, 1874), St. John's College (Palayamkottai, 1878), St. Alosius College (Mangalore 1880), St. Stephen's College (New Delhi, 1881), and The American College (Madurai, 1881), and St. Joseph's College (Bangalore 1882). Some of the early colleges were started in big cities - Calcutta, Madras, Delhi and Bombay – but many early founders tended to prefer rural areas. Colleges were started in small towns like Agra, Kanpur, and Madurai, and remote places like Palayamkottai, Machilipattinam, Batala,

Guntur, Indore and Nagercoil. They reflected the missionary determination to reach out to the ordinary people of India and not simply favour the urban high-caste elites<sup>15</sup>.

Christians have been pioneering educational initiatives from pre independence time onwards and now has some 25000+ schools, colleges and universities even in very remote and rural areas, imparting quality education to all irrespective of caste, creed or language, contributing to the progress and development of the nation in most altruistic manner. Christians decry the limitations of ideologies, narrow religious assumptions, social prejudices, economic disparities, and gender discriminations in all its forms, and declare the fraternity of all persons in a community of mutual love and respect. Education is for greatness in human growth and economic wellbeing, with equal rights and equity of opportunities as children of God and equal citizens of one nation. This education provides inclusive and integral education space, digitally empowered and skill oriented, with holistic values and wisdom of healthy life management. Minority institutions reach out to the weaker sections of the society mostly in rural and tribal areas, through selfless service rendering not only educational services but also service in the areas of health care, social work and developmental programmes. It has raised their economic standards and improved their social status and prestige in the society.

Before the arrival of missionaries, there were schools in India but membering a few and the quality of education was poor. The missionaries believed that the introduction of Christian education would be an effective means of change by inspiring Christian thought. Through a new system of education, they brought an entirely new system of thought and action. Christian education ministry had a powerful impact to modernise India. During a debate on 'whether females ought to be educated', Duff, a Protestant missionary, realized the unique significance of women's education because he knew that there could be no spiritual or stable social progress apart from the education of women<sup>16</sup>.

## **WOMEN'S EDUCATION**

One of the activities of the Christian missionaries in the second half of the 19th century was the work among women. The missionaries were the first to promote women's education in India. Women's education led to the enlightenment of Indian women of all religions, castes, and regions in modern times. The first ever Girl's school in India was opened by the missionaries at Kottayam in 1819<sup>17</sup>. The CMS missionaries Mary Anne Cooke,

and Mrs. Wilson started female education in Calcutta in 1820<sup>18</sup>. Serampore Mission took lead in organizing female schools in Serampore area in 1821. With the progress made through Zenana visitation, a number of mission societies have established special societies such as the Zenana Mission and the Bible Medical Mission and the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society (1881)<sup>19</sup>. The first attempts towards the education of women in North East India were made at the turn of the twentieth century. The inception of women's education was a major breakthrough in transformation of society at large.

Clearly Indian Christian Higher education has made women's education a priority. The first women's college, Isabella Thoburn College, was established in Uttar Pradesh State in 1886 with the noble goal of sharing with women the love of the Lord through higher education. Quite aptly the motto of the college is "We Receive to Give." This was followed by the establishment of the second college exclusively for women, Sarah Tucker College (1895), in Palayamkottai, Tamil Nadu, a highly conservative and under developed area. In 1947, the year of independence, out of the seventy-two Christian Colleges in India, sixteen were exclusively for women. Quite interestingly, all four Christian colleges started in 1948, the first year of independence, were for women. Historically, the importance of providing education to women among Christians is well documented. In the co-educational Christian colleges, 56% are girls. In government colleges, that percentage drops by more than half.

## **ERADICATION OF THE SOCIAL EVILS**

Christian missionaries from the beginning of their mission work attempted to abolish the social evil practices and anti-social systems in India — sati, strangling and robbery of travelers, female infanticide and human sacrifices, purdha and polygamy. They were grossly immoral though these were associated with religion. Missionaries realized that only social reforms could not help the people in their plight, and they convinced that education would be the most effective and lasting instrument for the liberation of people.

## **THE CONCRETE IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

1. Christian education helped to lay the foundations for a wider and deeper fraternity based on love, justice, forgiveness and solidarity.
2. The Christian message has helped to unite the different peoples of the Indian Subcontinent, made them aware of their self-worth, opened up a wider horizon as large as the globe.

3. An area where the church has made notable contribution is the education of the indigenous people — the Adivasis and Tribals.

4. Due the dedicated service of the Christian mission/church in the field of education and production of literature, the literary rate in most parts of the subcontinent specially South and the North East India are commendable compared with the national average.

5. Statistics reveal that 85 percent of the health care institutions run by Christian Church / Mission are in the villages. This is the real meaning of the Christian life and mission to be at the service of the least and the last.

6. Indeed, for the tribal people, Christianity became a liberator from spiritual and social demons.

7. Christian mission/church in India has played a unique role in contributing to the Indian culture. As India is composed of various cultural traditions, their contribution to the Indian culture varies from one state to another.

8. One of the important things that the Christian missions emphasized was the humanization of life in all aspects of all people regardless of caste, religion, race and region. Hence Christian gospel is a source for humanization.

9. It was mainly women belonging to the *bhakti tradiditon* who stepped forward in self-expression of Indian Christianity. The contribution of *Bhakti* poets represents a permanent treasure of devotion and theology for the Indian church. H.A. Krishna Piker (1827 —1900) in Tamil Nadu, Narayan Vaman Tilak (1862 — 1919) in Maharashtra, Purushothan Chowdary in Andhra Pradesh and others were some of the prominent poets.

### **THE CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE**

According to Wikipedia, Christianity is India's third-largest religion (census of 2011), with approximately 27.8 million followers, constituting 2.3 percent of India's population. Christianity was established in India even before some European nations had been Christianized. Christians are found all across India and in all walks of life. Indian Christians have contributed significantly to and are well represented in various spheres of national life. They include former and current chief ministers, governors, chiefs of armed forces and chief election commissioners. Indian Christians have the highest ratio of women to men among the

various religious communities in India. The Christian Church runs thousands of educational institutions and hospitals, which have contributed significantly to the development of the nation. Today Christians are considered to be one of the most progressive communities in India<sup>21</sup>.

In the early nineteenth century, education took a whole new meaning in India. From being in the domain of the Brahmins and the ruling class Kshatriyas, the Christian missionaries introduced the revolutionary concept of education for all. This concept of universality was not acceptable to the old Brahmanical order and consequently, in the nineteenth century, there were many forces working against Christians offering education to the ordinary men and women. In their book, “Christian Higher Education”, the authors talk about how difficult it was to lead people across Indian society to realize the importance of education and starting educational institutions to serve them. The early Christian educators realized that it was their responsibility to give a socially relevant education to the Indian masses and for this it was imperative that education addressed itself to many of the burning social issues (21). Premalatha Dinakaralal adds that apart from imparting education, these institutions have taken a very bold stance in eradicating social evils: Sati [immolation of widow], child marriage, gender and caste discrimination, social exploitations and oppressions, illiteracy, widespread occult practices, and economic underdevelopment<sup>23</sup>.

Abraham Thomas in his book “Christians in Secular India”, talks of the impact of English education in India. According to him, “Of all the influences of the British Period, the introduction of English education had perhaps the most transforming effect in the life of India. India, which was essentially parochial and divided and sunk in the morass of old fossilized traditions and stagnant superstitions, was awakened from its sleep of lethargy and inaction and put in contact with the newly vibrant Western civilization. Out of this contact emerged a new India, which, by the end of the nineteenth century, was unified with the spirit of nationalism and infused with Western ideas of democracy and secularism.”<sup>24</sup>.

Even well-known critics of Christian and British education acknowledge the positive transformation and impact of this education. KM Panikkar acknowledged the major contributions of Britain in India’s new life relate to the spheres of ideas and organization. In the sphere of ideas it must be included the new ways of thinking and criticism, the cultivation of science and a scientific approach to problems and the transplantation and acclimatization

of political and social ideals. The most important contribution (of English education) to India's new tradition is a spirit of criticism. The spirit of criticism and what may be called an attitude of questioning towards inherited institutions, however irrational, was not active among the intellectual classes in the period immediately preceding the British<sup>25</sup>. This period, which he calls "an intellectually Dark Age that shrouded India till the middle of the nineteenth century"<sup>26</sup>, started with the abandoning of scientific thought and exploration somewhere in the early part of the eighth century AD.

The need for teachers and schools ushered in Christian missionaries, who left the relative comforts of their homes and families, to undertake the task of ushering in quality education for all. Panikkar describes the role of Christian missionaries in nation building... "Especially their educational institutions introduced a new spirit of understanding, a better appreciation of life in the community and gave an added impetus to a rethinking of values: men like Dr. William Miller of the Madras Christian College, C.F. Andrews of St. Stephen's College in Delhi and numerous less-known personalities all over India helped to bring up generations of students to whom the dedicated lives of their teachers became shining examples of service. In the field of social service also the foreign missions (read Christian institutions) have a fine record of achievement."<sup>27</sup>.

### **CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN THE POST INDEPENDENCE PERIOD**

The creators of the constitution of India realized that the contribution of these educational institutions knew the mayhem, which would result if they were not provided sufficient protection under the constitution. Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution thus were created to provide a multi-layered protective cover to all minority educational institutions regardless of religion or language. After all, Dr. Ambedkar was able to pursue his education at Elphinstone High School (est. 1822), in Bombay. The school lived up to its motto "All are equal under God" as he, an "untouchable", enrolled in the school. After completing his school education, he was enrolled into Elphinstone College, becoming the first from his community to pursue higher education. Before he was admitted in Elphinstone, he spent a brief time in his local school.

His experience is highlighted here in an interesting excerpt from his biography... "Ramji Sakpal (the father) encouraged his children to read the Hindu classics. He used his position in the army to lobby for his children to study at the government school, as they faced

resistance owing to their caste. Although able to attend school, Ambedkar and other untouchable children were segregated and given no attention or assistance by the teachers. They were not allowed to sit inside the class. Even if they needed to drink water somebody from a higher caste would have to pour that water from a height as they were not allowed to touch either the water or the vessel that contained it. This task was usually performed for the young Ambedkar by the school peon, and if the peon was not available then he had to go without water, Ambedkar states this situation as "No peon, No Water"<sup>28</sup>. Interestingly, it was the Christian School, which practiced inclusive education, and not the Government School.

The importance of education in the new independent India, which Dr. Ambedkar humbly acknowledged, was reflected in the desire that every child up to the age of 14 should enjoy the right to and have enrolment in education by the 1960's (a 10 year deadline was set in the article itself). Yet this intent was passed as Article 45 under Directive Principles of State Policy, which "are not enforceable by the courts". The original Article 45 of the Constitution, "seeks to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14". Although the Constituent Assembly of India said we would be "cheating the nation" by not providing education to all, 62 years down the road, we are yet to accomplish this fundamental goal.

Both educational and social services provided by the Christians were addressed in great part to the lower classes and castes. There was far more investment in helping the lower classes, than the elites. In fact many of the present day elite institutions started as services meant for the poor. But, undoubtedly the change in the concept of education from being a privilege of the upper class to being the right of all citizens owes much to the Christian inspiration.

To be continued in the next issue April-June-2018