

Contribution of Christian Missionaries to Karnataka-An Analytical Approach

Kirthinatha G.N.

Assistant professor,
Government First Grade College,
Thirthahalli.
Shivmogga District.
Karnataka.

Abstract

This research paper is an attempt made to investigate the significant influence that Christian missionaries have had on the social, educational, and medical environment of Karnataka. Beginning with the historical connections that existed between India and Palestine, the text then proceeds on to the early existence of Christianity in India, particularly after Saint Thomas and later missionaries brought the religion to the region. It emphasises the role that missionaries play in cultivating literacy, constructing schools and hospitals, and promoting gender equality. It highlights missionary work in education, healthcare, and social reforms across regions like as Belgaum, Dharwad, Mysore, and Mangalore. The endeavours of the missionaries encompassed a wide range of topics, including industrial development, cleanliness, and sociological changes. These initiatives had an impact on policies, including as the elimination of practices such as child marriage and Sati. The paper highlights their ongoing influence in the cultural and educational realms of Karnataka, which has contributed to the formation of a society that is more egalitarian and forward-thinking.

Key words: Missionaries, sacrifice, evangelical work, educated, equipped, Kannadigas

Introduction

No history of Karnataka can be complete without taking note of the work done by the Christian missionaries and influence. They brought to bear upon the minds of the people through the churches. They built the organisations, they established and the Institutions they started. A study of their endeavors in the educational, medical, social, moral and religious spheres will reveal that, on the whole the missionaries have rendered memorable service to the advancement of the public in general and to the Christian community in particular. Due, credit must be given to them for their pioneering work in the various fields, in the course of which they helped to rise the community standard of life, to build character and to broaden the outlook on life, because of their ideals of love, service and sacrifice.

Going deep into the discussion

The connection between India and Palestine where Christ was born in ancient. Regarding this long-standing connection two references are made in the Bible. The first one dates as far back as 2000 BC. When Solomon, who reigned in Palestine for 40 years, had trade relations with western India from where he obtained sandalwood for constructing the magnificent temple in Jerusalem. Another reference is in the first verse of the first chapter of the book of Esther (500 B.C.), where the name of the India occurs in connection with the description of the territorial boundaries of the Persian Emperor Ahasuerus.

The history of Christianity in India begins with the commencement of the Christian era. Saint Thomas, one of the 12 disciples of Jesus Christ, came to India (circa 50 A.D) and established in Thiruvankur, a church now known as “Saint Mar. Thoma Church”. While writing the early history of Christianity, Esabius the Roman historian records that Bishop Dimetrius of Alexandria sent a missionary named Pantaenus to India and that this missionary after 6 months journey arrived in Malabar in 180 A.D. and found to his great surprise that the Gospel according to Saint Matthew had already been translated into many Indian languages. This historical evidence makes it clear that the Christian Church was in existence in India in the second century. This earliest Mar Thoma Church in India is still carrying on its Christian activities by establishing Educational, Medical and Religious Institutions, run by Indian men and money, in **Honnar, Kumuta, Ankola and Karwara** under the management of the **National Missionary Society**.

To trace the beginnings of the Missionaries work in Karnataka, we have to look beyond the previous boundaries of Bombay Karnataka, because the Missionaries carried out their work in **Vishala Karnataka** comprising not only the districts of Belgaum, Dharwad, Bijapur and North Canara, but also the whole of Mysore state and the districts of the SouthCanara, Coorg, Bellary, Ananthapura, Gulbarga, Raichuru and Bidar. It is noteworthy that even during the British rule the Christian work done in all these areas was brought under the direction of a central body known as the **Karnataka Representative Christian Council**. (KRCC) and thus paved the way for the unification of Karnataka on a linguistic basis.

Long before the advent of the foreign protestant missionaries, the Roman Catholics had begun their missionary work in India, from the 16th century onwards. Amongst these Catholic Missionaries **St. Francis Xavier** (1542), Robot Denobile(1605) and Abbe Dubois (1791) are the most prominent figures. A large number of Catholic priests who were great Educationist, Scholars and Scientist have rendered and are still rendering yeoman’s services in various fields for the advancement of our country.

To the king of Denmark goes the honour of starting the organisation for carrying on evangelical work in India. **Frederic Schwartz** trained in the University of Halle, arrived in India in 1750 and started his evangelical work in Mysore. He took care of the orphans and looked after the education of poor children. Hyder Ali had such a great regard for Schwarts that he issued orders throw his officers saying “let the venerable Padri go everywhere without hindrance since he is a holy man”. He was popularly known as the Royal Raja of Tanjavuru. The inscription of his Grave is a worthy testimony of the esteem, love and affection which the people cherished towards him. A few lines of the long epitaph are quoted here. The simple sanctity of the Apostolic character and his natural vivacity won the affection, as his unspotted probity and purity of life alike commended the reverence of the Christian, Mohamedan and Hindu.

What is more interesting to the Kannada speaking people is that the new Testament of the Bible was first translated into Kannada in 1809 by William Carey and his colleagues (Marshman and Ward). But His manuscript was unfortunately destroyed by a fire in the press in 1812 and their version in Kannada was published in 1823.

Karnataka to had its share of good fortune in that she had many scholarly Missionaries who devoted much of their valuable time to the development of the Kannada literature. The Reverend John Hands of the London Missionary Society arrived in Bellary in 1809 and within a year he compiled a Kannada grammar and

began to translate the Gospel of Saint Luke in Kannada. In 1828 Hands returned to England to recoup his health and during his 3 years stay there. He got a new font of Kannada type caste under his personal direction and brought it to Bellary and improved the mission press there. The earliest Kannada- English dictionary was compiled by the Rev. Mr. Reeves and then by Kittle (1893). Who has given as a voluminous and monument work which still remains a standard lexicon. Ziegler compiled the English Kannada dictionary and various books on Botanical subjects. Worths Poetical Anthology is often prescribed as a textbook for higher examinations in Kannada. Kittels editions of Kannada poetry and grammar are still standard references books for students of Kannada literature. The rev. E. P. Rice's Canaries literature another valuable contribution, is also a standard reference work. Several volumes of Archaeological survey of Mysore and Coorg by Edward rice or useful to those who wish to study the inscriptions in Kannada.

Thanks to the tremendous toil of Carey and his colleagues the people of Europe and America were aroused to a sense of their duty to the non Christian people of the world . Thus a number of missionary societies formed. The following are the names of some of the important societies. Presbyterian, Congregational, Episcopalan, Wesleyan, Methodist, Baptist, Basel, Pentecostal, Oriental and The National Missionary. These missionary societies derived their names either from the places of their origin or from the denominations of their mother churches. It may be noted here that the denominational difference in the Western churches sprang from sharp differences, in the interpretation and application of certain creeds and spiritual passages and in the modes of worship.

But in India these denominational differences were entirely a matter of accident- that is, the accident of the arrival of a particular missionary body for working in a particular area rather than a result of any choice or conviction on the part of the Indians. The Indian churches, therefore felt that, these differences should be kept in the background since they had no special meaning or value for them. Consequently, the Indian churches has given the ecumenical lead to the hole of the Christian world by formulating a scheme of Church Union and translating it into action by the formation of the church of South India and the United church of Northern India. In which the various denomination in Southern North India have been United. It may be said that this union of different churches in the religious pair has its parallel in India more or less in the form of Union Government.

The ministry of Jesus Christ consisted of (A)teaching, (B)preaching, and (C) healing. The missionary societies carried on their ministry in Karnataka, as elsewhere, actuated by the same ideals set by their master. They established orphanages welfare centres, dispensaries and hospitals and educational institutions, not only because they provided a natural contact with the people. But chiefly because of the human need which moved their compassion and which could, in their opinion be met by Christian love and sacrifice.

The Missionaries, gifted with rare foresight made primary education compulsory for all Christian boys and girls with the result that today from the point of view of literacy. The Indian Christian community in Karnataka tops the list with 90% of literate members. This Nobel example is now being followed by our Government which has launched the adult literacy campaign and also compulsory primary education for children of school going age. Thanks to the Missionaries, the Government is relieved of a part of its burden to the extent to which the Indian Christians have become literate. Finding that the Christian children had

benefited a good deal by the education. They received in the primary schools, the Christian ideals of love and sacrifices let the Missionaries to extend these benefits to the children of other communities also, by opening of primary schools.

The Missionaries felt the need for higher education and opened English schools in various places in Karnataka. The Beynon-smith High School in Belgaum was the first English school in Karnataka. It was started in the year 1832. A Girls High School known as **Vanita Vidyalaya** was also started in the same town. The Basel Mission was the next to enter the field of Secondary Education and opened a high school in Dharwad in the year 1863. It is now running two High Schools- One for boys and the other for girls in the same town. It is a matter of great pride that so illustrious a person as the late Diwan Bahadur Rodda. The first Indian educational inspector in Karnataka and one of the chief promoters of Karnataka college, was educated in the Basil Mission High School.

Another Notable product of the school was the late Diwan Bahadur Menasinakai, who on retirement from the provincial revenue service founded the Central Cooperative Bank at Dharwad. Dr.Samuel Aravatagi, the well known surgeon who was running an independent and well equipped hospital known as Vail Memorial Hospital at Miraj, had his education in this high school. The Syrian Christians of the previously mentioned Marathoma Church are conducting a high school at Honnavara. Outside Bombay Karnataka several High School have been opened for Christian and non Christian Kannadigas. Like Mysore, Bangalore, Bellary, Anantapura, Kolara, Udupi and Kalburgi. As many as nine High Schools are conducted in Bangalore city alone. It is interesting to note the second grade colleges, affiliated to Madras University, were conducted at Bellary by the London mission and at Calicut by the Basel Mission during the last quarter of the 19th century.

It was the missionaries who first gave female education equal importance. Boys and girls were treated alike in their institutions pointing the way towards the equality of sexes. The girls got as much attention as, if not more than, the boys in the full development of personality. Dr S.Muttulakshmi Reddy in her presidential address at the all India woman's conference at Lahore in 1931. She said **“the woman of Asia have been placed under a deep debt of attitude to the missionary agencies for their valuable contribution to the educational uplift of Indian women.”** We can with equal emphasis say the same thing with regard to the education of woman in Karnataka.

While carrying on these educational activities the missionaries did not overlook the needs of the backward classes. Admission was freely given to the children of these people. And When absolutely necessary they even ran the schools specially for them. Thus indirectly paving the way for the removal of untouchability and encouraging regard for equality. Apart from missionary societies, a number of individual Europeans who were Christians at heart did what they could to start western Education in the grade cities of India. David Hare, a Scottish watch maker was a pioneer of English studies among Boys in Calcutta. A civil servant Mr. Drink water Bethune, succeeded in starting a school for Hindu girls in the same city. The Hon'ble Mount Stuart Elphinstone led both the Hindu and the Parsee communities in Bombay to Modern education. His name is perpetuated in the Government College of the city.

On the whole, the missions have always endeavored to give in their institutions what maybe called the Christian education which aimed at the development of total personality, including physical, mental, moral, and spiritual, with genuine concern for each student as a person calling attention to the importance of realising God's love for the whole of humanity as personified in Jesus Christ. They were actuated by a belief in the unity and the dignity of truth. High standards of character and conduct a passion for intellectual and moral freedom and sense of fellowship with all mankind.

The missionaries also ran industrial schools. Where the boys were given instruction in the various crafts such as carpentry, weaving, spinning and other cottage industries, as also farming. Girls were taught the art of cooking, sewing, knitting and embroidery, so as to make them self dependent. Thus the poor, the crippled the infirm and the helpless widows were taught to better their lot and become worthy citizens of the country.

The Basel Mission, with its headquarters at Mangalore, started industries such as the manufacturer of tiles and textiles in Kallikote, Kannanur, Kudroli and Jeppu. But the Government of India under British rule took them over from the Basel Mission and they are now run under the management of the Commonwealth trust. Some missions also did pioneering work by establishing printing presses in Bellary, Mysore, Bangalore and Mangalore. Weaving with the shuttle and fist introduced at the great waving center Guleda gudda (Bijapura district). As a result of the effort of missionaries who obtained supply of the requisite weaving implement from Japan. The Rangaregis and the Belagals then popular names in the weaving community of Karnataka, were the first to adopt this new method in their industry. 80 years ago a sugar factory was also started on a small scale at Mallasamudra near Gadag.

The most important service rendered by the missions was the establishment of dispensaries and hospitals in various places like Miraj, Sankeshwar, Nippani, Gadag- Bettageri, Hulakoti, Lakshmeshwar, Haveri, Motebennur, Udipi, Bangalore, Kolar, Hassan, Mysore, Bidar, Raichur and other places.

In the earlier years before the Government and the municipalities took preventive measures against epidemic, missionary doctors and nurses who had vision and a spirit of service. Through themselves heart and soul even at the risk of their lives, to the task of preventing the outbreak and spread of epidemics not only in towns but also in the neglected rural areas. The leprasoriya at Miraj, Sankeshwar, Hindalga (Belgaum district) are well known. A sanatorium for TB patients at Wanlesswadi near Miraj is famous for the expert treatment. It offers it has given an impetus to the starting of similar institutions elsewhere.

William carry and his colleagues after studying Hindu customs and manners of the age convinced the British Government that for the welfare of the country. Many social and religious reforms were absolutely necessary for example the total abolition of caste, the prohibition of 'Sati' (widow burning), child marriage, polygamy and infanticide, prohibition of human sacrifice and torturing of animals in sacrifice.

Some of these social reforms suggested by the Missionaries were taken up by the Government and implemented by Governors General like Lord Wellesley and William Bentinck. The country appreciated the benefits of some of the reforms and it is gratifying that our Government has been gradually giving effect to the other reforms through legislation for the building up of our Nation.

When the social consciousness of the people was still dormant the Missionaries started homes for the blind, dumb and destitute. These were for Christians as well as for non Christians. An Institution of this nature at Kedgaon near Pune is well known. The credit for starting this institution goes to the late Smt. Pandita Ramabai, a Brahmin convert whose name stands immortal in India's history of philanthropy and reform.

If the Christian community of this country has become a part of India. This was rightly observed by our Prime Minister Sri Jawaharlal Nehru, In his letter address to Bishop S.K. Mondol President of the National Christian Council the Kannada speaking Christian or part and parcel of Karnataka being inseparably knit together by a common environment, language and culture and cherishing the same ideals and aspirations and eagerly looking forward to the birth of a Vishala Karnataka in which even this community has a special part to play.

The distinctive features of this community are the high percentage of literacy due to compulsory primary education for its boys and girls fixing the marriageable age of girls above 14 years long before the 'Sardar Act' was introduced in 1932. Monogamy which has been the acknowledged rule in the community from the beginning widow marriage which was made permissible the equality of the sexes and recognition that sons and daughters succeeded equally to their parents intestate property. Social uplift by rising the standard of life. Rural uplift by improving sanitation by encouraging cleanliness and cottage industries, medical aid to persons suffering from all kinds of diseases including leprosy and TB. And finally the building up of a casteless society by admission to membership and by equal treatment of persons from all strata of society. Thus bringing into action the principle of the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God.

Conclusion

After reading this brief survey, the question will naturally be asked why foreign Missionaries should have at all come to India or to Karnataka, at such a great expense and sacrifice to themselves and to their Institutions. The answer is to be found in their Masters command to go into the uttermost parts of the world, to preach the saving Gospel and to continue the ministry he had begun about 2000 years ago. The Missionaries who had experienced the saving grace and the reading love of their Lord Jesus Christ were impelled by the inner urge. And the constraining love of Jesus to offer themselves as living sacrifice to fulfill the command of their Saviour. The good work turned out by them in every spare of life bears eloquent testimony to the passion love devotion and zeal with which they worked as humble servants of Jesus Christs.

References:-

- Jones, K. W. (1994). Social-Religious movements in British India. In W. H. C. Smith (Ed.), *The new Cambridge History of India, Vol. 3*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
- Majumdar, R. C. (1965). *The History and Culture of Indian people* (Vol. 1). Bharathiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay.
- Himsata, C. H. (1965). *Indian nationalism and social reform*.
- Panikkar, K. N. (2007). *Colonialism culture and resistance*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Kannada and Culture Department. (2006). *Karnataka Parampare* (Vol. 2). Bangalore: Kannada and Culture Department.