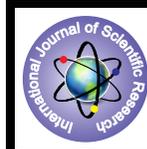


Neo-Colonialism: A Retrospect on Colonial Christian Mission in India



History

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ABSTRACT

Christians in India are considered as colonial agents because of colonial rule and Christian mission, which worked hand in hand. As far as Indian Church History is concerned the Colonial period is the most important period which made a significant impact on Indian Church and society. Christian missions in India made a positive impact in several areas such as education, medical service, eradication of social evil practices, technology development etc., Especially English education brought renaissance in India which led to Nationalistic movements. Some of the missionaries encouraged Indian nationalistic movements during freedom struggle. Along with their positive impact there are several negative areas that remain as black spots in Indian Christian mission history. Christian mission has always given a wrong impression thinking that mission is always from the superior West to the inferior East and rich North to the poor South. Even though political colonial dominance is over; still the shadow of colonialism is chasing the south by its dominance. It is a fact that Christianity is growing in south, but still its church is under the dominance of western superior power for its theology and mission praxis.

Introduction

History of Christianity in India can be divided into three sections, early period to the coming of the Portuguese (52-1498), the Colonial period (1498-1947), and the Independent India (1947-the present). Since Christian mission and Colonial powers worked hand in hand during Colonial Period (1498-1947), the effect of colonial period is still continuing in independent India. In this connection this paper is an attempt to understand the relationship between colonial powers and Christian mission along with their positive and negative impact on church and society in India.

An Overview of main Colonial Powers (1498-1947)

Indian church history helps us to understand that Vasco da Gama prepared a way for the establishment of colonial Christianity by his arrival to Calicut on May 20, 1498. "Dutch, English, and Danish merchants first represented Evangelical Christianity in India and especially in south India beginning with the 17th Century" (Lehmann 1956: 12). All these groups of Europeans brought their chaplains and the missionaries were accused of having made a business out their piety and turned their activity to profit.

The Dutch East Indian Company was not interested on Christian mission and in fact they could not make any efforts for the growth of the church in India. Their main focus was on trade and they could only translate

The Danish colonial power settled in Tranquebar in 1620 and at Serampore in 1676. The main purpose of Danish is to trade, but the Lutheran protestant King Fredrick IV has sent Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Henry Pluetschau for the mission work in India.

The British Colonial government openly supported missionaries and their activities. Christian mission under British made a great impact in the country in different areas such as education, medical, literacy, technology, eradication of social evil practices etc.,

Colonial Positive Impact

Christian mission work made a positive impact in several areas such as education, medical service, eradication of social evil practices, technology development etc., Especially English education brought renaissance in India which led to Nationalistic movements. Some of the missionaries encouraged Indian nationalistic movements in their freedom struggle.

Impact on Education

When education was available only to the high caste elite, Christian missions made it possible to extend it to the other sections of the country. They served irrespective of caste, colour, creed and status. Francis Xavier initiated education and started schools in sixteenth Century and there are records of schools started by protestant missionaries such as Ziegenbalg in Tranqubar in 1701, Schultze in Chennai. Tranqubar mission established several schools in different places. The East India Company established some educational institutions such as Madrissa for Muslims at Calcutta in 1781 where Persia was taught, a Hindu college at Benares in 1791 where Sanskrit was the medium of instruction. Some of the Orientals like Edmund Burke, William Jones, William Robertson, Sir Charles Williams promoted education in Indian languages, while evangelicals focused only on English Education. It was Alexander Duff who introduced English education and gave lot of priority to it. Christian missions have not only established educational institutions on plain lands of south India, but also on the Himalayan hills. For instance "The Himalaya Mission had established the first school at Kotgarh in 1842 A.D., The Baring High School (now Baring Union Christian College) in Batala, the Alexandra Girls School in Amritsar, the Alexandra High School in Jammu, Bishop Cotton School in Simla, Tyndale Biscoe in Srinagar were established by various missions with a view to impact western education in a Christian atmosphere (Negi 1995:141-142)." Some of these schools and colleges produced reformers and thinkers who could impact our country. English education enlightened Indian thinkers to fight against structural evil systems in Indian culture. Scottish church college in Calcutta and Madras Christian College raised several Hindu thinkers like Vivekananda, Radhakrishnan, and Morarji Desai who impacted our country. The underprivileged sections of our India society got exposed to English education by the efforts of Christian missions. Jayakumar evaluates missionaries' impact during colonial period and he says, "It was instrumental in introducing English-medium education and western type of education which resulted in renaissance and free-thinking (Jayakumar 37)." The literary activities of the missionaries such as compiling dictionaries in local languages, grammar books, printing of News papers both in the local languages and in English and the like began a renaissance in India.

Medical Service

Medical service was extended to India by almost all the mission agencies. Hospitals were established not only in towns but also in the villages as well. Their impact on training Indian doctors was note worthy. In fact, by 1895 there were 168 Indian doctors by the efforts of Missionaries investment. When women

education was very much discouraged in India, Christian missions could raise women doctors and nurses. "In 1940 it was estimated that about 90% of all the nurses in the country were Christians and about 80% of these had been trained in Christian hospitals" (Perumalil and Hambye 1972:276).

Impact on Social Evils

Christian missions under colonial rule transformed evil practices such as Sati and infanticide. They also worked tirelessly towards remarriage of widows and female education. Solomon Victus reminds us that "early missionaries of the present day Kanyakumari region took up certain issues like upper cloth movements as part of their anti-caste position (149)." Since caste system is deeply rooted in Indian culture they could not do much to eradicate it but their contribution is noteworthy.

Colonial Negative Impact

It is a fact that Christian missions have impacted in several areas of development, but there are some negative areas that we need to discuss.

Though Indian Church has a rich heritage from the first century onwards, colonial invasion shattered the identity of Indian Church. Christianity had a wonderful glories presence in India from the first century onwards especially in Kerala, but because of mission expansion along with colonial rule, people misunderstand Christian faith as a white man's religion.

Western missionaries offered Christianity in a foreign cup which gave wrong impression about Christian faith. The significant observation is that "Christianity propagated by the foreign missionaries was branded as a denationalizing force and the Indian Christians as agents of British Imperialism (Doss 1988:15)." Indian Christians were always suspected by the nationalistic leaders.

One of the blender mistakes missionaries did during colonial power was that they had a faulty conception regarding followers of Christ from Hindu background. They had conviction that it was impossible for any man to stand as a Christian unless he came and lived in the mission compound. Christian faith could not grow in the atmosphere of Indian culture because of this church compound mission approach.

Christian mission has always given a wrong impression thinking that mission is always from the superior West to the inferior East and rich North to the poor South. Even though political colonial dominance is over but still the shadow of colonialism

is chasing the south by its economic dominance. It is a fact that Christianity is growing in south, but still its church is under the dominance of western superior power for its theology and mission practice. Globalization is the result of neocolonialism that has become a threat to the oppressed sections of the south. The exploitation of the week continues under this neocolonialism. "Globalization, for example, under the pretext of breaking down barriers, especially trade barriers, is actually erecting new walls of First World hegemony, walls that exclude the Third World, and walls of neo-colonialism" (Nalunnakkal 2005:15). Globalization brought a great revolution in the field of economy. The dominant west made third world countries to fall under the debt crisis by lending loans through World Bank and IMF. The IMF which is dominated by west is the system which is controlling the global economic system. Neocolonialism is an indirect oppression of the weak and it is another form of colonial rule. 'Joerg Rieger' observes that "Neocolonialism is perhaps more subtle than colonialism - we no longer tell people what to do through direct governance - but it is no less clear about its mission ("we know what is right for the world") and no less powerful when it comes to the results (those in power shape the lives of those without power) (Rieger 2004:201). These neocolonial powers are still exercising the **knowing attitude** to oppress the weak. They think that they are the only elite group who has the wisdom to make policies and they view the East as inferior in knowledge. In these days the "European consciousness is only just awakening to an incipient collective repentance for the horrific injustices inflicted upon the southern hemisphere (Grey 1999:201)." They are also realizing of their oppressive nature "including the wholesale wiping out of populations, the African slave traffic, and the setting up of a system whereby poor countries of the southern hemisphere were forced to become cripplingly dependent on the rich north for economic survival (Grey 1999:201)." It is an evident that the Western dominance is continuing as an undercurrent in the form of neocolonialism.

Conclusion

Christianity in India has rich heritage from the first century onwards and there are several indigenous movements which helped Indian Church to survive in the midst of opposition from the critics of non Christians in India. Though colonial powers gave a wrong picture about Christian faith due to their dominant nature, we should acknowledge their service to Indian church and society.

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