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**TRIBAL'S ATTACHMENT TOWARDS BREKLUM MISSION AND THEIR  
PROSELYTISATION IN UNDIVIDED KORAPUT DISTRICT (1882 A.D.-1934 A.D.) -  
AN ANALYTICAL OUTLINE**

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**Abstract:** *The undivided Koraput district was too hilly and inaccessible to bask in the ray of progress. This is the homeland of different colourful aboriginals. They were illiterate, ignorant, indigent and superstitious and considered outcaste, uncivilized and untouchable. Forest was their natural habitat and source of livelihood. They did not even come out of their habitat and were totally isolated from outside world. As a result, they remained backward and undeveloped. Nobody was bothered about them and let them be suppressed by not only by the local Zamindars, Sahukars but also the British. In this circumstance, the Breklum Mission came to Koraput district on 15th May 1882 A.D and heralded a new epoch by introducing education, health and economic etc. It was the first to come closer to such people and show a ray of hope. Thereafter, the tribal society was the modern civilization. This was the outstanding job done by the Mission.*

**Keywords:** *Tribal, Breklum Mission, economic, health, education, religion*

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

The undivided Koraput District is a tribal dominated district. It is a district of meadows, forests and rapid falls. The picturesque environment with its mystery and enchantment has made Koraput undoubtedly a '**Paradise for the Lovers of Nature**'. For natural beauty it is said to be **the Kashmir of Orissa state**. The tribal people are the indigenous people of the vast forest territory and are, therefore called the 'Adivasis' 'Aboriginals', 'Girijans' or 'Vanavasis'. It is the home land of the aboriginals. The Adivasi have their own identity, culture, language, and philosophy of life. Living isolated and confined to their limited locality in the jungle and hilly terrain, they had little or no outside contact till the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. People who knew them have admired them for their '**love of truth**' and '**sense of justice**'.

The word Tribal is defined by physical anthropologist Beteille (1974) who points four key criteria to distinguish tribe from the rest of the population. These are **Size, isolation, religion and Culture**. Their means of livelihoods depends on land, land based resources and forests. Out of 62 tribes in India, there are 23 tribes in Odisha. Out of 23 tribes of Odisha 18 major tribes are seen only in Koraput district. The most important tribes of Koraput district are Kondhs, Kohla, Gadaba, Santal, Bonda, Bhattara, Koya, Bhuyan, Ho, Paraja, and Savara, In spite of bounty nature, Koraput district has paucity of cultivable lands to sustain its people. Forest was both the seat and source of their livelihood. From dawn to dusk they remained struck to forest. To speak broadly, forest was regulating the socio – cultural, economic and ecological life of the tribals. The tribal were solely depended upon forest for food, fodder, fiber, fuel, housing material, medicine and recreation.

Besides that, they collected different forest products in different seasons such as tamarind, myro baleen, sal seeds, resin, lac, adda leaves, sabai grass, beedi leaves, Sal seeds, soap nuts, reeds, canes, honey, arrow-root, mahua flower and seeds, cleaning nuts, wax, horns, skins, nux-vomica, kusum seeds, brooms, silk cotton, kath and medicinal herbs. They also sowed various seeds like ragi, suan, kosla, kangu, ganthi, jahna, jhuranga, kandul, maize, alasi or Niger in the podu field etc. They were occasionally doing podu or shifting cultivation and terrace cultivation by slashing and burring forest. Cattle rearing and animal husbandry was additional occupation for earning their livelihood. However, they did not bring them



prosperity. They only helped provide twice a meal daily with much difficulty. Therefore, the tribal were very impecunious and leading miserable and deplorable life.

Their traditions, customs, beliefs, life styles were unique. The tribal were the worshippers of Nature. The most important trees they worshipped in different places are phylanthus, emblica, Embroy (Garbhana), Karam, Neem, Peepal Tree, Sal tree and Banyan Tree. A peculiarity of the tribal mode of worship was the offering of blood of animal and bird. Such propitiation and observance of rites are explicitly directed towards happiness, safety and security, abundance of crops, live-stock, plants and welfare of progenies in the mundane world.

To appease earth Goddess, 'Dharnipennu' the Kondhs were practising the most inhuman practice known as "Mariah sacrifice". They worship as many as 84 kinds of Gods and Goddesses. The 'Bhutos' (Bhutas) was one of their traditions. The tribal religion has in general taken over the spirit worship found in Hinduism. 'Duma' another conception related to past funeral ritual is practised by the tribal. Besides that, animism, animatims, fetishism anthropomorphism shamanism, and ancestors worship has been prevailing among the tribal people.

Educationally, the tribal's were grossly illiterate, ignorant and superstitious. It was because; they were very much busy in collecting their daily needs and got no time to learn something for their life. The children helped their parents to supplement to their earning. They had developed a strong prejudice that if any tribal dared to read, his eyes would be dropped out and his head burst into thousand pieces and his health would destroy (Padhi: 177). Such superstitious beliefs discouraged the aboriginals to send their children to schools. Apart from that, there was no scope of education for them. The most important remonstrance to tribal education was the language. They used to communicate through jargons and their own language was kuvi, which was no intelligible. In the then available educational institutions, there was no Kuvi teacher. Their impoverishment and caste prejudices debarred from getting education in the society. That's why, they were deprived of availing of education and remained backward and illiterate.

In case of health and hygiene, the tribal were suffering a lot and losing their valuable lives without proper treatment. Mortality rate was very high. Koraput district was notorious as a malaria prone region. Besides malaria, people were suffering from various lethal diseases



like Malaria fever, Black water fever, Typhoid, Rheumatism, Dysentery, Syphilis, Small pox, Cholera and Leprosy etc. ( Gloyer : 37 ). During that time, the sickness was viewed as attack of supernatural power or deity and was associated with blind belief, sorcery and superstition. So, the sensible care of the sick was thought to be the successful way of fighting against the practice of sorcery and superstition. There was no health care facility for these people and people were dying more without treatment. They were under the clutches of sorcery, Dissari (Male priest), Gurumain (Female), Bejjus (androgynous), Siras (Deities played on them) who knew how to make money and economically exploited them (Tauscher: 153)

In religion, the Adivasi were the Nature worshippers and they were worshipping various elements of Nature. Their Gods were jungle, Dangar (Forest), Stream and the Earth. Their interaction with nature has been intense and that has led to formation of many religious practices related to Nature.

In these critical circumstances, the **Breklum Mission** came to Koraput on **15<sup>th</sup> May, 1882 A.D.** and thereafter, the fate of the tribal underwent a tremendous transmutation in every sphere of life.

**The Breklum mission** - It was built on the foundation of **belief and prayer**. It was the brain child of the Rev. Christian Jensen, a peitist of Breklum in the Northern part of West Germany. He was a very devoted servant of Lord Jesus Christ - the only Saviour and Redeemer of Souls, The theme of his prayer was '**Jesus Saves Souls**'. His entire work planned for mission work was 'founded on **faith and action**' and his motto was '**Beten and Arbeiten**' (pray and work). To produce missionaries, he set up 'a Breklum Mission Seminary' on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1877 A.D. This institution served a great purpose in producing missionaries which fulfilled the aim of Christian Jensen. To begin with 12 members were admitted and dedicated for the Lord's service and two out of the 12 were the first missionaries to India – Koraput. They were Rev. Ernst Pohl and Rev. Harmann Bothmann. Bothmann was a man of practical bent of mind and master builder whereas Rev. Ernst Pohl was a Lutheran Theologian and Artist. They came to Koraput District on **15<sup>th</sup> May, 1882 A.D.** This great mission society started doing missionary work not only in India but also in Africa and South America. (Prokash: 4-7).



## 1. ATTACHMENT OF TRIBAL TOWARDS BREKLUM MISSION

The Breklum Mission was first to come in contact with the tribal with bringing handful of welfare measures and tried to improve them in all aspects of life but never uttered the word Proselytisation. The tribal got golden opportunity to see and understand the modern trend through the mission. Though the Mission came to Koraput in 1882 A.D. and established its missionary stations all over this hilly region it had to wait till 1908 to make so – called contact with them. So, the Gospel of God couldn't reach to the tribals. On the other hand, the tribal were scared of the white men and hiding themselves in the forest or running away hither and thither. To remove the fear from their minds, the Mission used to go to the inhabitations of the tribal, fixed tent, moved their residences, distributed medicines and other goods, and exchanged words with them.

The Mission even appointed Gurus, catechists to bring the hiding people out and to communicate to them as interpreters. The Mission set up dispensaries, clinics and treated the sick people. It provided economic opportunity by giving appointment in their bungalows, horse rearing, gardens, kitchens, marketing, agricultural fields, gave agricultural loans, engaged in tea and coffee gardens, plantation work for their livelihood. The mission tried to protect the innocent and indebted tribals from Zamindars, Sahukars and Police personnel without any return.

The obliged tribal hauled towards the Mission without hesitation and the path of evangelization was opened. Thereafter the Mission adopted some **missionary methods** to win the hearts of the people. These were,

- i) Direct approach through preaching of the Gospels.
- ii) Dialogue with the people of other Faith.
- iii) Improvement of secular and theological education.
- iv) The publication of literature as a means of communicating the Gospel.
- iv) Healing ministry and
- v) Vocational training for self employment.
- vi) **Zenana system** or ministry among the women - 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 done 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 (Veil). The Zenana education made women conscious of medical and other professional education. Perhaps, in the long run this kind of education the Deaconess imparted was very much fruitful for them (Waack: 213 – 229).

## **2. THE TREND - MAKERS:**

When the good news of the love of God was delivered to the people dwelling in dense forests and mountainous ranges, they came forward to embrace Christ by group. Having experienced with love and service, about 200 Kondhs of the village of Gotiguda were first baptized by Rev. R. Tauscher in the year 1934 (Tauscher : 161). Many a villagers approached the Missionaries with request to provide them with 'Gurus'. Sincere work was carried out in these villages and consequently a great number of Adivasi embraced Christ as their 'Mahapru' (Great Lord) and mass conversion held among the tribal.

## **3. MASS PROSELYTISATION AMONG THE TRIBAL:**

This mass movement swept the whole of the district. More and more enquirers came to the missionaries to hear the Gospel of salvation. Other non-Christian tribal watched the reaction of Gods and evil spirits on the conversion of Kondhs. N. Helms reports that, some non-Christian Kondhs from other village area waited to see what actually will happen to the Kondh Christians. They were eager to see whether their God would kill their children, their crops would fail or their Government people would give them trouble. Fortunately their anxieties were unfounded. Nothing happened to the newly converted Kondhs people. Then other villages were interested to hear more about Jesus Christ. They observed a great change among the tribal after Proselytisation which encouraged people of surrounding villages to become Christians. It is interesting to note that, the Kondhs were more opened to the Gospel than the other tribal people of this district. (C. M: 2).

Anthony Asha observes that: The Holy Spirit is at work among the different tribes namely Kondhs, Pengu Porajas, Doras, Gonds, Koyas, Didayi, Bondas, Jhodia Porajas, Ronas, Bhatras, scheduled castes (Asha : 1982) and other caste people. The Breklum mission was the only institution who undertook a great step to improve them. It is a fact that, the initial process



of social development of these tribal was begun only by the early missionaries in the first decade of the 20th century, which saw the establishment of mission stations at Laxmipur (1908) and Doliambo (1910), (Waack : 235 -278). The year 1926, saw a new beginning with the coming of the missionary Rev R. Tauscher. Due to his incessant endeavour Gospel was brought to the tribal in Koraput District and the tribal mass movement was started in 1934 A.D. Even some of the missionaries had lost their valuable lives for the betterment of the tribal. Among them, Rev. R. Tauscher and Rev. R. Speck were prominent. Rev. R Tauscher was reverently called as '**BABA**' by the tribal.

#### **4. CAUSES OF MASS PROSELYTISATION**

There were many causes which inspired and attracted the tribal population to become Christians. The most important among them:

i) **Caste prejudices** – due to rigidity of caste system and untouchability, the people embraced because there is no caste system in Christianity in this religion.

ii) **Economic cause** - for the economic upliftment, the mission took a number of steps for the people and generated employment opportunities by engaging them in various works like plantation, gardening, and marketing and appointed as Pastors, Gurus, and Catechists etc.

iii) **Medical facility** – It was a Malaria prone area. People were completely depended upon sorcerers and Gurumains, Dissaris etc and losing their valuable lives. The mission established clinics, dispensaries, introduced mobile health care system and later on hospitals like Ebenzer hospital at Kotpad, Leprosy Asylum at Jeypore, Christian Hospital at Nabarangpur, Christian Hospital at Bissam Cuttack and Nabajeevan based Hospital at Doliambo and provided medical facilities to the poor and helpless people.

iv) **Educational cause** – the tribals remained grossly illiterate and superstitious because of their poverty and ignorance. Therefore, the mission established mission schools, introduced zenana system, Sunday schools, Night schools and theological seminary to eradicate illiteracy. Even the mission provided stipend to inspire good students for higher education.

v) **Upliftment, progress and protection** - Becoming Christian then meant uplift, progress and protection. Actually the mission had a positive gesture towards the mass movement. During this period the new converted out caste faced a lot of disadvantages to make both ends meet. The social break caused much inconveniences in the society. So, the mission came forward ensuring protection to the converted people from police atrocities,



Zamindars' harassment, moneylender's usurpations and high caste' provocation and exploitation. The mission also generated employment opportunities and even established Savings, Credit and Co-operative banks and provided loan to them at low per cent age of interest.

vi) **Protection from non-Christians outrage** - The tribal Christians had to face a lot of troubles created by non-Christians. According to N. Helm's, the land tax of the tribal Christians was increased by the non-Christian Government officers. It was a shock for others who were interested in Christianity. As per a historical statistics, within two years tax was increased from Rs.65 to Rs.145 (C.M: 5).

The rich stopped giving them loans for cultivation just because they became Christian. The Government official demanded bribes from them and warned that they would increase it if they failed to pay tax. Again they were scared to be booted if this matter would be reported to their higher authorities. In this situation, the mission helped and protected them. The mission undertook a number of economic measures to provide earning opportunities to the converted people and provided loans to them at low interest by establishing Banks. The mission persuaded the government to abolish Goti and Bethi system from the society through proper legislation.

vii) **Protection from local physicians and Sahukars** - The mission not only protected from the local physicians like Dissaris, Gurumains, Bejjus, Siras, sorcerers, magic spells but also from local money lenders and helped the people to stand on their own legs and provided agricultural loans and established industrial training centres The trained people were given scope to start their independent business.

viii) **Preaching and teaching in the language of the tribal** – this was the most effective method of the mission to reach these people and exchange with them and was able to communicate their Gospel of God. So, the people were fully convinced of their problems and tilted towards Christianity. They realized that nobody was interested to improve their conditions except the mission and spontaneously came to the fold of Christianity. Thereafter the mass Proselytisation took place in 1934 A.D. after long days of coming of the mission in 1882 A.D.



## **5. ESTABLISHMENT OF ADIVASI MISSION BOARD**

The Adivasi wanted to form a separate institution for them because the Pro-Christians (Scheduled Castes) had developed much better than the Adivasi in social, political, educational and economic aspects. Even, the food habits, dress, rites, rituals, festivals and ceremonies of the adivasis were totally different from Scheduled castes. So, they wanted to give their own culture and society a separate identity. At that time the total Adivasi Christian population was 7000. The JELC had spread the Gospel mainly in two stations called Laxmipur and Doliambo which were Adivasi populated areas. As the Adivasi pastors did not like to work under the non-Adivasi deans, they felt the need of a separate Mission Board. On this context, the missionaries also agreed to improve the conditions of the tribal. So, out of JELC the Adivasi Mission Board (AMB) was born on **1<sup>st</sup> March 1974** to run missionary work among their same communities( Pangli : 1982). Since that mission work among the Adivasis had been carried out **freely in the** Deaneries of Doliambo, Laxmipur, Nandapur, Mirabali and Baghlamti.

With the march of time, AMB has taken some commendable measures for the development of Tribal. The mission took some steps to improve the tribal in the field of agriculture and introduced financial assistance programme, educational development; eradication of health hazards which helped immensely for their development. Today, the tangible result of upward social mobility of the tribal community of this area is the contribution of the institutions at these mission stations (now Deaneries) over the past several years.

## **6. IMPACT ON TRIBAL SOCIETY**

The tribal were considered as outcaste, untouchable, uncivilized and neglected, deserted by the local Zamindars, kings and even by the British Government, They remained backward for centuries together and nobody was at all interested to look after their betterment. The mission was the first one to come closer to the tribal society with bringing handful welfare schemes for their development and for this reason some of the missionaries lost their valuable lives.

The mission brought a socio-cultural change among the tribal and other down trodden communities of this region. They were the first to discover the social habits with various welfare measures. The phrase '**missionary spirits**' even today, symbolizes devotion and self sacrifice of the alien Christian missionaries in the remotest hills and forests.



The mission got a safe ground for the propagation of Christianity in the tribal areas. Welfare activities preceded the work of their original intention. The tribal society was made open. Schools were instituted and medical facilities were provided. The Missionaries took up measures to rehabilitate the rescued victims of human sacrifice and female infanticide. So the welfare activities taken up by the Christian Missionaries were called the 'work of mercy'.

## 7. CONCLUSION:

Impact of Breklum Mission on the tribal society was immense. It is for the first time that the mission knocked at the ever – closed door of the tribals and gave a ray of hope among them and lime lighted them towards modern society. The tribals are no more considered outcaste and uncivilized and now they are able distinguish between right and wrong. Their isolation has been broken and they have been participating in the mainstream and getting opportunities to involve in the process of socio – cultural development of the district.

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