



THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY - "A GOLDMINE FOR CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN KORAPUT DISTRICT" – A HISTORICAL APPROACH

Dr Raghmani Naik*

Abstract: *The Christian Missionaries delegated by Breklum Mission came to Koraput District on 15th May, 1882 A.D. They heralded a new epoch in this hilly and backward region and raised a ray of hope among the illiterate, ignorant, indigent, superstitious, untouchable, undeveloped and helpless people. They brought handfults of welfare schemes like eradication of illiteracy, economic upliftment, and consciousness of health and hygiene which was a distant dream for the people. There was gross illiteracy among the converted people. The missionaries realized that until and unless they were literate, their Gospel of God wouldn't be reached to them. Therefore, the mission not only wanted to provide education to them but also took interest in their spiritual development .The missionaries introduced the Theological Seminary or College in 1896 A.D. at Kotpad to produce more religious teachers like Gurus, preachers, Catechists, Catechumen, pastors, Bible women etc and imparted spiritual knowledge and other subjects like mathematics, Geography, History etc. The theological seminary was established because of mass conversion and need of more pastors.*

Keywords: *Christian Missionaries, Mass proselytisation, trained preachers, Theological Seminary, Bible women and Sunday school.*

*Head, Dept. of History, NSCB Jr. College, Sambalpur (Odisha)



INTRODUCTION:

The undivided Koraput district is the largest district of South Odisha and it is a district of meadows, rolling mountains and high hills. It is the natural abode of several tribal communities known as Adivasi, aboriginals, Girijans or Vanabasi who were living amid picturesque setting comprising above mentioned areas. However, this district was completely isolated from outside world since time immemorial and remained backward and undeveloped due to its inaccessibility.

There was no social mobility due to rigidity of caste system and untouchability. The lower caste people were illiterate, ignorant, indigent and superstitious and considered untouchable, outcaste and uncivilized. The high caste people used to suppress and dominate the lower caste people. These people fully depended upon forest because there was scanty cultivable land and were occasionally doing Podu or shifting cultivation and terrace cultivation which was not sufficient for them. They too did manual jobs, small business, rearing cattle and were engaged in the services of the Zamindars, Sahukars and Govt. employees. However, they were not paying well according to their services. So, the lower caste people were leading very miserable and deplorable life. Above all, it was areas of virulence of malaria due to dense forest. People were dying without medical treatment because there were no health care systems in this district. Therefore, there was high death rate in this hilly region.

Apart from that, there was no opportunity for education for the lower caste people. It was exclusively confined to high caste people because of caste system and untouchability. Female education was next to nil

Above all, due to its inaccessibility people remained backward and ignored from outside world and were deprived of seeing the light of renaissance for long period of time. In this critical situation, the **Christian Missionaries** came to this district on **15th May, 1882 A.D.** and raised the ray of hope among the destitute, hopeless, depressed, despondent and helpless and the way they heralded a new epoch in the spiritual development of the people is a matter of discussion.

Christian Missionaries: missionaries are members 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**, which also means "to send"? The term 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. The missionaries of Koraput District were the missionaries of Breklum mission of West Germany, who came to this district on **15th May, 1882 A.D.** **The Breklum mission** was built on the foundation of **belief and prayer**. It was the brain child of the Rev. Christian Jensen, a peitist of Breklum. 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 10th 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. (Prokash: 4-7).

The missionaries minutely studied the disposition, temperament, food, dress, likes and dislikes etc and slowly and gradually motive d the people to come to the fold of Christianity. Apart from that, they implemented some welfare schemes for the development and amelioration of these down trodden people who were deprived and estranged for long period of time and implemented in various ways. These were eradication of illiteracy, economic upliftment, consciousness of health and hygiene, social mobilization, Gender identity of women, Girls' education and widow asylums etc. So, they not only took steps to uplift them socially, economically, educationally and hygienically but also gave much importance for their spiritual development. When the mass conversion took place and faith in Christianity increased more and more pastors and preachers were required. Therefore, for the popularization and propagation of Christianity, the missionaries felt the great need of the theological education in the Church. They wanted the new native Christians to be properly nurtured and deeply rooted into Christian faith. It was then decided to provide theological knowledge to the students of Christian Schools, Youth, Adults, Women, Pastors, Preachers and Elders. It was therefore, the duty of the Kotpad seminary to produce more



preachers. For the time being, the missionaries brought first “**6 Kohl catechists**” with their families from Chhot Nagpur of the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Mission field to Koraput to help them in the congregational work. (Asha: 52). They regularly taught the Bible stories, catechism, Hymns and liturgies (Ibid: 50). As the inquirers increased in every mission station, more workers were needed to guide them and it was the genesis of the theological seminary. Some of the missionaries also gave additional training to a number of able and promising young men to help them for the purposes. These people became teachers and evangelists among their own folks. However, it was only a short – gap arrangement. In each centre the Christian enquirers increased in number and there was an immense necessitates for Gurus (Preachers) catechists, teachers to teach, preach and conduct Sunday services (Ibid: 52). More preachers were required to meet the demand of increasing proselytizes. Many untrained workers were appointed to meet the immediate need of the situation. Those who had a good biblical knowledge and ability were appointed to teach the enquirers. Apart from this, school teachers were given opportunities to work. Furthermore, Tauscher notes, “A good number of Schoolmasters have received evangelistic training so that, they are better able to do some congregational work. Especially they can be taken over into full time mission work at any time we need them.” (Tauscher: 73). That’s why, establishment of theological institution was sinaquanon.

Rev. E. Gloyer had drawn the attention of the Home Board authorities to the necessity for “Theological education” in the church and to prepare the national workers. This request was gladly accepted by the Home Board as a result of which a ‘Theological institution or a seminary’ for teachers was founded at Kotpad on **2nd February 1896** (Tucker: 195). Rev. E. Gloyer says “Kotpad Seminary is the gold mine of mission work and pillar of all mission work”. The seminary was formerly known as **Schleswig Holstein Evangelical Seminary**. But later on, it was named “**Jensen Theological College and Bible School**”. Initially, this theological seminary was started with “**6 Boarding Boys**” named Eliya, Michael, Ruben, Eliazar, Isaac and Krupa but later on it numbered increased unexpectedly (Asha : 52). Rev. Von Frieling and Rev. Wohlenberg gave Theological instructions to these preachers to lead the congregations. The seminary was started when there were only 292 Christians in this area (Patro: 15). From the statement of Rev. Tauscher, it is known that, Rev. Timm



continued to be the Director till his death in 1900 A.D(Tauscher : 151). Many preachers and the catechists were produced from this institution. Those students who had been educated in Mission Elementary Schools staying in the boarding homes were selected for this course. In the beginning elementary subjects such as dictation, writing practices, geography and arithmetic were taught to all the students. In addition to that, biblical history, reading the Bible, catechism and hymns were taught. Later on Church history, mission history, Hinduism, the art of preaching and lessons on health and hygiene were added. The **table – 1**, below shows the number of Seminary students varying with a growing tendency (Waack: 504).

| Year | No. of students |
|-------------|-----------------|
| 1897 | 5 |
| (1898-1899) | 12 |
| 1900 | 33 |
| 1904 | 38 |
| 1905 | 47 |
| 1906 | 40 |
| 1907 | 60 |
| 1908 | 32 |
| 1909 | 22 |
| 1913 | 62 |

Besides theological seminary, preparatory classes for pastors were also opened in 1910 A.D. called “**Advanced Catechist Course**” where selected students were admitted. But the First World War interrupted the whole theological programme of the Church because all the German Missionaries were interned and their missionary stations were vacated. The whole charge of the mission was handed over to the American Lutheran Mission.

Theological education was emphasized to a certain extent. Since there were no pastors to look after the congregations, the missionaries felt the urgent need of training of national leaders. Therefore, the missionaries called meeting at Neudoerffer, the United Mission of America and decided to take some students for building of national leaders. The missionaries brought five promising pupils of that High School to Jeypore namely Rev. Mathew Khoda and Rev. Daniel Behera from Kotpad, Rev. Susil Boro from Nabarangpur, Rev. Uriya Pani of Koraput and Rev. Mongol Moni from Jeypore. They became the first five pastors of the Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church. They returned to Jeypore around 1927



A.D. and were leading the people of this district in the next period of the Church. This was the great opportunities for the emergence of national leaders who got abundant scope to serve their own people in their local languages. It helped immensely to promote the spiritual development of the people.

The training given to Gurus and Catechists was a great help during the absence of Missionaries. The Theological institution was closed down but the work was carried out by the Preachers and Catechists with the help of the American Lutheran Missionaries. On 28th March 1920 A.D two pastors, Christopal Bara and Ch. Theophilus by name were ordained and deputed to the Jeypore and Salur respectively to conduct sacramental work. The seminary students were given special attention which helped them to come into direct contact with the practical side of their future work. Apart from this, students had to preach in the local churches, conduct Biblical studies of the Sunday school children, school students, and youth and women's' associations. House visit and visiting the sick was regularly carried out, as part of their practical work. Tauscher has noted "the students got opportunities for teaching and preaching and dealing with the special need of the people that could never be possible in a class room" (Tauscher: 226).

In order to improve the theological education of congregational members, the missionaries gave special attention to the confirmation of the students. Usually confirmation took place when candidates were between 12-20 years of age. All the eligible students, both boys and girls, had to study for at least one month under the pastor of their respective parishes. In earlier days, students had to come to the mission stations and were instructed properly. Mainly, they were taught Old and New Testament, Catechism and Hymns. These instructions helped them to grow towards maturity in the Christian faith. After one month they had to appear for an examination conducted by the missionaries. Those who failed were denied of confirmation and they had to study one year more. They too, at the end of the year, appeared for Bible examination. If the student did not pass, promotion was not granted. If any Hostel student failed in the Bible examinations, he was not allowed to stay in the hostel in the following year. The missionaries appointed a **Bible woman** in every Deanery and pastoral centre for the spiritual education especially for the women.

Sunday school work was also given a place of importance with a view to building up the spiritual lives of children. In 1937 A.D., Rev Jungjohann reports that, the youth coming for



confirmation class were mostly void of biblical knowledge; therefore, every church conducted **Sunday school**. According to their age group the Gurus were instructed to start Sunday school in their respective villages (JELC: 1938). Special short course and theological training was given to the Sunday school teachers and school teachers to develop their theological knowledge. Those who attended were given travel allowance and dearness money (Church council: 25).

It was necessary for a teacher to acquire the knowledge of a catechist so that, he could teach the students properly. They were engaged not only for teaching but also helping congregations by conducting Sunday services in the absence of the preachers. On holidays, they had to preach in the non-Christian villages. In this way, the missionaries took a number of steps for the spiritual development and created spiritual consciousness among the people.

CONCLUSION:

The tribals were the Nature worshippers and lovers of Nature so that they were worshipping various elements of natures. They were pantheon and polytheists. Ancestral worship was their basic religious belief. Besides that, they were illiterate and superstitious. They believed in supernatural powers and under the tight clutches of local physicians like Dissaris, Gurumains, Siras and Bejjus. In this connection, the missionaries created spiritual awareness among such people is a tremendous impact of missionary activities in this area. At the time of proselytisation, the people were grossly illiterate. So, the missionaries realized that without providing education to them, the Gospel of God would not be reached. Out of these exigencies, the missionary educational institutions were developed and thereafter the theological seminary. Theological education brought a revolutionary impact on the minds of the people and prevented them from animal sacrifices and elaboration of rites and rituals. People moved from violence to peace and animal sacrifice to prayer. They stopped polytheism and accepted monotheism as their religious belief. This spiritual education helped immense for the missionaries to establish Christianity in this hilly and inaccessible region.

Now it has been shifted to Gopalpur 27.4.1993 A.D on sea shore which is in Ganjam District. Presently it is known as Orissa Christian Theological College (OCTC).



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