

Modern Missions in India

1. Catholic Missions and Missionaries

- 1.1 Earliest arrivals. The earliest European missionaries came after the Portuguese gained control of Goa in 1510. The Dominicans were dominant. They were shocked at the 'heresies' of the indigenous Nestorian (Syrian) church and attempted conversions to Catholicism. In 1540 the papacy approved Ignatius of Loyola's Jesuits. They stressed evangelism, discipline, education and moral reform.
- 1.2 Jesuit Francis Xavier (1506-1552). Xavier reached India in 1542 and traveled in the south. He translated the creed and preached memorized sermons. He helped disciple the Paravans, a low fishing caste that converted to Catholicism. Others were converted through intermarriage and some by force.
- 1.3 Jesuits in the Mughul court. (1580-1582). Akbar invited fathers Aquaviva and Monserrate to debate other faiths in Fathipur Sikri. They were warmly received. They translated the scriptures in Persian and allowed Akbar to attend mass, though he did not take communion. But they had little impact on the court.
- 1.4 Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656). An Italian Jesuit who arrived in India in 1605, and felt the need to convert Brahmins. Lived in Madurai, adopted sannyasin robes, hired a Brahmin cook, became a vegetarian and wore the sacred thread. Learned Sanskrit, Tamil and Hindu logic, and preached that the Bible was a lost Veda. Started a Brahmin congregation separated from the low-caste Paravan congregations. In 1623 a papal bull sanctioned his segregation of Christian castes. Later the Hindus discovered his evangelistic motivation and persecution set in. Few converts remained.
- 1.5 The French Catholics. French Catholic missionaries worked in the French enclaves from the late 17th centuries: Masulipatam, San Thome near Madras, Pondicherry in S. India, and Chandernagore in Bengal. Abbe Duboise learned Tamil and wrote a penetrating account of Hinduism titled Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies.

2. Protestant Missions and Missionaries

- 2.1 Early missionary activities. The Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) was founded in 1699, and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) in 1701. Their goals were to provide pastors for colonies to attract dissenters, Negroes and American Indians in North America back into the established church.
- 2.2 Danish-Halle mission to India. The first Protestant mission to India started in Danish Tranquebar in 1706. Two Halle-university trained Germans, Henry Plutschau and Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, founded a Lutheran mission under the patronage of Danish King Frederick IV. Ziegenbalg set up an orphanage and a Tamil school. He gained respect for the Tamil culture and Indian philosophy; translated texts; set up a press and published hymns using Tamil lyrics. The rapid growth of the congregations came mostly from the lower castes.

Rev. Christian Friedrich Schwartz (1724-1798) was the most outstanding missionary of the 18th century. He started with the Danish Tranquebar mission, then

worked with the English SPCK; in Tanjore he served as regent, British resident and even ambassador to Tipu Sultan. He never married and never returned to Europe. The decline of Halle university in Germany did not prevent a continuation of the Tanjore work by SPCK, SPG and the CMS (Church Missionary Society). The Danish sites of Tranquebar (South India) and Serampore (Bengal) continued as mission bases; they were finally sold to England in 1884.

- 2.3 English missionaries in India. The East India Company employed chaplains for its staff. Otherwise it initially barred mission activity from the territories it controlled, since it was concerned lest missionaries offend Hindu or Muslim sensibilities and engender revolt. The early English Baptist missionaries, e.g., William Carey (1761-1834) worked from Danish Serampore. They set up a printing press, stressed English and regional vernacular publications, and helped stimulate Bengale prose literature. Considerable popular pressure in England led to the company's charter revision that permitted missionary activity in the company's territory. Some company officers (eg. Charles Grant) recognized the potential usefulness of missionaries as ideological allies in reforming India. The CMS, and Anglican organization founded in 1799, spread over the entire subcontinent. In the 1820's bishop Reginald Heber recorded his observations of Indian social life in Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India.
- 2.4 Other missionaries. After the 1813 charter revision missionaries arrived in India from America, Scotland, Canada, Germany and Scandinavia. the missionaries typically practiced **comity**, the division of territory to reduce competition and confusion in Indian Christians. The Congregationalists worked in Maharashtra, Tamilnadu and Sri Lanka; the Presbyterians U.P. and Punjab; the Methodists in U.P. and M.P.; the Baptists in Burma, Orissa, Tamilnadu and Assam. Converts came mainly from tribes or low castes. The protestants largely stressed the unity of the church and required converts from all castes to meet together. Problems of intercaste congregations arose. There were low caste 'mass-movements' in the south to Christianity. Tribes in NEFA converted rapidly as tribal movements. Today some areas claim to be 90%+ Christian.
- 2.5 Methods Protestants set up 'mission compounds' on which were schools, hospitals or clinics, and churches. They went out 'touring' the country side preaching in different villages each night, and visiting homes in the daytime. They stressed Bible translation and started presses and publications.

When schools were not very fruitful in producing converts, a strong debate took place over the value of education as an evangelistic method. It remained important in training church leaders. The dominant theme from 1800-1900 was to evangelize India, and let everyone hear the gospel so that they might believe and be saved from eternal damnation. This sense of hell was a deep motivator of the missionaries who often paid a high price in terms of life and health.