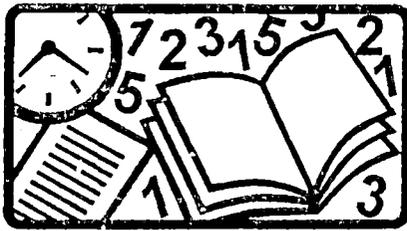


Chapter: 5



**Missionary and Colonial Administration: A Nexus Religion  
and Colonial Socio- Economic Interest**

## Chapter: 5

### Missionary and Colonial Administration: A Nexus Religion and Colonial Socio- Economic Interest

The introduction of Western ideas and influences had a far-reaching impact on the intellectual, religious and political spheres of Indian society. The role of the missions in this respect had been a very crucial one. More than the Catholics, the Protestant missions dominated the educational scene in India for the most part of the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> The Christian missionaries believed that western education would enable them to break up the fallow ground and protect them from the mischievous consequences of sowing the precious seed of faith among thorns: the secular philanthropist hoped on the other hand that the dissemination of western principles would start it on lines of intellectual and material advance which were approved in the west.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter an attempt is made to describe and analyse the contribution of the Christian missionaries to education in Bengal with a brief history of missionary activities with emphasis on specific nature of cultural subversiveness in missionary enterprises. The missionaries had two objectives in view. One was to educate the rural masses through English education which would help the process of evangelisation and the other was to attract the poor and helpless people towards Christianity.

## II

Christianity in the Indian subcontinent is quite old. The advent of the Portuguese and Christianity in Bengal goes back to the time following the renowned Portuguese

navigator Vasco da Gama's discovering of the sea-route to India and his landing at Calicut in 1498. From 1500 onwards, the Portuguese established their power first in Cranganore, then in Cochin and in Goa. With these traders and commercial opportunists, also came Franciscan, Dominican, Augustinian, and Jesuit missionaries to bring Indian heathens to Christ. From 1517 onwards, Portuguese traders from Goa were traversing the sea-route to Bengal but were not successful in establishing trading posts in this part of India. Only in 1537, were they allowed to settle and open customs houses at Satgaon (near present-day Hooghly) of West Bengal (India) and Chittagong (present-day Bangladesh). In 1577, The Mughal emperor Akbar permitted the Portuguese to build permanent settlements and churches in Bengal. The first Christians in Bengal were the Portuguese themselves. After their intermarriage with local women, their descendants became the first indigenous Christians. Then came the local converts to Christianity from both Hinduism and Islam.

Bengal's contact with the Christian mission started with the coming of Jesuit missionaries like father Antony Vaz and Father Peter Dias in 1576 and later Augustinian Friars in 1580.<sup>3</sup> Much before the arrival of Christianity in Bengal, the Muslim had come to Chittagong and Sylhet as traders. Almost trading on their footsteps came the *aulias* or the holy men with the object of preaching Islam in this region. This was in the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Later the Portuguese traders brought Christianity to this country through the port of Chittagong, called the Porto Grande or the great port, in the 16th century; the first church in Bangladesh was built in 1599 at Chandecan (also called Iswaripur or old Jessore) near Kaliganj in the Sunderbans of present Satkhira district. Jesuit Father

Francisco Fernandez went to Chandecan in October 1599, and with the permission of King Pratapaditya built a church and a rectory there.<sup>4</sup>

But the Christian mission started as an organised movement in Bengal with the arrival of British Protestant missionaries in the last decade of the 18th century.<sup>5</sup> There were many missionaries involved like the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Church Missionary Society (CMS). The BMS and The LMS were non-conformist bodies and CMS was Anglican. But the formation of the interdenominational Calcutta Missionary Conference (CMC) in 1831 was the best illustration of such evangelical spirit.<sup>6</sup>

The missionaries first tested their strength when the Baptist missionary, William Carey, arrived in Calcutta in 1793. He started his permanent mission station in 1800 at the Danish settlement of Serampore.<sup>7</sup> He joined his colleagues Joshua Marshman and William Ward at Serampore; they constituted a brotherhood which was to give an unparalleled contribution to the development of the Church in India.<sup>8</sup> The English East India Company initially opposed their organised work. But later in the year of 1813 the CMS gets the approval of the Company's Charter which removed the restriction on missionary enterprise in India.<sup>9</sup> Dr. Ranson points out the significant fact that the possession and use of the power granted by Royal Charter to confer degrees had influenced the development of ministerial training in India and had helped to raise the academic level of theological education.<sup>10</sup> After the Charter Act of 1813, the British government in India gave the missionaries a free hand in their educational work; and the

period from 1813 to 1833 saw brisk missionary activities in all parts of India. Even in the first half of the nineteenth century, formal or classroom education for women in Bengal was mainly in the hands of Christian missionaries.<sup>11</sup>

As one of the aims of the missionaries was to spread the light of the Gospel in Indian homes through their Hindu girls – students and Bible teaching was made compulsory. This in the long run resulted in an inevitable reaction against the missionaries in the Hindu society.<sup>12</sup> After the Charter Act of 1813 had removed all restrictions imposed on the entry of the missionaries in India by the East India Company when it became a territorial power, many of the missionary organisations in Europe and America became active again.<sup>13</sup> Several schools were established by Captain James Stewart at Calcutta, Burdwan, Khulna and Krishnanagar in Bengal.<sup>14</sup> Another 36 schools were established by the London Missionary Society between 1814 and 1818. Attended by nearly 3,000 children in and around Chinsurah, they functioned well “as a joint Government – Missionary enterprise in the field of vernacular education in Bengal.”<sup>15</sup> The educational development and the relative position of the missions in the educational system provide the background against which the reformulation of the missionary approach and evangelisation can be viewed. Education was the principle means by which the missionaries sought the evangelisation of the Indian people.<sup>16</sup> In the 19th century missionary educational activities has been called the ‘age of the mission schools’.<sup>17</sup> The emphasis of the missionaries was on English education. Alexander Duff and his colleagues of the other missionary societies believed that the ultimate evangelisation of India was to be effected by raising a class of teachers and preachers well grounded in English and the Christian religion. For a correct knowledge of Christianity as well as of

western ideas were to pave the way for its reception by undermining the popular notions of Hinduism. This could be effectively communicated only through the medium of English, the native language being undeveloped and there being a dearth of text books in them.<sup>18</sup> The mission schools did various work in increasing the speed and effectiveness of the teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic, and in introducing printed textbooks and in widening the syllabus.<sup>19</sup> The freedom of Press Act of 1835 for example, encouraged the printing publication and availability of books in English, thereby indirectly promoting the cause of missionary activities. All materials were printed at the Serampore mission press and reached schoolrooms so that the pupils could use them as examples for reading and writing.

The missionaries thus acted as the inaugurator of an intellectual awakening, or even revolution because they believed that as an inevitable consequence their pupils would realize what they themselves regarded as the absurdity of the religion by which they seemed to be enslaved; and schools were obvious agents of such a 'Christian enlightenment'.<sup>20</sup> Apart from the Bible, required reading in these institutions consisted of religious tracts, textbooks, parables, sermons, homilies, and prayers, many of which were specially written for inclusion in the curriculum.<sup>21</sup> The missionaries established schools outside the four main centres such as Chinsura, Serampore, Burdwan, and Calcutta.<sup>22</sup> The Baptist mission Society, the Roman Catholic Mission, The Lutheran Mission, The Scandinavian Alliance Mission were doing admirable work in the district of Eastern Bengal. The following table indicates the missionaries who were engaged in the different areas in Eastern Bengal districts namely Rajshahi, Pabna and Rangpur.

Table: XV  
Christian Mission in Bengal (1931)

Serial no.	Christian Mission	Districts
1	Anglican Church Mission Society	Howrah, 24 Pargana, Nadia and Rangpur
2	Australian Baptist Mission	Pabna, Mymensingh, Faridpur, Tippera
3	English Presbyterian Mission	Rajshahi
4	American Church of God Mission	Howrah, Bogra, Rangpur
5	Roman Catholic Mission	Rajshahi, Rangpur, Howrah, 24 Pargana, Dinajpur, Darjeeling
6	Salvation Army	Jessore, Rangpur

(Source: A.E. Porter, *Census of India, 1931, Bengal & Sikkim*, part I, statement no. XI-3)

There were two mission girls' schools in the town of Rampur Boalia. One was of middle vernacular and the other of Primary status. In the district of Rangpur the Kerwalnut School run by the Salvation Army had 51 pupils on its roll.<sup>23</sup> The mission schools in the district of Rajshahi Rangpur and Pabna were doing well. The grant of the Orkandi girls school was stopped in 1917. At Padrishibpur the mission school had two looms, where

weaving was taught to the girls and women of the village. The two mission schools in Rajshahi were under excellent management well staffed and supervised.<sup>24</sup> There were 16 such schools in the Dacca district some belonging to the Baptist mission and some to the Roman Catholics. In the district of Bogra, Pabna, Rajshahi, there were two schools under the management of the English Presbyterian mission.

Earlier Zanana system of education had been started by missionaries in Bengal. In 1871 there were more 'zanana' pupils in Bengal than in other presidencies put together.<sup>25</sup>

Indicating its success the education commission of 1882 recommended special grants for running the system.<sup>26</sup> The Inspectors of Schools, Eastern Bengal and Assam, commented on the importance of the scheme thus. "I felt that it is the only way to reach the home life of India. The home is the foundation for the education of both boys and girls. I do not consider, therefore, that there can be a better investment of money than in that of supplying really good, and well qualified and enlightened teachers for the mothers of Indian future sons and daughters."<sup>27</sup> The scheme for zanana teaching was supported by the female education committee and made some progress in Eastern Bengal and promising start in the Rajshahi division. In this division zanana classes were started in Rangpur, Pabna, Bogra, and Jalpaiguri districts. The district of Jalpaiguri and Rangpur had six and five centers with 43 and 28 pupils respectively.<sup>28</sup> And two new schemes for zanana education at Pabna and Rangpur were sanctioned during the 1922-23, but the scheme for Pabna could not be given effect to as the zanana ladies there were not willing to join the centres. The centres were opened at Rangpur in August 1915 and a Hindu lady of an orthodox family was appointed as the governess.<sup>29</sup> In the districts of Pabna and Rangpur the students of zanana education were all Muslims. This indicates that Muslims

were taking active part in spreading education among their women possibly because they recognised their backwardness in education in general and possibly because they did not have to spend anything for such *zanana* education.<sup>30</sup> The *zanana* education system aimed at giving education to women and widows at some centres organised and run by the government in co-operation with the local people.<sup>31</sup> We find that the missionaries played a significant role for the establishment of schools in the district of Rajshahi Rangpur and Pabna. Initially their activities were directed from Calcutta and Serampore. Their entry into in these districts was highly influenced by the socio political climate of the time as the British paramountcy had reached its apex then. Australian Baptist Mission was only missionary worker got the permission to enter Pabna district. The government permitted the Roman Catholic Mission to build mission stations in limited numbers and restricted areas of the district of Rajshahi and Rangpur. Another important mission Salvation Army remained active during the period of British administrative control in Bengal.

### III

Missionaries realized that the conversion of students in large number was increasingly questioned in Bengal. Protestant Missionaries had targeted the tribal community for conversion. Exploited by both Hindus and the tribals became easy victims of the missionary design of preselytization. The Santals in particular were the target group of the missionaries for evangels in Eastern Bengal. Most of the Santal resided in the district of Rajshahi and Rangpur.<sup>32</sup> For this cause protestant missionaries would only expand in India by way of gradual growth of the Christian population and the annual conversion of low caste and tribal Indians.<sup>33</sup> Missionaries were in favour of imparting education the

Santals through their mother tongue and were keen to improve their socio economic condition as a prerequisite for evangelisation.<sup>34</sup> After the Santal Rebellion in 1855 new mission stations were established in some parts of the newly created Santal Parganas (1856) which included some parts of Bengal proper.<sup>35</sup> It is noted that the Presbyterian Mission was mainly responsible for working among the Santals of the Rajshahi district. In 1862 Presbyterian Church, the first minister, The Rev. Bihari Lal Singh, opened schools and an orphanage, and gathered a little congregation.<sup>36</sup> They look it upon themselves for the spread of education among them. In 1866 Calcutta Mission Society (CMS) completed Santal vocabulary and published the Santal dictionary, Bible History, and translations of Part of St. Mathew's Gospel and Anglican Prayer Books etc. At Saidpur, Rangpur district, the Kerwlnut School was run by the Salvation Army and had fifty one pupils on its roll. Another five schools in the Pabna districts for the Santals, Muchis, Dhobis and Namasudras, with one hundred and fifty pupils.<sup>37</sup>

After 1871 the Calcutta Bible Society published more textbooks in Santali. Missionary efforts created a growing urge for education among the Santals since missionaries made them believe that education was the only safeguard against the oppression of Zaminder and Mahajans. George Campbhall, Lieutenant Governor in Bengal showed keen interest in Santal mission and a special grant by the Government towards Santal education encouraged the missionaries.<sup>38</sup>

Christians, Native and European together, number no more than 93,013 souls in Bengal in 1872.<sup>39</sup> The total number of Christians in Bengal is 183,067 and their numbers have shown a fairly regular rate of increase from 1881 when they were 72,289.<sup>40</sup> The whole of

Bengal saw their increase during the early twentieth century. It had been greater than at any other decades since 1881 except between the years 1891 and 1901 when the percentage increase was 29.5%. Except in the Dacca division where they had increased by 32.1 percent. Their numbers were greater in all Bengal than they were in 1881 and in the Rajshahi division there were actually almost 19 times as many of them as they were in that year. Amongst the Indians some groups were included such as Sinhalese who were not actually Indian, as well as some others of Nepalese origin who may not have been born in India. As might be expected no less than 16,863 Anglo Indian Christians out of a total of 27,573 resided in Calcutta, and for the most part they were found principally in urban areas. Next to the Presidency division with 17,768 the Burdwan division with 6,244 contains the largest number of Anglo Indian Christians. Amongst the Indian Christians also majority lived in the Presidency than in any other division. Out of 131,886 45,099 lived in the Presidency division of whom 17,388 were found in the 24 pargans and 14,280 in Calcutta. Dacca division with 40,419 and Rajshahi division with 31,835 Indian Christians comes next in order to Presidency Division. Jalpaiguri had no less than 14,327 Indian Christians and Dacca and Mymensingh 13,567 and 10,603 respectively.<sup>41</sup> In Rajshahi, Pabna and Rangpur this number was 1483, 428 and 1686 respectively.<sup>42</sup> They were seen to lie therefore principally in two series of districts running contiguously from north to south viz., Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, Rajshahi Nadia, Calcutta and 24 Parganas and again in Mymensingh, Dacca, Faridpur and Bakarganj.<sup>43</sup> It was doubled during the period of 1872 to 1921. The rate of increase of successive decades had been 13.9% between 1881 and 1891, 29.5% between 1891 and 1901 21.7% between 1901 and 1911 and 14.9%.<sup>44</sup> Christians were more numerous in central Bengal than in other

divisions in Bengal. Thus it may be concluded from the above mentioned figures that Rajshahi division ranked third<sup>45</sup> in Bengal by way of Christian population but Rajshahi district came much lower in the ladder with 1483 only out of a total of 14,327 (in the Rajshahi division).

The missionaries' attitude to Hinduism and Islam tended to be highly critical and confrontational for most of the 19th century. The intellectual opposition to Christianity from Hindu quarters took the form of intellectual defense of Hinduism and Shastric injunctions, with which learned Hindus sought to counter the anti-Hindu propaganda of the Christian missionaries or corner the missionaries themselves during their itinerancies.<sup>46</sup>

The *Tattavabodhini Sabha* entered into a controversy with the missionaries regarding the merits of the 'Vedantic doctrine'. On the other hand, at that time Alexander Duff published a work entitled "India and India Missions" which was critical of the doctrines of Hinduism. The *Tattavabodhini Sabha* regarded it as an unjust criticism, and decided to write a 'Refutation' in 'defense of the rural doctrines of Hinduism'.<sup>47</sup> The evangelizing efforts of the missionaries and their criticism of Hinduism naturally provoked counter criticisms from the Hindus. Through these criticisms were more or less continuous and assumed the form of an antimissionary propaganda.<sup>48</sup> *Tattavabodhini Sabha* and some press were taken part anti-missionary in attitude during this period. The papers which played a predominant role against the missionaries were the *Samachar Chandrika*, edited by Ishwar Chandra Gupta, the *Sambad Purnachandradoya* edited by

Udoy Chandra Adhya and his brothers, Advaitcharam Adhya, and the *Tattavabodhini Patrika*.<sup>49</sup>

The Muslims of Bengal also felt threatened by the missionaries as some Muslims were converted to Christianity. Illiteracy, weak faith in their religion and the prospect of economic benefit led some Muslims to accept Christianity.<sup>50</sup> However, Christian Missionary enterprise in Eastern Bengal districts particularly in the Muslim majority areas in the nineteenth century barring a few success, faced great obstacles from the orthodox Muslim society. The Bengali Muslims in the face of the onslaught of the Christian missionaries became conscious of their precarious position and that to a certain extent explains the aloofness on the part of the Muslim to associate themselves with English education.

William Carey was the greatest Protestant missionary who arrived at Serampore of West Bengal in 1793. This Englishman heralded the new missionary era in Bengal. Besides preaching, he left versatile contributions in Bengal. When Carey came the Baptist Missionary Society (British) in 1793, followed by Church Missionary Society (British) in 1805, Council for World Mission (British Presbyterian) in 1862, Australian Baptist Mission in 1882, New Zealand Baptist Mission in 1886, Oxford Mission (British Anglican) in 1895, Churches of God (American) in 1905, Seventh-Day Adventists in 1919, Assemblies of God in 1945, Santal Mission (Lutheran) in 1956, Bangladesh Mission of the Southern Baptist Convention (American) in 1957, and Association of Baptists for World Evangelism (American) in 1958. Such mission activities then spread to other towns like Dinajpur (1795), Jessore (1805), Dhaka (1816),

Barisal (1828), Khulna (1860), Chittagong(1881) and Rangpur (1891). And all missionaries in Bengal followed the humanitarian ideas of the early evangelicals in England and emphasised the social aspects of the missionary programme.<sup>51</sup> To expedite and promote evangelism, these societies also plant churches, and establish and run various educational, healthcare, and welfare institutions and organizations. Under this scheme a Christian mission hospital was established initially by medical missionaries of the Presbyterian Church of England in 1817 as a 5 bed hospital in Northern Bengal. It was later shifted to Rajshahi town in 1890.<sup>52</sup> Not unlikely the rural masses therefore felt they had their real friends in the missionaries.<sup>53</sup> Mohar Ali remarked that 'whatever might have been their religious prejudices, the rural population of Bengal would not have risen in revolt against the missionaries.'<sup>54</sup>

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