

## **Reformations effects on India**

*From Solomon Benjamin*

"The true rule is this: God's Word shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel can do so". *Martin Luther*

The beginning of the Protestant Reformation is generally identified with Martin Luther and the posting of the 95 Theses on the castle church in Wittenberg, Germany. The 95 arguments took issue primarily with the selling of indulgences. Luther sent them to the local Archbishop and they made their way to Rome and so we have the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation. Protestant is formed from the word protest and reformation out of the word reform so this was a protest against the church to reform it. When we look back at the history of Christianity, there were many events that shaped the Christianity today, but among all Protestant Reformation Movement is one which has contributed to a great extent in Christianity. Though it broke out in Europe, it spread all over the world and it changed the future course of Christianity.

## **Reformation of Martin Luther**

Martin Luther being a doctor of Theology on Bible from the University of Wittenberg, shared a strong doctrine of Justification and Reformation promoted a higher insights into Bible. Martin Luther said "God's Word shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel can do so" These two doctrines and scriptural ideologies promoted the concept of the Priesthood of all believers. (Spitz, Lewis W. *The Renaissance and Reformation Movements*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987)

The word *Protestant* is derived from the Latin *protestation* meaning *declaration* which refers to the letter of protestation by Lutheran princes against the decision of the Diet of Speyer in 1529, which reaffirmed the edict of the Diet of Worms against the Reformation. Since that time, the term has been used in many different senses, but most often as a general term refers to Western Christianity that is not subject to papal authority (Definition of Protestantism at the Episcopal Church website)

The term "Protestant" was not originally used by Reformation era leaders; instead, they called themselves "evangelical", emphasizing the "return to the true gospel (Greek *euangelion*). ("Protestant?" *The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod* (Website FAQ)

## **Protestant Missionaries to India post Reformation**

### **First New Testament in Tamil language**

The King Frederick IV of Denmark, a Lutheran was instrumental in conceiving the idea of sending Protestant missionaries to India. He assigned his court chaplain to find right candidates in Denmark but he could not find the right candidates so he approached his friends in Germany. There were two young theological students from the University of Halle, Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Henry Pluetschu. They accepted the offer of going to India as missionaries. They were sent to place called Tranquebar in south India as 'royal missionaries' at the personal expenses of the King. They faced a lot of issues in the beginning but some how managed to survive. They learned Portuguese and Tamil language because the European traders were using Portuguese language and native were using Tamil language for communication. Therefore they could conduct the worship for the German soldiers in the Danish East India Company's. At first five soldiers joined and later they were baptized in the Danish Church. The missionaries adopted orphan children from their guardians after making some payment, so that a small orphanage was formed. Further the children were baptized and were taught German. A Portuguese and a Tamil language school were introduced. Missionaries started discussing with the Hindus in Tamil language about their religions and this resulted in a first small congregation and nine Tamil converts were baptized.

Ziegenbalg and Plutschau were convinced that the most significant way of ministering to people who were natives was to make word of God available for them to read and connect to influence of Christ. Ziegenbalg started learning Tamil, to read and write and soon he learnt the local language Tamil and conversed with intellectuals by 1711, the pioneering missionary completed the whole translation of New Testament into Tamil, almost literally translating from Luther's bible. Hence you find many names of the books almost the same in German and in Tamil. He also contributed a Tamil-German dictionary. Reformation created history by translating Bible into local languages and this was the most important thing in India. (D. Dennis Hudson, *Protestant Origins in India: Evangelical Christians, 1706-1835*)

### **The first Missionary of SPCK in India**

Another city where the Lutheran mission spread was Madras presently called Chennai. One of the Lutheran missionaries names Benjamin Schultze, arrived in India 1720. Schultze was keen to expand the mission and was looking for creative ways of ministering and looked for new location and was attracted to Madras. When he located to Madras, the Anglican Church, through society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) agreed to support Schultze. Later Schultze became the first Missionary to SPCK, a German but from the Danish mission.

## **The starting of Orphan School and Educational institutions**

Schultze during his time of service and mission in Madras, constantly analyzed and researched on the culture, people and also the tradition and practice of Tamil people and slowly after 18 years of his consistence mission and missionary role, started an Orphan School for the vulnerable children who were denied the opportunity to study and became marginalized for no fault of theirs. (Neill, History of Christianity in India, 41)

## **Starting of Schools to spread education and social awareness**

The Church grew nearly twice by size in 1712, and apart from the church ministry Ziegenbalg also focused on variety of missions and focused on education as significant for growth awareness and development. He started Schools to spread literacy and awareness to draw more people to Christian faith. Within a short span of time, the missionary started schools for local boys, modelling after Francke orphan school in Halle (Robert Eric Frykenberg, Christianity in India: *From beginning to Present*). The intentions and purpose of these schools and institutions were to basically raise the awareness of people and level of literacy and knowledge so that the students may be able to read the Bible themselves apart from the special lessons to help them understand the word.

While focusing to start schools, the attention of the missionary also went to teach Life-skills so that they may be able to support their study plan themselves. Ziegenbalg was committed to teach help learn students on the need for conversation on bible and Christian faith. Another purpose for the schools was to provide abandoned children. Ziegenbalg desired to take only such children and to offer to abandoned children a possibility to stand on their own feet. Hence he took into his care to provide them education, training and above all to equip churches in leadership. (Stephen Neill, History of Christianity in India,

## **Converts of Tamil Nadu through Ziegenbalg/ Halle Mission in India**

Many more missionaries came from Germany. They transformed and converted local people in Tamil Nadu and the process of extending the Church went out in many places and a large population of people came into the experience of Christ and got converted to Christian faith through missionary work and mission. Those who were converted after training were called Catechists who were designated to have the love of God with neighbor towns and spread their new Protestant faith. The congregations grew considerably especially the Tanjore one in 1733 to meet the growing need for local engagement of the church, the Tanjore church ordained the first Tamil Pastor. (Ibid)

## **Reformation addresses Corruption.**

These reformers are distinguished from previous ones in that they considered the root of corruptions to be doctrinal (rather than simply a matter of moral weakness or lack of ecclesiastical discipline), and thus they aimed to change contemporary doctrines to accord with what they perceived to be the "true gospel." This also became the basis for the church leadership engaged to address the need for the Indian Church to be away from corruption which is also prevalent as part of the social system.

## **The Early Luthren Missionaries addressed social stratification and Gender discrimination**

The missionary engagement of the first two Lutheran missionaries raised an awareness towards the cultural and traditional practices of the people of Tranquebar.

Due to the doctrinal understanding on the area of righteousness and justification, based on Luther's theology of justification, or process by which one is made right in the eyes of god. Good works in the context of India were carried out by many religious groups and faiths due to the poverished context and poor state of economy. Luther's theology of reformation not the good works but the state of righteousness brought abundant impact on personal relationship with God. It became obvious and imperative for the missionaries to address the caste system and social discrimination that divided people of god's creation based on their human birth stratification which destroyed theologically the image of the creator god who made all equal. There was a spiritual revival in church through the reformative doctrine of righteousness of god that the very basic inhuman issue of Caste system was addressed by the missionary and church at large. This was the continuance of struggle of the church for equality of all people.

While addressing the concern of case discrimination, due to the theology of righteousness the issue of Gender was also addressed by the missionaries from Halle. They worked to bring in clear spiritual and theological understanding on discrimination of Women. Due to patriarchal society, India practiced an alarmingly glaring discrimination on women as a second class citizen. This came into the purview of the spiritual realms of the missionary to address it. Women were encouraged to take part in worship and also in the decision making for the welfare of the family. Many women's organizations were formed during the time of missionaries. While there were any oppositions and even accusations came on the missionaries and the Danish church also intervened to address these issues. The missionaries were constantly engaged in addressing women to be an integral part of the society and were integrated in the mainline system of the community.

## **Post Reformation Church in India is a Church identifying with the poor and discriminated**

The post reformation period in India is also known as the awakening of social consciousness and an era of spiritual understanding. This was clearly marked by the role of the church due to primarily based on the doctrine of righteousness for god, has strongly engaged to address the issue of discrimination of the ancient practice of untouchables. No human is discriminated so by any religious teaching and hence the word of god and its implication in the life situation of people engages to address the issue of untouchables. God is unbiased and his church should practice the theology of god's children in gods image. The church has taken a preferential option to identify itself with the pains and suffering of the people of god and calls itself the church of poor and a liberative church for god mission.

### **Conclusion**

The meaning of the reformation for the Christian Church in India today is Word of God irrespective to the changes happen to the church in both negative and positive ways. India being a predominantly a Hindu nations and all Indians are Hindus, the emergence of Christian faith was by the Missionaries who came to share the gospel, care and comfort to the people at a time when all were in chaos and disorder. To go back to Hinduism in India as it has existed at any one period would be to them no reform, but the contrary. For all spiritual purposes they need to go back to the Vedas, the Purans, but they could not receive any class of Hindu sacred books to build confidence. Those sacred books however are found to contain much but needed to update and address contemporary realities, and it is therefore proposed to reform Hinduism by reforming its sacred books to suit the exigencies of the times. This however would be not a reform but a subverting of Hinduism. The truth that reformation in Christian church in India consisted not in reforming the Scriptures to suit the tastes of the reformers, but in casting away all human inventions and returning to the Bible as it was is what the exact meaning of reformation is and is believed by the Indians. A light on a hill cannot be hidden and likewise is the truth.

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