CHAPTER III

EVANGELICAL ACTIVITIES

Evangelism is etymologically derived from a Greek root ευαγγελίζω which means Gospel or news. Webster describes its meaning as 'the proclamation of the Gospel'. Hence evangelism pertains to the Gospel itself and the evangelical work is done by believers among those who have not heard it or who have not responded to it or who have forgotten it. Thus the mission, which has no place for evangelism is not a Christian mission in the Biblical sense. Hence evangelism's occupation is not so much with the insiders as with the spiritual needs of the outsiders. The aim of the established churches which sent their missions to places, where the Gospel was neither known nor practised, was basically the preaching of the Gospel. They had a message of Jesus Christ to impart to the world for man's redemption. Their main emphasis was repentance for sins and faith in Jesus Christ. They believed in humanitarian work, salvation and eternal life after death. Thus the mission had definite things to preach and practise. They advocated the adoption of the four Gospel of the New Testament with crusading earnestness. They had a command from their master, who said, "Go ye into the world", being encouraged by the promise, "I am with you alway." The evangelical missions of various denominations which came to the Central Provinces preached the Gospel in the regions selected by them for their work. Though the missions were generally located in towns their

preaching penetrated deeper into the villages in the hope of a quick response. As compared to the urban areas they found work in the rural regions more attractive.

The persons selected as missionaries were generally well equipped for the performance of the work assigned to them and for the responsibilities they were required to discharge. They were given adequate training both theoretical and practical and only those persons were picked up who were persons of normal temperament and could not be enraged on the slightest provocation and adverse criticism. As far as possible highly intelligent, hard working and extremely tolerant persons possessing qualities of temperamental adjustments were prepared. Other personal qualities which went a long way in making a missionary successful were his good nature, "sweet temper, unperturbed and peaceful temperament, soft tongue, broad human sympathies and spirit of dedication and social service. They were required to make themselves more attractive and the audience more responsive. They were required to live and dress like persons among whom they preached. Almost all the missionaries were intellectually well-equipped by their thorough knowledge of the Bible and Biblical literature and linguistic capacity to plead for Christianity in the most simple straightforward unequivocal and most convincing manner.

Besides these personal and intellectual equipments which they brought with them, they had to equip themselves with the requirements peculiar to the place where they preached and the people who formed their audience. These equipments they acquired in the land of their adoption as delightedly as they had acquired other equipments before embarking on a career as selfless votaries of their religion and its precepts. Coming from the western world with the knowledge of only European language or languages it was not possible for them to make
themselves understood in the countries where European languages were neither the spoken languages of the people nor were they understood by them. They, therefore, engaged themselves in acquiring working knowledge of the local language spoken and understood by the people. For the adoption of the strategy for the propagation of Christianity they had also studied the geography, history, anthropology and sociology of the regions they selected for their field of work. It was largely on account of these equipments that the missionaries in the Central Provinces, as anywhere else, endeared themselves to the people and contributed a lot not only to the expansion of Christianity, but also to the historical and psychological studies and literature.

The methods adopted by the missionaries for their evangelistic work were simple but not essentially common. They differed slightly from region to region all over the world depending upon the equipment of the people among whom the work was done and their capacity for emotional and temperamental adjustments to new ideas and thinking. In the primitive and backward regions of the Central Provinces where the missionaries had built up their centres in rural surroundings and where people were mostly illiterate, the preaching was done in the simplest local language. In the initial stages of their work they used local vehicles on hire for going from place to place for evangelical preaching and in course of time they had their own means of conveyance provided to them by their mission organisations. During tours the missionaries were accompanied by the servants to pitch tents, cook meals and carry the tracts and scriptures for free distribution or sale at the nominal price.

The missionaries made known the story of Jesus Christ by open air preaching from busy street corners in the bigger towns and in the weekly or biweekly markets in the small towns and large villages.
where people were found coming at a common centre. Such markets were advantageous for meeting people who could rarely be seen at any other place or time. But the drawback of such places was that the preaching was disturbed by the noise of chattering and general hubbub of the market, and unwillingness of the people to hear long discourses. Therefore, during such occasions besides preachings religious tracts, pamphlets and leaflets containing extracts from the first four Gospels were distributed among the listeners, interested persons and the passers by.

This mode of preaching was quite common and the listeners could be seen wherever the missionaries reached. No other opportunities which could be availed of for preaching work were ever missed. Preaching among the sick was done in the mission hospitals and among the impressionable students who were instructed in the mission schools of various denominations. Among the intellectuals preaching was done in the discussion meetings arranged by the missionary societies either somewhere at the mission centres or at the houses of families interested in religious discussions. The camps were arranged in the villages in the interior parts of the province. The itinerations often occupied several months and included the visitation of several villages. During their preaching tours they conducted night preachings in the light of lanterns or gas lamps for those who were not available during day hours. They showed pictures depicting the stories of Jesus Christ and widely distributed them. To make their preaching convincing they gave illustrations from day to day events of life keeping their focus on Jesus Christ as the central figure.

To make their preaching attractive the evangelists made use of music. They were accompanied by a group of good musicians and singers. The missionary's songs were composed by the poetic-minded

missionaries and they were recited by those having a lyrical voice. Each raga or melody form had a Christian theme. A variety of musical instruments such as cymbal, tambourine, triangle, banjo, violin, sitar and drum or dholak were played on. But their music was not the common emotional street music or classical music which few could understand. Their songs were merely bhajans and kirtans associated with the life and thoughts of Jesus Christ (Yeshu) and his religion. In the villages the group music was quite unique. The village urchins and adults thronged round them and the preachers took the opportunity to preach the Gospel during the interlude between the two bhajans and quite often made preaching a part of the bhajans. The lyrical method of evangelism opened the hearts of the people. A promise of distinct effect could be realised when a singer-preacher, aided by some hand musical instruments, told a Bible story, chanted the prose exposition, broke for interpretation and developed the theme. Thus the main evangelistic work was done in less pretentious though not less effective ways. After a bhajan or a kirtan the villagers listened to the preachers with rapt attention hoping more bhajans and kirtans to follow. The preachings were done in such a manner as to create neither suspicions nor resentment or opposition. Generally the preachers never condemned any religion. Their preachings were more positive than negative. Whenever they touched social life they simply assailed the obviously irrational practices in a manner which could not have a chance of hurting their feelings and susceptibilities. Majority of the people being illiterate the words used for preaching and illustrations given were very homely. While the devotional songs and tunes attracted the people and created an emotional and psychological atmosphere for instilling a few simple ideas relating to Christianity.

The preaching was done in such a subtle but familiar ways that the villagers returned to their homes in the hope that the missionaries would come again and delight them with their music and songs and provide some welcome entertainment.

In the beginning the villagers had no idea what was the purpose behind all this performances. But the missionaries felt satisfied that they initiated the work quite satisfactorily. The few good ideas which remained in the minds of the villagers created some inquisitiveness to hear the missionaries. The subsequent visits of the preachers to the villages they had once visited were no less attractive. But as soon as the purpose of the missionaries came to be known, the upper classes either abstain from attending their gatherings on the advice of the village priests and the mullahs, or came only for the sake of entertainment without being affected by the preachings, but the down trodden people gave to preachers patient hearing. Some of the new ideas given by the missionaries to them went directly into their hearts and looked quite appealing to them because of their cult of social equality, exploitation of human sympathies and the practical humanitarian services rendered by them to the needy irrespective of their position in society, economic status and religious affiliations.

No less important and probably more effective, places for preaching were the prisons, hospitals, orphanages, relief camps etc. With the permission of the Government the missionary leaders used to pay the prisons and the prison reformatories with the idea of changing their sinful life into a blissful living and making them as useful members of society. This they tried to do through Christianity. District hospitals organised by the Government and the mission hospitals organised by missionary societies also attracted the attention of the Christian

1. F.F.M.A. Annual report 1893, p 28
preachers. With the permission of the Government authorities they could meet the patients in the wards and tried to alleviate their sufferings by relating good stories from the Bible, and giving solace to them. In their talks they used to introduce Biblical beliefs. In the mission hospitals no permission was needed. Visits to the patients was a regular daily feature. In the orphanages the juvenile as well as adult destitutes were given lessons in Christianity in a concerted and more direct way. During earthquakes, famines, pestilence and epidemics relief camps were organised by the missions. In those camps while food was distributed free to feed the body, lessons on Christianity were given as spiritual food for the soul.

Probably the most important places for imparting Christianity by the missionaries were their regular schools owned by the missionary societies at different places in various districts of the Central Provinces. In these schools there used to be a Bible class where Bible was regularly studied by the students and explained by the teachers. For this limited purpose every Christian teacher played the role of a missionary. The young boys reading in the schools have highly impressionable minds and any idea that is given to them, if acceptable, becomes a belief with them. All the non-Christian students who came out of mission schools knew Christianity more than their own religion which was never taught to them regularly at home or outside. But this much alone was not sufficient to convert them to Christianity. While converts from schools were not many the spirit of the Gospel undoubtedly was widespread. And this much alone was by no means a mean achievement. Besides the permanent Christian schools running all the year round, the Sunday schools for non-Christian children also became forums where elementary religious preaching was done among children. Stories from Bible were related to them. Some of them recited verses from the Bible. Some
prizes were also awarded to increase the interest.

Apart from the regular bazar and village preachings, the melas and the religious fairs were also considered good places for preaching the Gospel. In the Central Provinces the Mahadev mela at Pachmarhi in Hoshangabad District and numerous other annual fairs such as Ramtek in Nagpur District, Amarkantak fair in Mandla District, Bheraghat in Jabalpur District and Dhanteshwari fair in Raipur District etc. afforded good opportunities for propagating Christianity in the big gatherings of cross-section of people. The missionaries held their camps in almost all periodical fairs and regularly moved out from there to preach Gospel at the various ends. In the melas they also used to organise near their camps free exhibitions of pictures depicting the life of Christ and the scenes from Biblical stories and social work among the people. In these exhibitions they also displayed Christian literature, viz., Bible, and other books, booklets, tracts, pamphlets, leaflets and folders in English and in various Indian languages, and organised their sale at very low prices. Besides these they also rendered social service in the fair.

Each mission considered its preaching incomplete unless due attention was paid to the zenanas or the ladies who, in general, lived in seclusion in the urban areas and could be reached only by lady missionaries. The Hindu and the Muslim upper and middle classes being very conservative in the beginning, it was not possible to meet their women-folk except through their male members who kept close watch over what transpired in the meetings of their ladies with the lady missionaries. Therefore the task of preaching among women was very delicate and it had to be done with tactfulness and extreme caution. A

lady missionary named Mrs. F.W. Ward while describing her experiences mentioned that her entry into one of the families was prohibited to her as soon as the male members came to know that she talked about Christianity and its good points to their ladies. This made her as well as other lady missionaries of her organisation quite cautious in their future preachings in other families and they avoided the risk of their entry being banned in those families and elsewhere. It was a common practice among the lady missionaries to exchange their experiences at the end of the day's work and discuss the modalities of making their preachings more and more effective without running the risk of incurring the displeasure of the male folk and being politely asked to discontinue their meetings on some plea or the other telling to them that their routine home work was disturbed by such meetings. While teaching of Christianity in the *zenana* was dreaded, several other things such as knitting, sewing, lessons in reading and writing, child nursing, cleanliness etc. which they imparted, were very much appreciated by the men folk. These lessons were invariably received well by the ladies and made the lady missionaries quite popular. Consequently they were no longer required to take permission of men folk to meet their ladies. Whatever preaching the lady missionaries did directly or indirectly did not result in the conversion of any lady of an established house into Christianity. Entry into the *zenana* of the lower classes was not a problem as there was no *murdah* system in their families and most of the women worked outside. There were comparatively greater chances of conversions of some of the women of this class such as widows, destitutes etc. in their distressed or psychologically disturbed conditions if they were convinced that acceptance of Christianity would improve their lot and be beneficial to them. But in actual practice, conversion among women

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folk of this class was also rare. The greatest satisfaction to the lady missionaries in doing this work was that they had introduced fresh thinking and outlook and giving some ideas about Christian society, religion and way of life to them and they have established their superiority in social life and culture. In the rural families the entry of lady missionaries was not so difficult. Many of the rural ladies would like to meet them out of sheer curiosity and this would have been easily exploited for giving to them some ideas about the life that Jesus Christ lived, the sufferings of the people that he tried to remove, the causes for which he was crucified and the same path the Christian society has followed since then. Majority of the women in the rural areas being illiterate and unenlightened the niceties of Christianity were beyond their comprehensions. So preaching among them was necessarily simple and elementary.

Discussion forums and dialogues with people were also relied upon as a means of doing missionary work. These discussions were sometimes group discussions and quite often discussions with eminent persons. Stephen Hislop of the Scottish Church Nagpur, narrates a discussion with Shankaracharya of Jagannath Puri which took place at Ramakona in Chhindwara District when both were going to Chhindwara on a tour:

"The discussion commenced by my asking the Guru with what object he was travelling. He replied, "To confirm the people in their practices." "What practice ?" I asked."Bathing", he answered. "What is the use of bathing ?" "To take away the sins." But this afterwards rejected and admitted that by the application of water to the body only bodily pollution could be removed. The discussion went on;

"If a thief were to come, is he to be treated as a God?"
"Yes, because in every heart God resides."
"If a thief has stolen, then, is God the author of the theft?"
"No, he is far from evil doers."
When he felt the difficulty, he tried to get out of it by saying that there was no difference between sin and righteousness. 1

In an appeal to the Scottish Church, Rev. J. Dougal of Nagpur stated that the preaching of the Gospel among the poor was a very special work of the Christian missions. 2 Preaching among the tribal people, low class people and the aboriginals was more effective and result yielding than any where else largely because they had no well defined religion of their own. The last one viz. aboriginals did not generally belong to any religious group. For the major parts of their life these people lived in dire poverty and tyranny. Millions of them who had not been brought into the Hindu fold or converted to Islam, retained the primitive cult of their forefathers, adoring nature in various forms or images they had chosen to select as representing their deity. It appeared to the missionaries that the aboriginals had no religion at all, or they had only a vague conception of the existence of a supreme being. 3 They also found that the low class people who belong to the Hindu faith were so neglected that the high caste would not treat them as equals and, no relations with them except that of masters and servants or slaves. 4 Such people may treat Christianity as a better world to live in and also as a panacea for all their ills and handicaps.

Therefore considering work among these people more fruitful, the main

1. Quoted by G. Smith from R.S. Hislop's diary dated December 25, 1854 in Life of Stephen Hislop, p. 139.
3. Latter from J. Lampard to the Secretary of Methodist Mission dated Marpha, July 28, 1893 (Manuscript) Methodist Archives, Lake Junaluska
consentration of almost all the missionary organisations was on work among them, with particular emphasis on the conversion of the aboriginals to Christianity and improving their lot in other ways also. The C.M.S., the German evangelicals, the E.N.M.S.S. and the F.F.M.A. mostly concerned themselves with the conversion work among the Gonds. The Mennonites were active among the Garas, Pankas and Gonds of Chhattisgarh, and among the Ramnaris of Mahanadi river banks and the Chamars of Janjgir where the Satnamis were enormous. The German Evangelical Mission, later called the Synod of North America, functioned among the Satnamis of Bisrampur for bringing about conversions among them. The Disciples of Christ and the Methodists covered the Balahis of Nimar and the Ghasiyas and Lariyas of Raipur. The Kurku Mission worked among the Kurkus of Betul District. The Society of Friends was active among the Gonds and Kurkus in Hoshangabad. The missionaries believed that mass conversion among all these classes, particularly among the aboriginals, could be possible. Shimmin relates his initial contact with them:

"The people listened to our story with deep attention; told us we were the first messengers of the Gospel they had seen; assured us they were all eager to learn faith." 1

With the preaching of new religion, thousands of people heard of Jesus Christ in their own tongue for the first time. Sometimes it was difficult to make them understand the tenets of Christianity as they had their own well established religions. Hislop wrote in his diary, dated Nagpur, February 10, 1848, "In fact they were all nigh strangers to reflection. Almost unconscious of sin, they could

not see the use of forgiveness. They thought not of another world after death."¹

The methods applied by the missionaries in their evangelistic field were seldom aggressive. In their sermons, books, leaflets and pamphlets they distributed, they boldly condemned what appeared to them irrational and sinful in the Indian society.² Intent upon spreading their own Gospel they could not appreciate other religions. Most of them were silent on the brighter side of the Indian thought and culture. Therefore hot exchanges and wordy warfare sometimes took place between the preachers and the educated audience.

It was in an atmosphere of racial and cultural superiority that the western missionaries began their work, therefore, the feeling of superiority in general was reflected in certain missionary attitudes.³ Here and there it crept into the evangelistic work also taking for granted that the west alone had a worthy culture and their religion, Christianity, was the only faith which was true. The missionaries had an opinion that by expanding Christianity they were saving the vast multitude of Indians. Therefore they demanded more missionaries from their home organisations. They thought the preaching of Gospel would impress the educated listeners and make them realise the need to embrace Christianity. But this proved to be a wishful thinking.⁴

The ultimate result of preaching which the missionaries very avidly longed for was the conversion of the people to Christianity. Before embracing the Christian religion by baptism, the people were

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¹ Smith, G.: Life of Stephen Hislop, p 71
² Kaye, J.W.: The Administration of East India Company, p 117
⁴ Potts, E.D.: British Baptist Missionaries in India, p 208
taught Christian ethics in a simple way. They had to express their faith in Jesus Christ in words and were supposed to behave likewise. They were advised not to work on Sundays, not to eat carrion, and not to worship idols. At the time of baptism, the converts were given a new dhoti or a sari in case of women, and a blanket. They were given a job or a cash loan for starting crafts or improving agriculture against security of lands, and other facilities were also provided.

The statistics of evangelistic progress in the nineteenth century reveal that in the beginning the missionaries had to wait patiently to get the fruits of their labour and in the last two decades of the century their work yielded fairly encouraging results. While judging the results it must be borne in mind that the missionaries were not so large in number as to cover the vast areas of the Central Provinces. The census report of the Province returned 271 missionaries in 1901. The place-wise break up of Indian Christians is given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Native Christians in 1891</th>
<th>Native Christians in 1901</th>
<th>Increase in percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balaghat</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>1094%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betul</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>1029%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhandara</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>236%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilaspur</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>2030</td>
<td>649%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanda</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chhindwara</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>829%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damoh</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>470%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoshangabad</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>2301</td>
<td>355%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jabalpur</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>1644</td>
<td>171%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandla</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>396%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagpur</td>
<td>2360</td>
<td>3293</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Native Christians in 1891</th>
<th>Native Christians in 1901</th>
<th>Increase in percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marsinghpur</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>267%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nimar</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>1187</td>
<td>393%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raipur</td>
<td>1011</td>
<td>3294</td>
<td>226%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sagar</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>206%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seoni</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>126%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wardha</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sambalpur and other Feudatory States</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>1153</td>
<td>216%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>6278</strong></td>
<td><strong>18367</strong></td>
<td><strong>193%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentage of Christians in the total population in the 1890s was 2.8%. From the above statistical table, it is also evident that while there was a very small increase in the Christian population in Chanda and Nagpur Districts, but in Balaghat and Betul Districts the increase was very large. How much of this increase was due to the number of conversions made or due to the number of births cannot be ascertained. The percentage rose in those districts which had a numerous population of aboriginals, tribals and low caste people.

The conversion of groups or individuals belonging to a particular caste or tribe inhabiting a particular area has been called **The Mass Movement** by the missionaries. This caused a rapid increase of the Christian communities specially in Balaghat, Betul, Bilaspur, Chhindwara, Hoshangabad, Mandla and Nimar Districts. The Christian population during the last four decades in the Central Provinces was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Native Christians</th>
<th>Total Christians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1872¹</td>
<td>4674</td>
<td>10477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881²</td>
<td>6200</td>
<td>12963</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² Drysdale, T.P. (Ed.) Census Report; Central Provinces 1881, p.45.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Native Christians</th>
<th>Total Christians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>6278</td>
<td>13318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>18367</td>
<td>25591</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that there was a very little increase in the Christian population between 1881 to 1891, because the establishment of the Christian missions was comparatively in its initial stage. The tremendous rise in the last decade was due to two reasons. Firstly, in the '90s the establishment was nearing completion and the labour began to yield its fruit. Secondly, during the repeated famines, epidemics and other calamities of that decade, many afflicted persons of all ages were persuaded by the missionaries by their laudable relief work among them to accept Christianity. The Census Report of 1901 indicates that the increase in number of the European Christians was very low, being two percent of the total Christian population. The reason for this was obvious. Many of the European missionaries were either bachelors or did not keep their wives with them.

Whatever adjectives may be given to the achievements of the Christian missions in the field of conversion in the Central Provinces, it can be positively asserted that by their ceaseless hard preaching work they brought about a new religious community in the Province. Although the percentage of the Christian community in 1901 was only 2.8% of the total population, it was by no means a small achievement considering all facts of the situation including the existence of two very well established religious communities of Hindus.

1. Russell, R.V. (Ed.) : Census Report; Central Provinces 1901, pp.100-01
2. Ibid.
and Muslims with their high ideals and philosophy of life. In other words the emergence of Christian community by conversions was an indication of the success of evangelism and the evangelistic strategies as well as modes of dissemination of the Gospel adopted by the missionaries.

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