CHAPTER VIII: FINAL ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion, missionaries were inextricably connected with imperialism and a threat to indigenous culture and values. The issues of imperialism, together with the claims and motivation of missionaries, led to colonialism. Of course, missionaries might not be the open advocates of empire, yet as local people identified some of their gestures acquainted to institutions or beliefs suggest their association with imperialism. Thus, the focus of denominational missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), London Missionary Society (LMS), Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), Wesleyan Missionary Society (WMS) etc., was always directed to bring the Gospel through civilizing or westernizing institutions like schools, hospitals etc., into colonies.

Societal mission schools were recognized images of imperial means, even though, no more than 3 or 4 percent of population received education in India in spite of missionary efforts. Many Hindu parents fearing that their children might be attracted to Christianity, over the years withdrew them from mission schools. However, there were occasions when missionaries’ efforts worked for local advantages. The mission education provided indigenous people with all white man’s many advantages. It is therefore essential to our assessment of the imperial role of missions which worked both in positive and negative ways when we take account of their limitations and inabilities. Equally significant is the fact that missionary education in India provided low castes with the means to defend their interests and improve their status.
In India, Christian teaching provided a spur to the revival and reform of indigenous religion as well as society and introduced new conceptions of gender particularly to indigenous women. Women were empowered despite missionary imperialism. Another issue of this kind is the Mass movements at the instance of vigorous missionary activity. Mass movements or mass conversions to Christianity were witnessed among depressed classes in Andhra during 19th century in the face of famine, epidemic and persecution (oppression by upper castes). These conversions were labeled as a simple surrender to White power. But alternative answers are also very persuasive: that the fundamental egalitarianism of Christianity was very touching to indigenous consciousness. Similarly Anna Johnstone (Missionary Writing and Empire, OUP, 2003) argues that missionaries were ambivalent and ambiguous figures in the colonial landscape-they were simultaneously on the side of White Power but also on the side of the indigenous people.

Among missionaries as well as theologians, as I discussed with emphasis in the initial chapters, there was an ever-present discussion and perennial publications justifying the Christian presence in India under the provision of the Providence. They propagated this contrasting notion among wide British public through their books and articles and more through their reports to the Church Missionary Society, Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, Methodist and Scotland Free Church mission head quarters. For example, Bishop Daniel Corrie of the Church Missionary Society in his address on the occasion of anniversary meeting of the corresponding committee, Calcutta (Church Missionary Record, no.11, vol vi, Nov. 1835, p.263), said ‘I verily believe the British power has been established in India with the permission, and under the direction, of
Divine Providence... There was Burmese war why? To open a way to the free dispersion of the Gospel and now missionaries are baptizing great numbers of them... The Gorkha war too? To bring us acquainted with those brave highlanders... God will support the British government in India for the good of the people and that his servants may have free liberty and protection'. This statement is one example how missionaries, unconsciously used the colonial war machine to further evangelical preaching. The notion of Providentialism is itself a discourse of conflict within the Raj, primarily in terms of the changing economic equation in India, which used transcendental divine sanction to justify Britain’s economic exploitation of India. Missionaries or Whig evangelicals did not consider subject people’s economic improvement equal in importance to religion. As these were two sides of the same coin, the shifting and complex character of missionaries’ relations with imperial authorities and religion determined the more or less simultaneous spread of imperialism and Christianity. Also, Britain’s overseas empire made it impossible for missionaries to escape all involvement with the empire and the empire because a tool for missionaries’ obligation to fulfill their calling.

Missions and cultural imperialism was also dealt methodically in this volume. This study found that Empires had been held together in a settled imperial hierarchy less by material connections than by an integrated 'colonial discourse'. Therefore, Cultural Imperialism became commonplace to interpret missionary enterprise as of central importance in the construction of empire by advancing cultural change. Missionaries, everywhere, believed English to be the vehicle of an essentially superior culture wrapped in Christianity. This English language, we saw in the earlier chapters, was an effective missionary strategy for colonizing the vernaculars by confining them within a colonial
discourse of cultural power. However, It is also assumed by many that the English language, the missionaries taught, was not simply important to the centralising ambitions of imperial controllers but also helped to forge more coherent, independent and secure local communities in India. In such settings, the 'cultural imperialism' associated with missionary schools, and the linguistic change, played a vital role in community life forging differences across the nation. Certainly English the medium of a single language communication among the people of India. When the first linguistic state, Andhra was formed in 1953, Prime Minister Nehru feared this would set a trend towards the Balkanization of the Indian Republic along the lines of India’s 15 languages and 250 dialects. The language of once all-embracing 'imperial project' is in common use today which imposes a quite impressive co-ordination and coherent planning among people of India. So, the missionary impact was variable and largely dependent on the type of society and its politics where they worked, up to the extent to which colonial governments wished to use them.

Missionary imperialism, which I described extensively, was one clear issue among denominational or societal missionaries viz., Church Missionary Society (CMS), London Missionary Society (LMS), Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), Wesleyan Missionary Society (WMS) etc. who come under first phase of missionary enterprise. Over the years, the formation of Faith missions represented a new phase in the enterprise. The term Faith missions was developed from a conviction of not soliciting funds, nor supported by foreign missionary societies. Thus the missionaries of this sect were to have faith in God to provide for their needs. To say in the words of Andrew Porter: ‘the argument developed here has paid particular attention to the many influences that strained
relations between missions and empire and often pushed them apart. At their most extreme, these were perhaps to be seen in the activities of the ‘faith missions’, inspired by radical theology and anxious to distance themselves as far as possible from western influences. Occasionally missions found themselves at the other pole’. This kind of profound personal example was initiated earlier in India by the Brethren movement, particularly, as one of its founder but pioneer missionary, A.N. Groves inaugurated it in the Telugu country.

As colonialism in different forms expanded in the impoverished nations like India so was the missionary movement coming from rich countries, and eventually both contributed for the rise and spread of nationalism in the colonies. Nationalism threatened the colonial system that dominated the missionary scenario (in the case of denominational missions). This nationalist feeling, in the form of socio-religious movements or movements for political reasons, shook the role of missionary as well as western image of Christianity. With this, the power of western superiority declined, western based and western directed missionary endeavour was also declining. Now it demanded stronger indigenized ministries. In the face of these developments, in reality, the Brethren missionary efforts and their assemblages began to grow to the point where they moved closer to the goals of indigenous Christianity of self governing, self supporting and self propagating Christian communities. At one time denominational missionaries of Church Missionary Society, Baptist Missionary Society, London Missionary Society, Wesleyan Missionary Society often enjoyed the benefits of serving in regions under the control of colonial empires and they were propagators of liberal theology (westernizing British Christianity), which tended to racial superiority, domination and to colonize and
impoverish other people. Whereas, with the emergence of Brethren movement, the radical or fundamentalist theology inherited from 1ST Century Apostolic Christianity received essential impetus in India, took adequate indigenous or Asiatic forms. The two micro case studies of Brethren missionaries, on which I focused, are visibly shed light on the indigenous spirit of the movement. The indigenous elements – the simplicity of meeting places, believers sitting on the ground with crossed legs, the use of Bhakti as the style of worship, the Indian lyrical and musical systems, long days of fasting and meditations etc., all make the Indianness, seen clear, and mark the movement as unique from others. The Brethren missionaries’ main focus was to raise native leadership being equipped with their own methodology to fit into indigenous setup.

I referred standard historical arguments as to the missions bearing the blame of being imperialistic in their stand points, while investigating into Brethren movement, one wide Christian group in Andhra, which was anti-imperialist, offers a useful study to a researcher. This Christian fellowship group that is so large enough now in Andhra counts to several thousands. Further the innumerable adherents to Bakht Singh movement initiated by Rajamani and Dorairaj who were associated with the Brethren from the time of their parents and grand parents and finally several fellowship groups of the Laymen’s Evangelical movement started by a Brethren man N. Daniel, all put together to number several lakhs, which speak ever widened circles of influence of the Brethren movement in Andhra. These Christian fellowships called ‘the assemblies’ see themselves not as the creation of foreigners, nor as Indian branches of foreign societal denominations, but as the fruit of Indian initiatives. As such they fulfill A.N. Groves’ vision for the spontaneous growth of early Apostolic native churches.
The history of the Protestant missions in India would not be complete without reference to the constructive role of the missionary in the social aspects, even though he bore the stigma of imperialism. In this particular aspect missionaries were looked with apathy and were a neglected stock. However, it is true that they are the integral part of the country’s rich heritage and they played an unequivocal role in shaping and moulding the dimensions of modern India and modern Andhra as well. The existence of the Protestant missions and their penetration into Andhra was mainly due to the service sanctity dominated by the mannerisms of missionary as well as his audience. This was where the people of the area accepted missionary and were not anti missionary of the useful services he rendered to them. The educational and medical work of the missionaries met with approval and this aspect of their work made a long lasting impression upon the people and became a pre-ground for the developmental activities of post independent India. In the light of these facts the missions’ history challenges the Indian society in the following areas:

1. In the area of religion and humanitarian activity as expressed by the ever-cherished doctrine of missionaries in respect of love and service for others.

2. In the area of social change, with a promise of social uplift of the lowly and the depressed classes.

3. In the area of economic well-being with a promise of an opportunity for economic betterment.

These challenges cannot be responded satisfactorily yet are also critical angles, since the missionaries did put pioneering and unparallel labours, on many fronts, and
their efforts rivalled the past and present governments. The alien missionaries were always friendly with people they chose to serve, irrespective of their religion, caste and colour. Particularly, the people of the depressed sections were liberated from the bondages, which were quite in vogue since their ancestral times.

Missionaries, once convinced of God’s will for their lives, never looked back till they fulfilled their calling, even at the cost of their lives. The enormous expansion of Christian missions in the area was resultant of this zeal and combined an insight into philanthropy with a desire for social change. Missionaries encountered caste system and worked for its eradication. They arranged inter dining and inter caste marriages. Even when it was held to do no good, they taught the egalitarian conviction of brotherhood among its adherents. Every mission in Andhra emphasized the vocational aspect of education and gave the students the opportunity ‘to learn and earn’. As there was a loom factory at Ludhiana in Punjab, missionaries brought looms, cotton gins, spades and wheelbarrows to natives in the mission centers, which have lifted several villages out of poverty. The mission centers taught their adherents some trade or handicraft to achieve livelihood and similarly, cooperative credit societies and thrift societies started by the missionaries promised of an opportunity for the economic betterment of the natives. Hundred years ago the Brethren missionaries of Godavari Delta first introduced lace work among Christian and non-Christian girls and today there are at least 20,000 people surviving by this trade in the Godavari districts.

The missionaries contributed greatly to the scientific agricultural farming in Andhra. Missionary activity exerted its influence well beyond its missionary sphere as it created social mobility, social change and dynamism in the area. Urbanization had been
characterized as the most significant historical process in Andhra since 19th century. This was particularly true of the expanding mission settlements. Large mission establishments associated with agricultural farms, Industrial institutes etc, had resulted in the growth of townships particularly in Andhra. A book titled ‘Laymen’s Foreign Missions’ Vol.I, part I (1933), based on the Report of Royal Commission on labour in India, 1931, shows that the years between 1872-1921 witnessed the high growth rate of important industrial and commercial cities in all regions of India. The villages occupied by the mission stations in vast areas, developed their own bank, post-office, co-operative societies, residential colonies with outlay of planned roads, agricultural farms, Irrigational dams, Industrial establishments, libraries, schools from nursery to colleges, sports clubs etc., and thus formed into modern townships. Several mission stations in Andhra, which were once villages have turned into moderate townships in the present day. Therefore, despite missions’ evangelism, their social relief and developmental activities received widespread recognition and appreciation in the Telugu country in an indigenous form.