CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION

The Christian missionary movement in the Central Provinces was started in the nineteenth century with only a few foreign missionaries of several denominations to lead it. This resulted in a break-up into several mission stations and Christian communities at different places. Their main aim was to introduce Christianity in their regions. But they found their path beset with several difficulties which appeared to be quite disheartening.

The climate being entirely different from that of their home countries, the problem of adjustment and acclimatization in a tropical country became quite difficult. Several missionaries had to go on furlough only to seek retirement on account of ill health. Due to unfavourable climate, four out of the six missionaries of the Gossner Mission lost their lives resulting in a total failure. Subsequently the casualty rate of the Swedish Mission at Chhindwara in the nineteenth century was one missionary per annum. Other missions faced the same trouble of maladjustment in a tropical climate with malaria, dysentery and small-pox as deadly diseases for Europeans.

The greatest practical difficulty that the missionaries had to face in doing their work was the media of communication. Neither they were acquainted with the regional languages and tribal dialects nor were the people conversant with the European languages. In this meeting
place of races of northern, eastern, western and peninsular India, there was a 'Babel' of tongues. Apart from Urdu or Hindustani, there were four other languages spoken by the people viz. Hindi, Marathi, Oriya and Telugu. Gondi was the tongue of the aboriginals in uplands. Less important was Tamil in Gonda District. The tribal dialects differed from one another. Without acquiring a working knowledge of these languages and dialects mission work was impossible. As there was no provision for teaching the Indian vernacular languages in the western countries, the missionaries had to study the indigenous languages at their mission stations to equip themselves for the work assigned to them. Still while preaching, sometimes they had to take the help of an Indian interpreter to explain the sermons to the local people.

The topography of the province posed another problem. The land was hilly and full of dense forests. There were neither good roads nor comfortable means of conveyance. They had to travel with bag and baggage on very rough roads. Often they hired crude bullock carts or rode on horses or walked on foot in order to penetrate into the far-flung parts of the country.

The uncertain behaviour of the people was quite depressing. Those who did not understand them were indifferent and even those who understood them were quite often hostile. They would not like any attack on or opposition to their traditional religious and social beliefs. By and large the people of the towns, specially the high caste Hindus, zamindars and the Muslims as a class were opposed to the preaching of the new religion which they contemptuously called the Firangis' religion. In 1843 a feeling of hostility was roused at Nagpur in which the rank, wealth and power of the native community joined hands. A Hindu society for protection was formed. Dr. Duff's house was
besieged. He was warned that a body of ruffians had been hired to assault him, and entreated not to expose himself by going out at night. The missionaries did not pay much heed to these difficulties and continued the work. Determined to carry the message of Jesus Christ to the people they endured hardships caused by their prolonged absence from home, deprivation of the facilities of post office, telegraph and hospital services. Rev. G.M. Davis remarked admiringly, "There is uncertainty of life in India, disciples yet not fear."

The methods adopted by the missionaries for the evangelical work were simple but not essentially uniform and common all over the province. They differed slightly from region to region depending on the equipment of the people among whom they worked and their capacity for emotional temporal adjustment to new ideas and thinking. In the primitive and backward regions 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 and emphasis was laid on the utility of the missions to the people.

As a result of the missionary enterprise, a new community of Christians was found slowly emerging in various parts of the province. The missions' efforts to assail and abolish the caste system only added a new caste consisting mostly of low class converts. Since the conversion deprived them of their previous social and material benefits and in most cases resulted in total rejection by the family and

2. Pekin : In the C.P., p.171.
3. Pickett, J.W. : Christian Missions in Mid India, p.16.
4. Davis, G.M. : A Chaplain in India, p.82.
the community, the missions owned the responsibility to provide them with all facilities possible in the confines of a mission compound. Such a group became larger when many of the depressed and untouchable classes saw a hope of social equality, and were persuaded to embrace Christianity. Thus a class of Indian Christians was formed which cherished the notion of superiority over their unconverted brethren by virtue of their admission to a new enlightened class maintained by the concept of high and low.

Although this new community was an outcome of the missions which came from abroad, it was allowed to remain closely attached to the traditional Indian pattern in its management. A panchayat or a local board, consisting of the members elected by the congregation, governed the financial, social and religious activities of this new Christian community, free from the traditional socio-economic constraints. Western culture was not imposed upon this community of converts. All the missions held unanimous view that the Indian culture was quite suitable even for the converted Christians who preferred to retain their culture traits, customs and manners, which did not conflict with the principal tenets of their new religion. George Swan wrote, "We are careful to encourage them to continue their native habit of life, where these are not actually evil or of bad tendency." The old missionary records and photographs show that they continued their former dress, food and other ways of life. The English ways and customs and food and clothing were discountenanced as tending to lead them into habits of extravagance and debt. The E.S.N.A. decided not to change the habits of the people as regards their habitation, clothing and food.

beyond introducing certain ideas that make for cleanliness and good health.

Thus the Christianity did not completely dislodge the rural converts from their cultural moorings. But for the change of religion, religious practices and mode of worship there was no significant change in their traditions. The missionaries adopted folklore, ritual, art and music from the Indian tunes and used Indian musical instruments. Rev. O. Lohr translated the term 'in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost' as 'Pita Putra Pavitratmane namah'. The indigenous style was adopted in the picturization of the Biblical text. In their illustrations, the missionaries painted the Christian families, devotees and even Jesus Christ in the purely Indian style. They saluted one another usually with 'Isa sahai' (may God be your help). The missionary writings distinctly mentioned that they preferred to give the converts an Indian name with or without a Christian name as a prefix or suffix to it. Some orphans were named after their supporters. The converts were required to read Bible, join congregational worship in the churches and observe Christian festivals such as Christmas, Good Friday and Easter.

The Indian culture made a deep impact upon the Christian rituals. The church buildings where the people sat on the floor with folded hands, were simple in style. Shoes were kept outside in accordance with the Indian tradition. J. W. Pickett remarked, "Most of the customs and traditions, the institutions and relationship which make up their lives are preserved and transformed by this type of Christianisation." Although Christianity had no veneration for the cow, in Reference

to the sentiments of the Hindu converts, they were permitted to abstain from beef eating if they so liked.

The Protestant missionaries as a class were very soft towards those among whom they worked. They did not condemn the Indians as heretics and did not let loose a campaign of hate against them. They attracted the people by creating an atmosphere of love, fellow-feeling and helpfulness. By peaceful propaganda in favour of a cause so dear to them, they tried to create a conviction in the minds of the people that they would be their dependable friends. For their success they depended on the goodwill of the people and efficacy of their advocacy. Some of them wore the outward appearances of an Indian saint, identified themselves with the people and won their hearts but could not convert many to their faith as the Buddhist preachers had done in foreign lands in ancient times. Outwardly they did not make any distinction between themselves and the Indian converts and always exhibited the patronising benevolence towards them. While prescribing Christian way of life to them, they did not interfere with their day to day life and allowed them to have their traditional ways and customs which did not directly militate against the basic concept of Protestant Christianity. The converts to Christianity enjoyed discretion even to use tarlum and sacred thread.

After more than half a century of the missionary work in the Central Provinces it was assessed that welcome to the Protestant missionaries in the interior of the Province was greater than in the district headquarters. This was because of their backwardness and social segregation. Whatever success the missionaries had achieved was not because of the attractiveness of their religion but because of the excellent social service they had rendered to the people during their
days of distress. They were appreciated more as humanists than as distributors of Biblical tracts and preachers of an alien religion in which people had little or no interest. It was only where the chains of social bondage were tighter that the Christianity was accepted, though hesitatingly and reluctantly, in the full conviction that its acceptance would give them a better social status and economic livelihood in society. Hence conversions to Christianity were larger in number in the remoter regions and among the lower orders and submerged communities than among the well-to-do urban classes and the key to their success was their sustained sympathy and consideration for the needy. Unlike the Roman Catholic Jesuits in the Portugueses territories their work was not tainted by bigotry, persecution or forcible conversion.

Service by non-Christians in the Christian missions and their educational and other institutions and organizations also very often resulted in their conversion to the faith of their employers. Comparatively the western education in the mission schools and colleges, regular study of the Bible in and outside classrooms and attendance in the attached chapels undoubtedly helped more in the spread of Christianity in the urban areas. Education enabled the people to read, understand and discuss scriptures. It provided Indian preachers for evangelical work and made Christianity a subject of conversation, communication, debates and essay writings. The school houses became chapels under the control of the missionaries. But the actual number of conversion in this environment were much less than expected. In fact, the success which Christianity achieved in the Central Provinces in the nineteenth century was the accumulated result of many-pronged purposeful drive its missionary launched to increase the yield. By their

1. Wilder, R.C.  Mission schools in India, pp. 36-37.
wide learning, humanitarian approach, ascetic way of life and selfless service some of the brilliant leaders of the Christian missions enjoyed considerable respect in the Province. Such extraordinary personalities as Hislop, Hagenstien, Lampard and Danielson were bound to succeed in any society where there was scope for their work. Some missionary leaders studied Sanskrit and quoted from them in support of what they preached. At times they tried to reconcile the moral codes of Christianity with the ethical concept of Hinduism.

Though never compromising in their missionary efforts the foreign missionaries could neither hide their sense of racial and cultural superiority nor divert themselves of the idea of Whiteman's burden to civilize and reshape the country through Christianity and western ideas. Coming from the dominant West, they attributed to themselves the duty to make the benefits of Christianity available to the backward and tradition-bound people and promote their welfare through it. That may be the reason why Christianity failed to make a dent in the intellectual and aristocratic circles in the Province.

The missionaries had no political connections and no politics of their own. There is no evidence to substantiate the irresponsible statement that the missionaries constituted a wing of the political power except probably in Goa. It is true that the missionaries maintained good relations with the British officers and rendered invaluable assistance to the Government in its educational enterprise, famine relief work and epidemic eradication programme and the Government officers provided them elementary civic facilities and granted them protection, but generally abstained from giving official countenance to their religious work. The Government retained the right to deport them.

In the Central Provinces the missionaries never gave an occasion to the government to exercise its right.

With the rising tempo of the propagation of Christianity and the increasing number of Christians and their institutions, the whole province was exposed to a new culture and way of life. The new learning and sciences that the missionaries brought in their train, began to widen the intellectual horizon. By the end of the century their impact began to be clearly felt and visible to the naked eye. Some readjustment in the attitude of the people who came in contact with the missionaries and a growing change in their value system began to be perceptible to some extent. For the aboriginals the Christianity came as a civilizing force and a novel experience which was bound to bring about a metamorphosis in their way of life in the course of time. For those in the lower strata of caste hierarchy in the Hindu society, who were baptised, it proved to be a means of emancipation from the age-old social disabilities. A new but small class of people sprang up in society who were basically Indian, superficially Christian, removed from the main current of traditional Indian life, living an exclusive life inside or around the mission compounds under the fostering care of white Fathers, fully dependent on the mission organisations for vocations and enterprise seeking government service or acquiring a modicum of education in the mission schools or trying to find out an independent career after getting training in domestic or industrial crafts and hoping for a better life, away from their kith and kin.

In the beginning the caste Hindus remained indifferent to the preachings of the missionaries as long as they did not try to

1. Chatterji, S.N. in Religion and Society Vol. XII, September 1965, p. 20
Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society.
(An article in manuscript)
demolish their family loyalty, caste and other socio-religious
prejudices, even though they did not necessarily agree with them.
Inclined to honour Jesus and acknowledge his services to humanity, they
did not stage any organised opposition or open hostility to the
preachings of the missionaries anywhere in the province. No doubt the
upper and middle class people resented the work of proselytization, but
beyond expressing resentment, boycotting the converts and having little
or no contact with the missionaries, they did nothing to harm them. But
in the later years of the nineteenth century when there came about a
lot of awakening among the people in defense of their religion and
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the culture as a result of multiplicity of forces at work, particularly the
reforming activities of a host of the social reformers all over the
country and the increasing tempo of the many Hindu society dimensional
reform work, opposition to conversion came on the surface. The open
condemnation of Hinduism and the mounting assaults on its unchristian
beliefs and practices by the missionaries together with the increasing
number of conversions to Christianity posed a challenge to the Hindu
society. Therefore, opposition was started initially against the high
moral claims and standard of purity of the missionaries and against
several of their practices which militated against their traditional
ones. The educated Hindus declared the doctrines of the deification of
Christ and his virgin birth, resurrection and miracles as mere
superstitions. As compared to the Hindus, the Muslims had a more closed
mind in matters of acceptance of a new idea or way of life which
appeared unislamic to them. Therefore, the preaching of Christian
missionaries did not have any dent in the Muslim society of the Central
Provinces for a considerable time.

In all the socio-religious Hindu reform movements there was a strong desire for reorientation to be carried on with a missionary zeal. Taking a clue from the work of the Christian missionaries they established their own organizations with trained personnel for bringing about social reform and social change in tune with the ancient past and modern requirements. In doing so, practically every missionary method and organization was counteracted. A branch of Arya Samaj was established at Narsinghpur probably in 1880 which preached a modified Hindu religion excluding idol worship, pilgrimages and expensive ceremonies. It rejected the caste system, pleaded for remarriage of widows, and attracted the converts into its communities. It held regular meetings, established schools, and published a monthly magazine through which it urged the people not to fear the missionaries because they had white faces, or belonged to the ruling class. It countered the prevailing notion that there was close connection between Government and Christianity by citing the Proclamation of 1858, by the Queen Victoria which contained a declaration of neutrality in all religious matters. Like the Christian missions, Arya Samaj started parallel conversion work. Its members tried to preach conversions to Hinduism from Christianity or Islam, propagated against evangelization, aroused public opinion against them but did not resort to violence anywhere. Subsequently the Pratama Samaj and Ram Krishna Mission also used the social work of the Christian missionaries as a model for their work. At Nagpur a society called 'Gorakshini Sabha' or the Society for Protection the cow was formed in 1888.

Almost all social reformers rejected the contention of the missionaries that Christianity was a panacea for their social ills and looked back to their ancient religious and social ideals and patterns
for inspiration to reform their society on their basis. They added vigour to their work by adopting missionary methods and organizational framework, which were rendering social services in their own way and with their own ends in view. In this way the missionary movement provided a modus operandi to the leaders of Indian society for their reform work and its social programme served as a model for them.

For this opposition to evangelism and conversion the missionaries themselves were largely responsible. While enlarging the frontiers of their missionary work they, in their over-zeal, consciously or unconsciously created at times situations full of conflicts which sometimes turned into active opposition. Their irresponsible criticism and condemnation of Hinduism made reaction against them inevitable. As early as 1865 this rising trend was noticed by Rev. E. Champion at Jabalpur. Even Colonel Ingersole, the Officer Commandings, Army Division at Jabalpur, did not see eye to eye with the missionaries and wrote an article on 'Self Contradiction of the Bible'. Colonel Olcott, the father of the Theosophical Society of India, did not allow the missionaries to speak from the platform of the branch of his society at Jabalpur. At Seoni Malwa some Christians were accused of damaging a temple and tension prevailed in the town. With great difficulty Rev. George Swan could pacify the enraged Hindus by explaining to them in a convincing manner that the Christians did not believe in such activities and they were not involved in the affair. In 1898 Francis Kilbey reported the opposition to his work at Sankhera, at Itarsi tahsil, where stones were

1. Letter from E. Champion to the Secretary, dated July 22, 1865. Folder-Letter No. Cl/055, C.M.S. Archives. "As you only too well know, in India we are generally met with people very well satisfied with their own religion. Often do we find this in the bazar, when the most ignorant depraved thinks himself entitled to heap scorn upon us. Such people sometimes ask, what do they call him who is born without a father?"

thrown at the Christians when they were going to attend a religious congregation.\footnote{1}

These were only isolated instances of exhibition of intolerance. In fact, the enlightened Hindus as a class never objected to the preaching of the Bible. But at the same time, desired the missionaries to be discreet in deciding the limit to which their preachings might be carried, without hurting the feelings of the people. They were almost unanimous in their praise for the social services rendered by the missionaries, as many of them had been benefitted by them. There was hardly any voice to suggest that in the interest of India the missionaries should return to their countries. In fact their cordial idea of unity of Godhead had been basic to the Hindu as well as to the Muslim religions. They stood for social equality as against caste distinctions and social separation which had always been assailed by Indian social reformers in all ages.\footnote{2} But their opposition to the existing polytheism and mythological superstructure was not appreciated by the people. Some sort of a fear that contact with the Christian missionaries might lead to the loss of their religious and cultural traditions rightly or wrongly pervaded their minds.

The outcome of this fear was inevitable. Even after more than half a century of persistent work the missionaries were not much successful in their primary pursuit of evangelization and had to content with only a handful of converts. However, the more valuable achievements of the missionaries were in the educational, humanitarian and philanthropic fields. Sir John Lawrance, the Viceroy of India, applauded what they had done for the benefit of India.\footnote{3} N.P. Niyogi, the Chairman of the

3. 16th Quarterly Papers, April 1900, p. 3. U.F.C.S. Archives. "I believe, notwithstanding all that the English people have done to benefit that country (India), the missionaries have done more than all the agencies combined."
Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee of Madhya Pradesh, while criticising proselytization, paid tributes to the missionaries for their laudable activities and gave credit to them for shaping the Indian life in modern times by their pioneering work in the field of education and medical relief. By introducing female education and enabling the women to come to public life such as hospitals, orphanages, education and numerous other kinds of social work, the missionaries were the first to emphasize the need to upgrade the status of women in society. By working among the neglected classes they made the Indian social reformers realize the necessity of ameliorating their social and economic lot. By rendering social and humanitarian service to the needy, widows, sick, helpless and handicapped persons, lepers and normals, irrespective of colour, caste and sex, they showed the path for humanitarian and philanthropic work and instilled a sense of social service and social responsibility among the enlightened people. By criticising the superstitious beliefs and practices and irrational ideas about the prevailing Indian religions, they awakened the enlightened minds to rediscover the original forms of their religions and restore to them their pristine purity.

In short, by their multifarious activities in diverse fields for the primary purpose of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Christian missions created awareness in India for social and religious reforms in the second half of the nineteenth century. This was the greatest and the most significant impact of the missionary activities on the minds of the people and the leaders of socio-religious reform movements. Directly or indirectly, in the shaping of the reform programmes of the period, the contribution of the work of the

Christian missions were engaged in doing was quite substantial. Therefore, it would hardly be an exaggeration to conclude that the missionaries showed the path for socio-religious reforms in India. At best, the emergence of social reforms was, to a large extent, the result of the inspiration provided by the many-sided activities of the Christian missions. Thus the missionary influence on the contemporary Indian thinking on social matters was an abiding phenomenon which can neither be ignored nor minimised.

Owing to the enthusiasm and dedication of the missionaries to their work, the term 'missionary zeal' came to be coined and it became an ideal for a reformer. Gandhiji considered the missionaries as fine specimens of humanity. The missions as a body brought various influences to bear upon the country with greater force and compactness than what any other non-official foreign organisation. They set ideal examples with their self denying efforts and thus infused a new vigour into the life of the Indian people and prepared the way for ideal citizenship.

While evaluating the impact of the missionaries on the country and their contribution to it, the background in which they worked with success almost uninterruptedly, cannot be overlooked. All the Christian missions in the Province could survive, right from the very beginning, because of the broad-mindedness and spirit of tolerance prevailing in the country. The general assessment of Dr. G.M. Moraes that apart from the unique service to the community which the Christian missions were in a position to render, it is a tribute to the sense of justice, fairness and magnanimity of the Hindus that they appreciated the loyalty and efficiency of the Christians, and permitted them to rise.

was equally correct in the context of the Central Provinces in the
nineteenth century. In this part of country the success of Christian
missions was more conspicuous among the aboriginals and tribals than
anywhere else among those having high civilization as their heritage.

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