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**THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON INDIAN EDUCATION:
AN ADVENTIST PERSPECTIVE**

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The Influence of Christianity on Indian Education: An Adventist Perspective

The advent of Christianity in India marked the dawn of an era of enlightenment of a new kind - an era when the learned Indian scholars saw themselves in a new light, with culture, education and lifestyle acquiring added dimensions. Yet the influence has had to confine itself only to those sections of Indians who really felt cribbed and cabined by a system that sought to subjugate men to its heirarchical and caste constraints. A fresh breeze has since been blowing across this land with Christian educators showing the way. The aim of even members of the so-called elite today in India's towns and cities is to secure by any means a place for their children in any one of the good Christian schools. But there is today a challenge from the communal and ultra-religious nationalist forces which offer to impart knowledge in their institutions with the stated aim of fostering a community that holds dear ideas, legends, myths and traditions that are typically Indian.

Education in India 2000 Years Ago

When St. Thomas, Jesus' disciple, arrived on the shores of Malabar (the present Kerala) in 52 A.D., he came across a community that had an advanced system of education. But the traditions were much too strange and incomprehensible. He managed to put across his message and surprisingly received a good reception. Thomas' attitude must have been one of tolerance. He observed and learned more about the Indian psyche than anyone else before or since. The view expressed by Arthur

F. Holmes acquires significance here: "Culture was ordained by God ...the creation mandate to replenish and subdue and have dominion has never been rescinded." (Arthur F. Holmes, **The Idea of a Christian College**, p.20). "It may be argued that sin changes things and perverts culture, so that God's grace calls us out of culture to witness to it rather than participate in it." (ibid) It , therefore, may be observed here that the early Christians who arrived in India sought to witness to a people who needed to break from the superstitions of a native culture.

Social and Religious Reform in India through Christian Influence

India has been a land of customs, traditions and practices that are hard to explain and difficult to comprehend, easy to ignore and well nigh impossible to change or discard. However, India also has been a receptive and hospitable land. As Mahatma Gandhi once observed, Indians leave the windows of their minds open so that the cultures of various lands may blow through them, but they have their feet firmly planted on the ground and refuse to be blown off their feet by the winds. That is how it has been. However, the winds of Christian influence have had an impact whose intensity may not have been very great in terms of numbers, but has certainly been at the root of the modernization that has taken place.

Indian leaders educated abroad, chiefly in England, had returned home with a new outlook. Men like Lord Bentick, Governor General from (1829 - 1834), came to India to influence

the course of history for the better. Then there were the men who underwent modern education in Christian institutions and came out of them seething with anguish at the cultural disorder in a beautiful land. Raja Ram Mohan Roy has earned a niche in India's history for his brave campaign against the obnoxious custom, *sati* (a practice that required the widow of a dead man to be burnt alive with his corpse on his funeral pyre). Lord Bentick displayed rare courage in initiating an act on 14th December, 1829, making *sati* illegal. The orthodox Hindus protested and sent a petition to the Privy Council in England which, however, upheld the decision of the Governor General.

In like manner other evils like infanticide, human sacrifice and the ban on re-marriage of child widows, were identified and abolished. In 1856, Lord Dalhousie made widow re-marriage lawful. In 1930, as a corollary of the national movement, another landmark legislation (the Sarda Act) was enacted fixing the minimum age of marriage at 18 for boys and 14 for girls. Mahatma Gandhi, who was himself married at 13 to Kasturba who was just 9, wrote, "My fierce hatred of child marriage I gladly say is due to Christian influence..... My feelings gathered momentum at the fierce attack from Christian sources on this evil." (Louis D'Silva. **Christian Community and National Mainstream.** p.52) It may be recalled that Mahatma Gandhi was deeply influenced by his education in England and his knowledge of Jesus Christ, whose life deeply inspired and motivated his thoughts and actions.

Missionaries with a Mission

India has over the years been a nation at war with herself constantly striving to realise her present and recognise her future. Christian educators had initially aimed at freeing her from the bondage of 'ignorance'. Every Christian mission (beginning with St. Thomas, followed by the Nestorian missions of the fourth century, and then the European missions of Danes, Dutch, French, and finally, in a big way, the English) has worked towards this end. They came to exchange their wares, but soon found themselves trading ideas with special emphasis being laid on religion. These missions were unable to confine themselves to well-defined areas of influence, and soon ended up bickering to cut down one another. Only the English survived. They stayed and their language is still playing a major role in modern India.

The European missions introduced the western mode of education and developed it appreciably. Their fundamental aim was to propagate Christianity. For them, education was not an end in itself but a means to the spread of Christianity and Christian culture. They first established primary schools, studied Indian languages, and then preached the gospel. A number of translators of the Bible into indigenous languages were Europeans. The success of early missionaries may be gauged from the impact they have had on the state of Kerala which is today the most literate in India.

Modern Education Ushered in

The Portuguese could well be regarded the founders of a modern system of education in India. They started schools for elementary education wherein education was imparted mainly in religion, local languages, Portuguese, arithmetic and crafts. For higher education, they established Jesuit colleges where they offered education in Latin, religion, logic and music. Though these colleges were set up to mainly train the clergy, general education was also imparted. (Rawat. **History of Indian Education**, p.126)

The Dutch did not show much interest in propagating their religion, but went on to establish several Protestant churches through their educational institutions.

The French, in 1664 A.D., established a trading company and opened factories at Mahe, Karaikal, Chandranagore and Pondicherry. Along with the trading centres they also set up their schools. They established a secondary school at Pondicherry where the French language was taught. In the primary schools Indian teachers taught using the medium of the local language. Attached to every school was a religious missionary who taught religion. Non-Christian pupils were entitled to admission in these schools. With the French backing out of an ugly power game, many of their colonies came under the possession of the English and consequently the system of education too underwent a change. (Rawat. p.127)

The Danes, with never any pretensions to political

influence, rendered invaluable religious and educational services. It would not be an exaggeration to affirm that the Danes were pioneers of modern education in India (ibid). The Danish missionaries could convert 50,000 people into the Baptist faith mainly through education. They established several elementary schools for Muslims who were very backward in education at that time. Two of the Danish missionaries, Schultz and Zeigenbalg, learnt Telugu and Tamil. Schultz translated the Bible into Telugu and Zeigenbalg into Tamil. Zeigenbalg also authored a Tamil grammar book.

The English set up schools throughout the country especially through the Church Mission Society (CMS). Fort William College at Calcutta, Fort St. George College in Madras and CMS College in Kottayam, Kerala, are few of the many colleges established besides scores of secondary and elementary schools. Madras Christian College is a very reputed college established by the English.

Among Christian pioneers the name of William Carey stands out for his distinguished contribution. He landed in 1793 at Calcutta and worked ceaselessly to help a people come out from ignorance into the light of knowledge. The Serampore Theological College, established by him, has now become the only Christian university in India. The university conducts graduate and post-graduate degrees through affiliated colleges and seminaries operating around the country. This cobbler-turned -theologian envisioned a time when India would be liberated and to achieve

his aim he decided to get the Bible translated into the local languages. He set up what might be called a Bible factory at Serampore with many different linguistic departments engaged in translating the Bible. The outcome: the Bible was translated, in whole or in part, into more than thirty languages. "Through the work of Carey and his many successors, the Bible has become the treasured possession of Protestant Christians all over India, and these vernacular translations have been a primary instrument of evangelism." (R.H.S.Boyd. pp.15,16.)

The Influence Grows and Spreads

All Christian organisations, both foreign and indigeneous, took keen interest in the establishment of schools and educating the Indian people. The finest institutions, without doubt, are owned and operated by different Christian churches and denominations, Catholic or Protestant. The free, simple and honest and peaceful disposition of early educationists had drawn many out from orthodox communities into the fold of Christianity. The literature available in local languages, and the positive approach of Christian teachers to the fundamental questions of life and history, have together made Christianity a respected movement. If not converts, the Christian school system has created many admirers and draws much praise from many sections of India's diverse population.

Most Christian educators have not confined themselves to preaching; in fact most today work hard to promote a love for

knowledge. Teaching a people who need to learn a lot more in order to face the uncertain vicissitudes of life with more confidence has become the stimulus, as it were. Perhaps apostle Paul's counsel to Timothy would be appropriate here: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2Tim.2:15).

The influence today extends to the uttermost corners of the sub-continent, what with most government officials, from moderate to very high ranks, having had the benefit of a good Christian education. As the influence of Christian schools grows and spreads, the network of Adventist schools is, especially in the central and southern states, fast gaining a solid reputation for the all-round education imparted at a time when it appears as though there is a definite shift from value-based education to education that is readily compromising in the face of an onslaught from communal and parochial forces.

Noteworthy and Lasting Contribution

Christianity's contribution to the social reform movement is as substantial as its influence on the system of education which changed dramatically with the arrival of the European colonial powers. Men like the great reformer, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who fought the superstitious practices of his time such as *sati*, were to a great extent influenced by a modern Christian system of education that raised many rational questions against obnoxious customs that troubled the conscience of the thinking Indians.

The Concept of Equality Introduced: The youth of the country were introduced to the concept of complete equality. They got a feel of the healthy system that challenged the cruel caste-based order, when they secured admission into Christian institutions which waived all sex, caste, creed and class regulations. Prior to the advent of Christian missions, school-going was a privilege limited only to the upper class, the Brahmins, who formed the highest order in the caste hierarchy, and the ruling class called Kshatriya. The middle class was forced to be content with little basic learning, while the lowest class could entertain no such desire, their role being to serve the needs of their masters -- that was according to the doctrine of karma. All this has since changed (atleast these changes are incorporated in the Constitution of India as Fundamental Rights.)

Louis D'Silva in the book, "Christian Community and the National Mainstream", p.927, writes: "It is not generally known that several features of the educational system today, and the great benefits stemming from them, are the fine flower of seeds sown long ago by Christian missionaries."

The education and uplift of the so-called lower castes and classes were for decades in the hands of the Christians who are pioneers in this area. The idea of teaching the teacher was first put into effect by the Christian organisations who from the 16th century began establishing schools for the teachers. Training of teachers from the less privileged classes enabled the

Christian missions to further promote the concept of equality. The setting up of boarding schools for the benefit of various classes was another area in which the missions led the way, and still do. Institutions of vocational education intended to suit persons of differing aptitude were an off-shoot of the industrial revolution in Europe. To the missions goes the credit of establishing the first industrial and agricultural schools in the country.

Priority to Character-building and Development of Personality:

Christian schools and colleges are well-known for the discipline and decent conduct they inculcate in their students. In my long experience as an educator for 33 years, I have come across several officials holding high positions in government who attribute their success as civil servants to the early training they received in good Christian schools. A Christian you may meet anywhere in India is sure to impress you as a peace-loving, honest, simple and sincere person. And the same may be said of non-Christians who have passed through the portals of a Christian institution.

"Generally by the Christian's readiness to aid and assist any student, rich or poor, who showed promise, they set an example, followed by others. Christian teachers in general have a sense of dedication to duty and a commitment to responsibility." (Louis D'Silva)

Breakthrough in Education of Women

Over half of India's population comprises of women who for centuries, like their Chinese counterparts, were bound by every conceivable cultural restriction. One of Christianity's greatest contributions to education in India was the importance given to the education of India's women. Conservative traditionalism had long held that the status of a woman was considerably lower than that of a man. P.L. Rawat, in his book, "History of Indian Education", p.432, says: "In ancient times, during the later Vedic period, the Aryans had sealed the feet of women culturally and socially by denying them the right to study vedas and thus half of our population was deprived of one of the most fundamental of human rights. Their condition deteriorated during the course of history... Woman came to be regarded as the bond slave to man. Their position in society got a further rude shock by their economic dependence on men. Even today, inspite of the recognition of women's status as equal to that of men, the condition of majority of them is as wretched and pitiable as ever. Illiteracy and ignorance is prevalent more in women-folk than in men-folk. This evil is more rampant in rural areas and lower strata of urban population and backward communities."

In 1927, the Rani of Sangli, speaking at the All India Women's Conference, said, " There was a time when the education of girls had not only no supporters, but open enemies in India. Female education has by now gone through all the stages - total apathy, ridicule, criticism and acceptance. It may now be safely

stated that anywhere in India the need for the education of girls as much as boys is recognised as a cardinal need." (Louis D'Silva. p.94)

Serious problems created by such social customs as **pardah** (the practice of women staying indoors, away from public gaze, and if venturing out became unavoidable they had their faces covered with the edge of the saree or, as with Muslim women, a black hood) and child-marriage were addressed by the missions. Child widows were prohibited from being re-married. The future of women was very bleak. The new consciousness introduced by the missions was not readily accepted. Panditha Ramabai, a convert to Christianity, said that in 99 cases out of a hundred, the educated men of the country were opposed to female education and the proper position of women. The education of women in the 19th century had to contend against prejudice as well as superstition. For instance, there was a strong belief among the Hindus and Muslims that a woman who learnt to read and write was doomed to premature widowhood. (Louis D'Silva. p.96)

It is in this respect that the British colonialists made a singular and laudable contribution. Authorities and educationists devoted their attention to the importance of female education. Prior to the 19th century there was no constructive and organised effort in this direction. According to one investigation made at the turn of the century, there were only four literate women in Bengal district out of a population of half a million. The struggle was against a system that

erroneously yet zealously guarded the belief that women's education was a serious breach of morals.

Governor Generals William Bentick and Dalhousie worked out steps to improve the situation. In 1854, some provision through legislation was made for the establishment of more schools for girls and increased grant-in-aid for them. By 1882, 120,000 girls began to receive educational benefits and the number of institutions for them rose to 2500.

The nationalist movement took up the cue from the missions and from 1921, what with all the social and political awakening, women's status began to register an upward trend. Today, except in the villages of states like Rajasthan, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, female children flock to neighbourhood schools in large numbers. The following table that appears in the Manorama Year Book (1990 ed.), p.430, explains the progress in the area of women's education:

Table 1
Literacy of India, 1901-81

Year	Percentage	Male	Female
1901	5.35	9.83	0.60
1911	5.92	10.56	1.05
1921	7.16	12.21	1.81
1931	9.50	15.59	2.93
1941	16.10	24.90	7.30
1951	16.67	24.95	7.93
1961	24.02	34.44	12.95
1971	29.45	39.45	18.69
1981	36.17	46.74	24.88

Note: 1. This percentage is inclusive of children under the age group 0 - 4. 2. A person is considered literate if he or she can read and write with understanding in any language. Children below 5 are treated as illiterate.

Hence it may be noted that there has been much progress with regard to the education of the under-privileged classes of Indian society. The foundation laid by the Christian organisations became the stepping stone for the rulers of free India to build on. Education in India is a state subject or a subject dealt with by the state governments. States like Kerala, Punjab, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have taken up the challenge seriously and lead the way.

Adventist Work Among the Tribals

Christians have everywhere championed the cause of the tribals. They have represented their problems before the authorities and secured relief. Schools are now in existence in remote areas where a modern education is within walking distance from a tribal home. The government recognises and to a large extent aids several Christian organisations which run schools in difficult and adverse situations. The Adventists have done some good work in the tribal areas of Bihar. Attempts are in progress at some places to present the gospel and the health message.

Demon worship seems to still be a problem as in some parts of Africa. Pr.C.S.Marandi, director, Adult Education and Continuing Education in the Southern Asia Division, speaks of a recent encounter with three women who were possessed by evil spirits and danced at one of his evangelistic series held among the Mal Paharias in Bihar. The team of evangelists prayed, and they were pleasantly surprised to find that the spirits left the

women. These women were then baptised at the end of his series.

One reason why Christians had to take up the work among the tribals and other backward groups is because caste-minded Hindus considered it unethical to work for or with these groups who were culturally inferior to them. The Christians have by and large tried to measure up to the unenviable task.

Adventist Influence on the Educational Scene in India

Adventists with a church membership of 162,000, 850 churches, 173 primary schools, 47 secondary schools, 1 college, 10 hospitals, 1 orphanage, 1 publishing house, and about 4500 workers have utilised every opportunity that has come their way, and yet the work before us seems to be increasing every year as the population keeps exploding. The present target is to set up one Adventist school in every town. In the state of Tamil Nadu which comes under the South India Union, we have one school in most major towns. Church members and many others who have heard of the Adventist system of education, visit the headquarters often to urge us to start a school in their area, if none exists. In the second largest town, which incidentally is a major temple town and a pilgrimage centre for Hindus, we have at present four large schools and scope for a few more.

What Makes Adventist Education Relevant in the Indian Context?

From the philosophy of education to the way of life of the Adventist teacher, Adventist education has proven beyond doubt

that it is suitable to the Indian masses who are essentially simple people - with a biblical simplicity that brings them very close to the heart of Christianity as propounded by the Adventist health message and the three-pronged education imparted in our schools. Adventist education comes close to several of Mahatma Gandhi's teachings. For one, the Mahatma taught the dignity of labour and the need to use education as a means to further the spiritual well-being of man.

Character-development, moral and spiritual lessons, physical training, a balanced study of the sciences and arts, hygiene and the work programme in boarding schools, make Adventist education the finest and noblest experience that any value-conscious Indian parent desires for his child. Indians, be they Hindu, Muslim, Bhuddhist or Jain, are basically religious people. They place a high price on moral values and social ethics. While visiting our various schools and meeting with these children of such diverse backgrounds, one is sure to be struck by their common interest in the values sought to be instilled in them by the Adventist education. In my experience as a teacher I have been pleased to find that often it was a Hindu pupil who topped his class in the exam conducted in the Bible or doctrinal course at the end of a scholastic year.

How have we been able to continue to uphold Christian education in the face of resistance from neo-communal and religious fundamentalists? The answer is not far to seek. It is simply our dependence on the Lordship of Jesus Christ that has

seen us through many a difficult situation. All our schools have had a very humble beginning. They were begun in small sheds with one or two teachers. The investment has been minimal, but the leading of the Lord so sure that many of our schools are in a position to support, substantially, evangelism within their territory.

The Expanding Network of Day Schools

South India and Central India Unions have witnessed a rapid growth of day schools over the last decade. The schools record quick growth on account of the demand for English-medium schools. Our schools are inexpensive and are well known for the excellent results they produce in the public examinations. The rapid growth has brought in its wake certain serious problems, such as the shortage of Adventist teachers and adequate facilities, so much so that we have had to shelve several expansion plans prepared by principals. Many SDA day schools have well over 1500 students.

Boarding Schools

Though not many in number SDA boarding schools have had a unique influence on the ministry of the church in India. Most of the Division's leaders have grown up in the boarding schools, which have a varied programme, with special emphasis laid on the spiritual programmes in the church. Boarding school education has passed the test of time. The 12 boarding schools that exist

in different parts are now schools meant for children of Adventist workers and laymen. Some of them also run attached day schools for the benefit of the community in the surrounding areas.

Adventist Education - Answer to India's Problems

A visitor to Spicer College will come away with the feeling that the college is an India in miniature. It reflects almost every shade of India's cultural and human fabric. The work programme, the cultural activities, the rigid work programme, the discipline and controlled diet, all these make Spicer College as reflective of India as of the church and her beliefs.

India's problems are a large population that is ill-clad and underfed, illiteracy, epidemic diseases, disparate tendencies and widespread corruption. Adventist education has addressed these problems with varying degrees of success. The overall answer to all of them is in the central theme, motive and ideal that serves as the beacon of true Christian education: a Christ-centred education. The Bible and doctrinal courses taught in Adventist classrooms by Adventist teachers aim at the same purpose. Stress now laid on health education, temperance ideals, academic excellence and moral dimensions of personality, is certain to lead Adventist youth where it was first designed to lead them-- to their Lord and Saviour.

"The ultimate end of education on earth is salvation, eternal life. But in eternity learning will go on; earth is but a preparatory school for the School of the hereafter. The correct teacher calls for every youth to learn the true philosophy of education, 'What must I do to be saved?' "(ST. p.240)

A study of Ellen White's writings and the writings and sayings of Indian thinkers and writers who shape India's educational planning and policies, will leave one in no doubt that she has suggested answers, based on the scriptures, which show a deep understanding of India's needs. The answers are also well-suited to the Indian context. True Adventist education succeeds where Government-sponsored campaigns against social evils like drug-addiction, alcoholism, dowry, illiteracy, diseases, corruption, etc., cannot succeed, simply because Adventist educators take the help of the greatest Power on earth and in the heavens. The daily devotions and the week of prayer sessions make Adventist educational institutions unique in an era when worship and education are kept apart for political and communal reasons.

To develop the spirit is to build character and to enable one to work towards a knowledge of God and self-realisation.... (This is) an essential part of the training of the young ... all training without culture of the spirit (is) of no use, and might be even harmful.
(M.K. Gandhi, **The Story of My Experiments with Truth**.p.270)

Sounds so much like lines from the Spirit of Prophecy. But that is how the Mahatma thought when he ran a school for the children of inmates on the Tolstoy Farm organised by him in South

Africa before his return to India to lead the freedom struggle. In all his career he gave spiritual education prime place. Hence, in India today there exists a widespread belief that education is not complete without sufficient stress on the spiritual aspect Here is great hope and promising scope for Christian education, more so, for Adventist education.

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