

Ideological Conflict in Colonial Mysore – An Encounter with the Wesleyan Methodist Mission of Gubbi

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Abstract:

This paper explores the ideological conflict that emerged in colonial Mysore between indigenous sociocultural systems and the Wesleyan Methodist Mission established in Gubbi during the 19th century. The study delves into how the mission's evangelical and educational activities confronted local traditions, religious beliefs, and societal structures, leading to cultural tensions and transformations. Drawing from archival sources, missionary records, and local narratives, the research critically examines the power dynamics between the colonial administration, missionary enterprise, and native resistance. It also highlights the role of religious ideology as both a tool of colonial influence and a site of contestation. The paper aims to shed light on how such encounters shaped regional identities, belief systems, and the broader discourse of cultural resilience during the colonial period in southern India.

Keywords: Colonial Mysore, Wesleyan Methodist Mission, Ideological Conflict, Cultural Encounter, Religious Conversion.

Introduction

Religion conflicts bordering the ideological dimensions were the major facts of Mysore state under the colonial authority. As elsewhere, Mysore also becomes a battle ground for these conflicts. The missionaries who were a part of the larger interest of the British imperialism invented many tools to argument the religions version of imperial and colonial interests .Entire 19th century

was a period of this conflict which carried over to the 20th century.

The case study of Gubbi a taluka place in Tumkur district of Karnataka became the early laboratory for the missionaries. This resulted in the sharp reaction from the natives particularly the Beaurcracy who were invariably derived from the priestly classes. This trajectory of interest in this case was largely in the background of the ‘Removal of the disabilities of the

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native Christian Converts which sustained till 1910 and faded away.

This particular Mission in all its divisive attempts tried to institutionalize the conversions process. They tried to reach the people through pamphlet, speeches at the public gatherings, and philanthropic activities during the famine and other calamities. Medical assistance, free education were the major tools employed by them. As statistics shows in this paper their attempt yielded good results in terms of native converts. The interaction between the Mission, Government of Mysore, Calcutta Presidency and the Imperial Government in England would enable a student of history about the multi-dimensional canvas of the missionary enterprise in Colonial Mysore.

In the year 1813, after obtaining the permission from the East India Company to spread Christianity, a band of six Missionaries led by the Rev. Thomas Coke, a close associate and co-worker of John Wesley published a plan of the Society for the establishment of Missions among the natives. James Lynch another Missionary from this group who travelled along with Dr. Coke came to India to establish a mission after serving in Ceylon. He was the first Wesleyan Methodist Missionary to come to India and started his missionary work in 1817 at Madras. Later he was succeeded by Robert Carver, Elijah Hoole and James Mowat successively. Elijah Hoole and his companion James Mowat the first

Wesleyan Methodist missionary to come to the state¹. They first came to Srirangapatana through Bangalore in 1821. But they were discouraged by Abbe-Dubois, a French missionary, who reported that they would face difficulty in finding converts to Christianity among the natives of Mysore. He also advised them to take their earliest opportunity to return to England². In July 1833, Thomas Hudson, a Methodist missionary arrived at Bangalore and served as the first chairman of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. He was the first to organize the Methodists' work in Mysore State. From then onwards, brisk preparations to evangelize the province of Mysore were launched. In 1836, on the recommendation of the Home-Board he toured through Mysore territories and selected Gubbi, located 50 miles north of Bangalore for establishing a Canaries Mission. Soon, British Methodist churches and Instructions of the Wesleyan Methodists Missionary Society started expanding in the State. Gubbi eventually became one of the most important stations of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. Thomas Hudson while speaking of Gubbi enumerates the reasons for having selected the place.

He writes that "This country town has many things in its command in his eyes; it is remote from the contaminating influences of the European population, and free from priestly domination of the Brahmins. The people belong to the

peaceful and accessible trading or agricultural classes³”.

Hudson's family and his assistant missionary Charles Franklin arrived at Gubbi in 1837 and established first Wesleyan mission station. They tried to enlighten the people about Christ's preachings and his service to mankind. They slowly developed cordial relationship with the people of surrounding villages and preached the relevance of Christianity. As a result in 1843, a native called Singonahally Chikka got converted to Christianity and changed his name as 'Daniel'. He was the first native do so. There after his family members accepted Christianity⁴.

The government of Mysore was outwardly favorable towards the activities of the missionaries and which further encouraged the missionaries to carry their work in the region. In the following years the Wesleyan Methodist missionary successfully carried out its evangelical work by adopting various strategies for spreading the gospel, which led to increased proselytisation in Tumkur district which is generally true of the State of Mysore.

Evangelical Works of the Wesleyan Methodist (WMM) in Tumkur.

For the furtherance of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the WMM adopted a number of means, like preaching of gospel, establishment of schools for boys as well as girls, industrial schools, training of the ministry, opening of the health centers and

very importantly, production of Christian literature and later starting of weeklies and news papers. The evangelical work was carried out very regularly and systematically. To carry out the work, theological students were appointed in large numbers. Separate programmes were drafted for the morning as well as the evening work. While street preaching, preaching in public places, and visit to villages were done in the mornings, evening work was devoted to indoor preaching in the school rooms or houses which were adopted for the purpose⁵.

Conversions were the most important programme of the Missionaries. Just as in other parts of south India, Mysorean society was also highly conservative and orthodox. Hence the Missionaries many a time found their attempts to convert the natives hampered. Under the camouflage of spreading education, the Missionaries had restored to large scale conversions. The mindset synchronized in to the rigid caste system was one of the greatest obstacles for the preaching of the Gospel in the State of Mysore. Though Christian doctrine was preached to everybody irrespective of caste, creed or colour, it failed to lure high caste Hindus into Christianity because of the prevailing liberal space they enjoyed in the cast hierarchy. Though a few high caste natives got converted into the new faith, the missionaries could not succeed in changing their fundamental beliefs, values of life, beliefs in the rites and rituals as well as their view of life.

The Wesleyan Mission appointed a number of Christian missionaries in different parts of the State of Mysore, and, through a number of evangelical methods launched the work of proselytisation. At first, the missionaries established regular worship in the villages, and then they organized systematic Christian teaching which greatly facilitated the transformation of community⁶.

Education was another means by which the missionaries tried to win over these people towards Christianity. The missionaries admitted in their schools both boys and girls irrespective of caste background. Many untouchables were lured to embraced Christianity and many more that got education in the Missionary schools became aware of their social degradation. They also became aware of the fact that for centuries they were denied entry into the Hindu places of worship and they were starved spiritually and socially for long time.

A mass movement of conversion into Christianity was tried during the great 1875-76 famine. This was followed by the outbreak of Plague in 1890, which covered large tracts. The two calamities had a greater effect upon the socially and economically deprived sections. Having been requested by the state to provide relief to the afflicted, the missionaries launched a number of relief programs, which went a long way in furthering the evangelical interests.

The minutes and journals of the Wesleyan Methodist missionaries contain statistics of the number of baptisms held in each year in Tumkur district⁷.

Year	Tumkur	Gubbi
1877	25	25
1878	111	7
1879	14	2
1880	128	NIL
1881	72	40
1882	80	20
1884	106	35
1885	102	35
1886	133	26
1887	103	25
1888	155	28
1889	241	28
1890	25	28
1891	231	27
1893	228	23
1894	235	29
1895	235	28

Contribution of Weslean mission in Tumkur District

In the different places of the Tumkur district Wesleyan mission contributed in the field of education, medicine, literature and society. Wesleyan mission used education as a powerful weapon to reach the socially degraded. They chiefly concentrated on the down trodden and women. Christian missionaries learned regional languages and prepared the

necessary text books. Another biggest problem that Christian missionaries had to face was that their purpose and their deeds were viewed with suspicion by the natives. Parents were scared to send their children to school run by Christian missionaries.

Because they constantly heard the rumor that these Christian missionaries would kidnap their children and take them their country. But Christian missionaries did not lose the confidence and continued to work. The following is brief analysis of how Christian missionaries promoted education in Tumkur district.

An orphanage was established at Tumkur by Wesleyan Methodist Missionary during the famine of 1876 had 337 orphan boys who had been received from the Hassan orphanage. Among 337 boys .95 died of various complications at the time of admission .Majority of the orphans admitted here belonged to the untouchable communities while the rest belonged to Vokkaliga, Besta, Kuruba, Golla, Thigala and other shudra castes ⁸ . The missionaries provided education and industrial training to the orphaned children. Industrial training consisted of carpentry, blacksmith, rope making, weaving, farming etc.and the industrial school was generally busy throughout the year.

Education

In 1848 Chikka Daniel with the help of Mathew male and John Jakins , the missionaries ,opened the school at

Singonahally near Gubbi. At the same time i.e. in 1848 there was a school in Tumkur. There were 34 students in that school. When the English school started in 1854, 211 children sought admission. Many schools were opened in and around Gubbi. By 1906, 11 schools were opened for boys and 3 schools for girls separately.4 schools for boys, one night school and 2 schools for girls were opened in Gubbi. Medium of instruction was in both Kannada and English. An interesting thing to be noted in this context is that these missionaries gave importance to women education. They ran the following kinds of schools

1. Vernacular Boys school
2. Vernacular Girls schools
3. Sunday schools
4. Industrial schools

Vernacular schools for boys and girls offered general education to them. Natives particularly lower strata of the society over a period of realized the importance of education and encouraged the children to offered schools and colleges. Education became a means of elevation of the people in the social skill and economic empowerment. With the expansion imperial and colonial interests natives had an opportunity to utilize the space available for them at the lower levels of bureaucracy.⁹

The economic distress of the people was effectively used by the missionaries to augment the influence of Gospel. Industrial schools that were opened by

them able to bring some sense of solace to the native, and there by many of them decided to convert themselves to Christianity. The ability of listening made them offered to many while helped baptism. Sunday schools were meant for native converts and these schools acted complimentary to the industrial schools.

Medical Service

The services of Christian missionaries can be recognized in the field of medical science also. Christian missionaries have rendered valuable service to many medically needy. Even though there were no well equipped hospitals, they treated the patients at small dispensaries. Official records 1911 and before show us that even wives of the missionaries had served the diseased. In 1911, Mrs. Tomlinson and Mrs. Newham treated the diseased people at their homes. After 1917, they used to provide treatment on every market day in Gubbi. The number of patients increased day by day. This eventually resulted in the construction of a hospital in Gubbi.¹⁰

Conclusion

The Wesleyan mission activities in Gubbi Tumkur district are of considerable historical significance as the mission initiated a new social transformation, especially of those who came under its influence. Education was an important strategy adopted by the Wesleyan missions for the upliftment of the downtrodden who came under their influence. Places in Tumkur district were meant as a socio-cultural laboratory for

the Wesleyan Mission. Experiments here slowly started in the result as strategised by the Missionaries. The missionaries found a new opportunity to improve the economic and social status of natives anticipating a reverse flow in stream of converts.

Endnotes

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