

## BREKLUM MISSION AND ITS ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECONOMY, EDUCATION AND HEALTH OF KORAPUT

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### **Abstract:**

Before the advent of Breklum Mission in Koraput, it was passing through a 'Dark Age'. It was a hilly and inaccessible region and isolated from outside world for century together and remained backward and underdeveloped. The People of this area were indigent, grossly illiterate, superstitious and considered untouchable and outcaste. They were indulged in a number of evil practices such as female infanticide, Child marriage, Mariah sacrifice, seclusion of women, rigidity of caste system and untouchability. It was a malaria prone district. However, with the coming of the Breklum Mission to this district on **15<sup>th</sup> May, 1882 A.D.** it heralded a new epoch in socio - cultural development of Koraput. The mission brought handful of welfare schemes such as eradication of illiteracy and established schools and introduced Zenana system for female education. For economic upliftment it introduced agriculture, plantation work, established Banks and vocational centres etc. Consciousness of health and hygiene, the mission established clinics, hospitals and mobile health care system. Thereafter, there was a tremendous impact of missionaries' activities of Breklum mission in this district.

**Keywords** – Inaccessible, Casteism, economy, Education, female education, Health.

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**Introduction:**

The undivided Koraput is the district of rolling mountains and green forests. It is the natural abode of several colourful tribal communities known as Adivasi or aboriginals who were living amid picturesque setting comprising above mentioned areas. So, the environment with its mystery and enchanting panorama of flora and fauna has made Koraput undoubtedly a “**Nature Lovers paradise**”. However, this district was completely isolated from outside world for centuries together and remained backward and undeveloped due to its inaccessibility.

Generally, the people were illiterate and indigent and fully depending upon forest products because there was scanty cultivable land. The people were occasionally doing shifting cultivation and terrace cultivation but it was insufficient for them. They too did manual jobs, small business and rearing cattle for their sustenance. So, the economic standard of lower caste people was very low and they were leading the life which was very miserable and deplorable.

Apart from that, there was no opportunity of education for the lower caste people. It was exclusively confined to high caste people because of rigidity of caste system and untouchability. Female education was next to nil. The general feeling was that, it was “**unbecoming of the modesty of the women**” to go to schools (Padhi, 1992:166). So, they were prohibited from attending educational institutions and their activities confined to hearth and homes only. They were considered enjoyable things for the men and machine for producing children.

Due to dense forest, Malaria was common. People were also dying of various lethal diseases like black water fever, typhoid, rheumatism, dysentery, syphilis, small pox, cholera and leprosy etc. Consequently, the mortality rate was very high. It was because there was no provision of medical facility. So, the people were bound to believe in supernatural power (like magic craft, spells, sorcery and spirit) and under the tight clutches of local physicians like Dissaris, Bejjus, Siras, Guniyas and Gurumains and exploited by them (Asha, 1982: 20-24). So, these were the acute economic - educational and health problems in this district before the arrival of \***Breklum mission**.

\***The Breklum mission** was built on the foundation of **belief and prayer**. It was the brain child of the Rev. Christian Jensen, a peitist of Breklum in the Northern part of West Germany. He was a very devoted servant of Lord Jesus Christ - the only Saviour and Redeemer of Souls, The theme of his prayer was ‘**Jesus Saves Souls**’. His entire work

planned for mission work was ‘founded on **faith and action**’ and his motto was ‘**Beten and Arbeiten**’ (pray and work). To produce missionaries, into ‘a Breklum Mission Seminary’ on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1877 A.D. This institution served a great purpose in producing missionaries which fulfilled the aim of Christian Jensen. To begin with 12 members were admitted and dedicated for the Lord’s service and two out of the 12 were the first missionaries to India – Koraput. They were **Rev. Ernst Pohl and Rev. Harmann Bothmann**. They came to Koraput District on **15<sup>th</sup> May, 1882 A.D.** This great mission society started doing missionary work not only in India but also in Africa **and** South America.

In this critical circumstances and unhealthy ambience, Breklum Mission came to this most backward region on **15<sup>th</sup> May, 1882 A.D.** and raised the ray of hope among the despondent, helpless, hopeless, neglected and secluded people. The Breklum Mission came to this region with two noble motives i.e. “**Arise and Shine.**”

After minutely observation of all the problems of the people of these hilly areas, the mission introduced and implemented some of the welfare schemes for the all round development and amelioration such as economic upliftment, consciousness of health and hygiene and eradication of illiteracy. They are discussed below:

#### **Economic measures for upliftment of the people**

Nearly 60% of the people lived below poverty line. Most of them were in debts. The main reason for their backwardness was the prolonged alienation from the mainstream of the developed society. They were collecting firewood and charcoal from the forest, working as labourers or doing simple artisanship such as mat weaving, basket making, pottery making, and rearing cattle. But these economic activities were insufficient for them. Therefore, they were taking loan from the Zamindars, Sahukars, Sundhis and moneylenders at high rate of interest on the occasion of celebration of ceremonies, buying new clothes, funeral ceremony and buying liquor. Addiction to drinking was the main cause of their suffering and ruin of their families. When they were unable to repay loan, they had to work days together and even years together under these mahajans for recovery of their amounts and this was the genesis of inhuman practices of Bethi and Goti system in this area.

Secondly, people of high caste who accepted Christianity were deprived of their ancestral property and subjected to social boycott. They lost their professions also. Therefore, the mission took some strong steps to improve the economic standard of the converted

people. The mission first of all determined to improve the quality of the people by providing necessary training. So, numbers of training centers were established. Such as -

### I. Establishment of Vocational Training Centre

The missionaries wanted to give training to the students and educated people to enable them for earning their livelihood. So, an **Industrial school** was set up at Koraput where carpentry, blacksmith, pottery and weaving were taught. Besides that, the Mission had established a **Tea Department Labour Association (TDLA)** with its headquarters at Koraput. Young boys from Jeypore Estate were taken and engaged as workers in Tea garden. They were sent to **Assam**, which was the centre of work of TDLA.

The mission also set up **Vocational training and weaving school** at Koraput in 1902. Rev. Hubner Sr. took some training and prepared himself as an Industrial missionary and started vocational school at Koraput in 1905. Besides weaving, training was also given on making baskets, weaving mats, carpentry, blacksmith work, bamboo weaving, pottery etc. Three-year training was prescribed for the carpentry and blacksmith and one year for masonry and brick lying. Christian craftsmen were awarded a professional qualification called the "**blessing of work.**" Financial help was extended to qualified craftsmen, carpenters, bricklayers, masons and brick makers. The then **Nabarangapur Co-operative Central Bank** provided loans to the individual members of the **weavers' Co-operative society** to improve in their own business.

### II. Generation of employment opportunities

The converted Christians after passing out standard three were immediately appointed as pastors. Any one, who knew writing and reading, was appointed as Gurus, catechists and preachers. The illiterate men were appointed for household work, for marketing, cooking, manual work, plantation and agricultural fields etc. The mission introduced a systematic way of agriculture, plantation programme and coffee gardens for the people so that it would provide job opportunities to unemployed people.

### III. Establishment of Savings and Lending Banks

To provide financial assistance to the trained people and poor converted Christians and above all to protect them from local money lenders, the mission started **Koraput Savings and Lending Bank** in the year 1903. Because of this, 1,034 farmers and weavers in 155 villages had benefited (Cultural: 578-79).

**Agricultural loans** were also provided to the farmers for the development of agriculture. In view of this, the mission was lending money personally in order to save the

poor people from the outrage of the native money lenders - Sahukars and Zamindars - who charged high rate of interest and the people ran into in heavy debts and were leading the life of dire distress and dismal. This Bank was later on converted into 'Small Saving Bank' in the year 1906. The effective annual interest rate it kept was 5%, whereas the interest rate usually charged by the money lenders was as high as 350 - 400% during that time( Ibid).

#### **Eradication of illiteracy:**

Education modernizes human behavior and it plays a vital role in determining the socio-economic development of the society and implies the sum total of an individual's personality. However, this important department was totally neglected in this undivided Koraput District for centuries together.

Chatchalis that played a major role in the spread of education was confined to the children of Zamindars, Sahukars, Royal officials and high caste only. There was no question of education for Tribals, Poor, destitute and untouchables. The poor parents had no strong financial backup to send their children to such institutions because they had to pay fees to the Abadhanas. They rather engaged their children to supplement their income by collecting forest products and working in agricultural fields and doing manual jobs. So, the lower caste people remained backward, uneducated and ignorant for long period of time.

Until 1866 A.D there was not a single school in the Koraput - Jeypore agency tract. The school established by Mr. D. F. Carmichael, the British administrator (Agent to the Madras Presidency) at Jeypore in 1862 A.D did not meet with success. He wrote about the school that after struggling for three years against an adverse state, he could not give the school a full shape (Bell, 1945: 157). The main reason was the dearth or absence of teachers in this region. The school went dormant and it could not be revived again. The Administrative Report from 1880- 81 A.D. of Andhra Pradesh does not mention a single School in Jeypore Estate. The argument put forward in the Government Report of 1882 A.D, states that whilst schools in Koraput, Jeypore and Kotpad were very desirable, it was not done due to lack of financial means.

The Breklum mission was the first one that introduced education in this hilly district because most of the converted Christians were illiterate during mass conversion. They did not even understand the so called Oriya book. So, for educating the converted people, the mission began to set up mission schools. The mission fully convinced that without providing education to them, its objective would not be fulfilled. The mission wanted to fit them not



only spiritually but also educationally. Therefore, the mission set up a number of mission schools all over Koraput district.

#### I. System of Schools under the Breklum Mission

The Breklum Mission ran four types of schools.

- a) The Boys School - This taught a basic curriculum of English, Oriya, Arithmetic, History, Geography, the Bible and other scriptures. In some village schools, religious instruction was imparted in the vernacular language and the promising students among them used to go to the mission school of the town.
- b) The orphanages and destitute boarding Homes - This type of School made provision for shelter and free education to the poor students of the locality.
- c) Girls school – It served as orphanage and school as well for the daughters of the converts as well as for the daughters of lower caste people. They were given education up to primary standard and or rudiments of domestic science.
- d) School of co – education - In boys' school education was also imparted to girls. But they were very few. In those institutions education and instructions were imparted in their native languages.

In order to fulfill their main objectives, the Mission concentrated on establishing 4th types of schools, which were intended to convert local non - Christian boys and girls in rural areas.

Besides that, the mission also established Industrial schools, weaving schools and Teacher Training Centres to impart training to the students to fit them for employment. It also started **adult education** and **night schools** for the illiterate and ignorant people. **Sunday schools** were organized. **Bible class** was taken by educated women.

The mission established mission school at Koraput (30<sup>th</sup> January 1888 A.D), Kotpad (on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1891 A.D), Jeypore and Nabarangpur (in 1892-93 A.D.) etc. Other schools were set up at Kumzoro, Ghatguda, Kholiguda, Dhodra, Budisorgi, and jamboguda, Dengaguda, Kamtagaon, Turinji, Kurmuti, Nishnahandi and Chopia, Karlahandi Khondi Baghodhori Pirinji and Ontalguda School at Gunupur (1904/05) A.D, Nandapur (1909/10) A.D Bissam Cuttak (1909/10) A.D, Doliambo (1910/11) A.D, and Lakshmipur (1910/11) A.D. flourished greatly ( Waack, 1997: 510- 511 & Asha,( 1982: 96 – 99).

In this way, the mission set up 34 U.P Schools, 05 M.E.Schools, and 05 High Schools 01 Theological Seminary, 10 Boarding homes and Girls' hostels. Apart from boarding homes, the mission was running the “**Day boarding**” in all small stations and in mission villages. The wives of missionaries were also taking the onus to literate the rural uneducated

women, Muslim women and non-Christian women who were unable to attend those educational institutions due to social barrier by introducing zenana system.

- II. **Zenana System:** The Zenana system of education along with day schools and orphanages was the third most significant form of education which the mission promoted in all the presidencies. This kind of education was meant for the upper caste women who due to social customs could not receive formal schooling. It was also meant for Muslim girls and women who had no formal schooling.

The above Schools were smoothly managed under the proper supervision of Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church, the headquarters of missionary activities of undivided Koraput District.

### III. Female education

The missionaries pioneered the movement of Women's' education, which was a noble step. They were convinced of the fact that education was the means by which the women of this area could come to realize the importance of their position. Girls Schools, Boarding Homes, Hostels and Orphanages were established to keep girls students and impart religion, biblical knowledge, and general education for their mental and spiritual development (Waack, 1997: 517 – 18).

The objective of the mission was to make them sensible, moral, industrious and pious young women. They also aimed to make them good wives for the native Christians. Women leadership training was organized for the wives of pastors and evangelists. Bible women were produced in the seminary and used for evangelistic work, among the women. Girls were taught housewifery like sewing, knitting, and basket making and spinning for earning their livelihood.

The initiated measures of the mission for women brought to the limelight the entire question of Indian women for public debate and discussion and thereby facilitated a change in the indigenous attitude towards the status of women. It resulted in various reformist legislations and the beginning of a new movement for the emancipation of women

### **Impact of Breklum Mission on Consciousness of Health and Hygiene – A magic spell to medicine**

For centuries, the district was almost inaccessible mainly for two reasons. Firstly, the Ghats which separated it from the coastal plains were not easy to cross and secondly, the climate of the forest and hilly tract lying to the west of Ghats was inhospitable. From the

early period of British occupation, official records are full of references to its adverse climate. D.F.Carmichael has observed in the manual of Vizagapatnam District published in 1869 A.D, that “There is scarcely a man who visits these parts who does not return with an enlarged spleen or liver, more or less affection of the head, making business irksome, and with some constitutional breakdown”( Gloyer,1933 : 37). A new comer to the district even after a very short stay was being suddenly attacked by Malaria, a disease most dreaded. Besides Malaria, there were a number of diseases such as typhoid, rheumatism, dysentery, syphilis small-pox, cholera, leprosy, influenza, yaws, venereal diseases, scabies and tuberculosis etc. frequently striking this region.

The typical tribal character and nature had made them separate from the rest of modern society. Their survival depended on forest. Even in the present time, writes, R. C. S. Bell, the collector of Koraput “the district cannot strictly be called healthy, for malaria is endemic almost everywhere and a special allowance is paid to official serving there, who are not natives or domiciles of the district, to compensate them for the unhealthiness of the district.” Disease for Tribal was nothing but the “**course of God**” or ‘**evil spirits**’. So, anybody affected by such diseases immediately contacted to sorcerers for his treatment.

The tribal, to free themselves from diseases, propitiated the deities and took the services of imposter-doctors (known among different tribes as Dissaris, Bejjus, Siras, Gurumains, medicine-men etc) who pretended to counteract the effects of black art (Gloyer, 1933: 37). The mission explored into this sort of natural hostility and rose to action. They took some worthwhile steps.

1. Wherever and whenever, the missionaries were going to outside, they were taking medicine with them. They visited the sick praying for them and distributing medicine.
2. Mobile health care system was introduced.. This kind of service covered not only the villagers but also the town areas. Dr. Sheel, of Nabarangpur Christian Hospital, visited Pendajam and Doliambo every Friday for health service. This type of mobile service was started in 1912 A.D.
3. The missionaries established Health clinics, Dispensaries and later on, Hospitals. Rev. E. Gloyer writes that “Two hospitals and 5 dispensaries” were under the management of the Schleswig Holstein Evangelical Lutheran Mission by 1933 A.D.

#### **I. Leprosy haven - a heaven on earth for the Lepers**

It is interesting to know that the missionaries also cared for the lepers. In earlier times, the fate of the leprosy patients was very miserable. They were living away from the



village without love and care. They were thriving mostly on begging. Neglected and ignored, they died unseen. There was no leper Asylum in the Jeypore Estate. So, the missionaries took interest to take care of the leprosy patients. In 1901 A.D, the Maharaja of Jeypore gave a piece of land near mission station and Rev. W. Ahrens built a leper asylum over it in 1903 A.D. This building was intended for 16 men and 16 women and later on the capacity was increased to 60 inmates. After Rev. W. Ahrens, Rev. H. Speck was in - charge of this asylum.

## II. Establishment of Hospitals:

In the year 1909, the missionaries built a small hospital at Kotpad and named it 'Ebenezer' and started treating outdoor and indoor patients. The meaning of the name 'Ebenezer' is an expression of God's help, which has so far been received. Gradually hospitals like Nabarangpur Christian Hospital (1952A.D), Bissam Cuttack Christian Hospital (1954 A.D) and Navajeevan Based Hospital, Doliambo (1978 A.D) were established for providing necessary medical service to the people.

At present, thousands of patients from different corners of district are visiting these hospitals for their treatment and getting proper medical care by the experienced doctors. . The missionaries could free the innocent and superstitious people from the clutches of local physicians. The medical work rendered by them to this most backward district of South Orissa was in fact an excellent job.

## Conclusion:

The role of missionaries in socio-cultural development of Koraput is enormous. The missionaries were the first one who came closer to the tribal society by bringing a handful of welfare schemes. The phrase '**missionary's spirit**' even today, symbolizes the self-sacrifice of the alien Christian missionaries in the remotest hills and forests. The mission got a safe and fertile ground for the propagation of Christianity in the tribal areas. The welfare activities taken up by the mission was called the '**work of mercy**'.

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