

THE CHRISTIAN MISSION AND ITS IMPACT ON THE BODO SOCIETY (1865-1999)

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study is an attempt to sum up the entire activities of the christian missionaries among the Bodos and conclusion. When the christian missionaries encountered the Bodos with gospel message they were rejected and discarded in the early stage. But the unique feature of accommodating all people irrespective of caste, creed, religion, love for one another, love for the poor, visit to the sick, consoling the bereaved in times of sorrows and anxieties drew the attention of some Bodos who accepted the new faith. These values of christianity instilled in the minds of the Bodos a sense of acceptance and respect in human relationship which enabled them to walk at equal pace in any society and cultures. It was more of liberation from the ethnic bondage under the caste Assamese Hindus as they had been keeping them suppressed socially, culturally, religiously and economically. In fact, the spirit of the gospel strengthened them to be shaken off the pessimism and to look forward to a favourable future.¹ It gave a new outlook towards building unity and solidarity based on love and concern for one another. It showed the path to love each other and to be united for the development of the community.

Christianity among the Bodos compared to other tribes in the North East India was less to be reckoned with. Bodos are the greatest single tribe in the North East India but the spread of christianity remained confined to a few selected pockets while vast other areas remained unevangelized.

There were several factors that could be attributed for the less and slow conversion of the Bodos to christianity. At the outset it is to be mentioned that there was no direct mission plan for the Bodos. Missionaries of all denominations came into contact with the Bodos while evangelizing other communities. As there was no direct mission, no separate resource was allotted and personnel selected. So in the absence of fund and personnel, no concentration can be given to any definite objective.

Secondly the introduction of new cultures such as introduction of tea in place of rice-beer, prohibition of musical instrument and encouragement of the use of western music in their place such as guitar, organs etc, disregard of the traditional Bodo dances and festivals could hardly be digested by vast majority of the Bodo populace. They considered such acts of the christian missionaries as measures to exterminate the Bodo culture.

Thirdly, though some Bodo christian leaders emerged they were not raised academically with indigenous tribal theology. They also did not incorporate indigenous values into christian faith. Everything indigenous was rejected. This concept hindered the growth of christianity among the Bodos.

Fourthly, the caste Hindus detribalized a large number of Bodos through conversion and assimilation into their fold. It was when the christian missionaries evangelized among the Bodos the efforts were equally made to dissuade them from accepting christianity. Christian missionaries of different denominations presented gospels pertaining to their theology claiming their own to be the true one. Bodos who had not heard of the gospel were confused which could be the true christian religion. The disunity, hostility, intolerance and mutual accusation among the christian missionaries convinced the Bodos that the religion preached by them could be ridiculous and not worth accepting. This hindered the spread of christianity among the Bodos to a great extent.

Fifthly, the missionaries were to contextualize the gospel message into Bodo context. Failure to identify the positive values of the traditional culture and indigenous theology and contextualize them into Bodo system failed to attract the Bodos to christianity. In the absence of such plan the progress of christianity among the Bodos could not be possible. Because of their negative attitudes towards other religions, they just neglected even the positive values, which could be easily adapted in the gospel in a relevant way to the people. They treated all others except their own religion as incompatible to the christian gospel.

In the light of the above hurdles, it is important for the christian missionaries working among the tribes to have a thorough knowledge about the people's religious beliefs, customs, laws and manners before he/she presents the gospel to his/her hearers. To make christian mission more meaningful and relevant to the recipients,

there must be an attempt to contextualize the gospel message of Christ to the people's context. Mission strategy must include the policy to identify positive values of the traditional culture, religion and raise indigenous leaders and develop indigenous theology.

Secondly, christian theology must reflect on the realities of people and should encompass identity crisis, social and political injustices, economic dependency, exploitation and suppression of the weaker sections of the society. Christian mission should not limit itself only in saving of the soul of individuals. It must include the fulfilment of spiritual, mental, physical, social, economic and political needs of the people. In present social, economic and political needs of crisis of the Bodo society, the church cannot keep herself as a silent spectator. She must have solidarity with the people in their struggles for justice and peace. It is high time for the church to take people into confidence to give christian insights of struggle and to impress upon them the need for objective analysis of society and to frame relevant christian responses to their situation. The christian missionaries must be careful to adapt to the culture of the society. No one can suppress any traditional beliefs and practices. The traditional culture must be adapted and used to build up a new and genuinely christian culture. The process of integration must be so directed that Good News remains theologically sound both in substance and in emphasis.

Thirdly, the christian missionaries working among the marginalised communities should evaluate the political ideologies of political parties because in a democratic country this ideologies play a major role in the socio-economic, religio-cultural and political life of the people.

Fourthly, the christian clergy are too slow to inculturation. They keep on stressing on uniformity and forward the pretext of unity of the church but the approach should be unity in diversity. The Second Vatican Council believed and endorsed inculturation in the church.

In conclusion it may be stated that the foreign christian missionaries while trying to propagate the gospel of Christ did not overlook the social and cultural aspects of the Bodos. Even though the early christian missionaries discarded some of the socio-cultural elements of the society. But in the later period they felt the necessity to inculturate them with the Bodo ethos. Today the Bodo christians assert

themselves that they are true tribals and true Bodos. Bodo songs and dances, signs and symbols, rituals and ceremonies have been integrated into the christian system of worship. Bodo Christians have in no way uprooted themselves from their cultural patrimony. Unlike in some other religions in which the converts lose his/her original identity like loss of title, house name, community name etc. Bodo christian have been retaining all their title, dress, language etc. They have not de-tribalized themselves by becoming christians. But a lot more remains to be done. Today the Bodo christians feel liberated psychologically and find in them a sense of confidence, identity and sustainability. Christian missionaries still stand as agents of change even when injustice prevails.

ENDNOTES

¹ Luke 4:18-19