

Christianity, and India in its Making

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'Christian role in the nation building' may be an incomprehensive title for this article. We cannot identify such a title in world history or Indian history. The major reason for this is that academic history is almost always written as the history of the adventures (and even misadventures of) political leaders. We are therefore led to assume that nation is built by political leaders. The truth is that a nation is formed by the creativity as well as the blood, toil, tears and sweat of different sections of people. History of agriculture, History of language, History of laureates, History of science, History of philosophy, History of inventions, History of schools and universities, History of philosophy, History of law or statute making etc constitute the integral part of a comprehensive and inclusive history of nation building.-Unfortunately, these things are absent from general history of a nation. So, a comprehensive all-inclusive methodology is necessary for writing history. In the absence such methodology different sections in the process of nation building are absent in the history of a nation. This article is an attempt to analyse the role of Christianity in the nation building process thereby attempting to develop a new method for analysing history.

1. Methodology: Epics -Ethics- Statutes - Unification of Language - education -Printing- Mass media-Social reform movements-Political ideology-Political parties - state.

a) Nation

A nation is a group of people who share a common history, traditions, culture, and language. When different nations form together and organize themselves under a government it becomes a country. India is a union of different states.

b) Epic

Nations will become a country only on the basis of a commonly shared dream about a future society. These dreams are expressed through epics which comprise lessons passed from generation to generation from the

people of the time immemorial. In India the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata share the common dream of future society. Some of the known epics in Europe are Iliad and Odyssey of Homer and Aeneid of Virgil. In West- Asia it is the Old Testament, and in America it is Old Testament with complemented by the New Testament [Poetry of Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound, *Gone with the Wind, Grapes of Wrath, or Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer etc etc*]. In China it is Journey to the West, Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Outlaws of the Marsh and Dream of Red Chamber.

Epics are not statues to be executed, it is the dreaming of people about the origin of world, nature of human being, role of family, nature of God, duties and rights of kings, and the dream about a country where all people live in happiness, in a garden of Eden.

These dreams are embedded in the consciousness of persons. Therefore, by a mere knowledge of the contents of an epic a country is not formed. For example, Ramayana proposes monogamy. But this dream is never made as a statute in India. Statutes are made on the basis of reciprocity of duties and rights. Those who are accepting and obey the duties and rights are citizens. India is making statues of Rama and not statutes based on Ramayana. The implementing agency of this statute is state. Confederation of different nation states forms a country. And the compiled statutes are constitution. Epic is a dream and the constitution is made to ensure the actualisation of that dream.

c) Ethics

The dreams of people slowly transformed into ethical norms. Ethics explains the norms for separating virtue and vice. The book of Genesis considered the violation of ethical norm of a society as a temptation from Satan or devilish act. Satan tempted Adam (human race) to violate ethical norms, to eat from the fruit of the tree which separates virtue and vice.

When the dreams in the epics are exhausted as ethical norms, the dream itself merges into the people and becomes natural life style of the citizens. Confucius of China, Socrates and Plato of China, Kautilya of India are the persons who struggled to transform epics into ethics. Ethics slowly evolved as statutes and objectified as Constitution.

c) Statutes from Epics and Ethics

Material evidences indicate that the formation of statutes from epics and ethics was formed firstly in Babylonia where tablets of Hammurabi are considered as the first codification of statutes (BCE1750). Codified statutes are constitution. The second codification is the Thora of Jews. It is in the form of written text and known as Bible. New Testament is an ethical formulation per se but contains statues formed from the life and struggle lived out through various pagan gentile epics, works of Greek and Roman thinkers, as well as the pre-Christian Old Testament.

d) Route Map of the Formation of a Country

Do the statutes in the New Testament share the dreams of the epics of various nations? For example, Ramayana, Odyssey and the creation event in Genesis dreamed monogamy. Jesus made it as a statute and Christians accepted it as their fundamental statute to follow. But Indians till this date have not made it an ethical norm and statute to be followed by all citizens in the country.

Greek and Roman epics considered Athena and Minerva as epitomes of sexual purity. The New Testament epitomised celibacy as a model virtue which is upheld by the Catholic Church. Jesus exhorted to separate the realm of politics (Caesar) and that of religion (Church). He also commanded that the basis of all authority is the service to the people and people are not to be treated as the servants of rulers.

From the epic story of the Tower of Babel (OT) the Church identified that language constructs a society while the imposition of a particular language over multifarious and diverse cultural units of people would only divide a nation, whereas, only an extra-linguistic or trans-linguistic bond (such as love) would function as a unifying force of different cultures and nations into a single country (Acts of Apostles). As history warns us, Babylonian, Arabian, Roman and Indian cultures tried to impose a single language for all and the attempt shattered thousands of independent nation states.

Education local language and printing Technology

Statutes can be established by a state only if these statutes win spontaneously (not coercively with political intent) the consciousness of the majority. When an idea crosses the consciousness of the majority, the

idea itself will become a material force for social and cultural transformation. Plato dreamt that public education is the means to conquer the consciousness of man as it would become the material force for the formation of a country. Outside Greece, the Catholic Church was the first to identify this and, as a result, she started Cathedral schools and universities all over Europe.

Those who were educated in the European Universities critically examined all areas of life and paved the way for socio political transformation in Europe. This transmission mechanism from epic to state is the route map of socio – political and economic development of modern Europe.

2. Christian Presence in Europe

Almost all oriental Christians could not assimilate the ethical dimension or statute dimension of the Christian message. (A case in point is the entity of the Syrian Christians). They contemplated and swallowed up the text instead of assimilating it and converting it into a constitution for constructing a democratic nation. European Christians, on the other hand, through emperor Justinian (CE 536) formed a statute book and tried to implement it through state apparatus. Justinian code thenceforth became the basis of all the democratic nations in the world including India.

But Roman empire failed to impart to the local languages a unification which is a precondition for achieving unity of federal states into a country. Latin was the official language in all European states. Dante, is the pioneer in world, who transformed Italian folk language into a scientific language by fusing it with the scientific grammatical structure of Latin (CE1265-1321). Following this, England, Portugal, Spain, France and Germany fused their respective vernacular languages with the grammatical structure of Latin and Indo European grammatical structure. Formerly, Latin was the official language of all the above-mentioned nations. The Arabs, like the Indians, tried to impose Arabic and Sanskrit, respectively, in various nations/areas under their territorial jurisdiction. In Europe, the up gradation of folk language or vernacular into scientific language or the fusion of the vernacular and Latin and Indo European grammar structure permitted all population to enter into knowledge system. But in Arabian countries and in India knowledge was restricted to only those who knew the official

languages, namely, Arabic and Sanskrit. And this process received new impetus by the invention of printing press (CE1440), publication of books, establishment of schools and colleges, growth of science, control over the rules by the House of Lords and the House of Commons, Constitution and the growth of newspapers, magazines or mass media.

The above mentioned process was materialised through the intellectual and scientific inventions and discoveries from the universities founded by Catholic Church. Bologna University, Padua University, Oxford University, Cambridge University , Paris University Salamanca University are some among the many Universities began in 12th and 13th centuries under the tutelage of Catholic Church. These universities later became the Hatcheries of new scientific inventions and political theories and movements.

3. Role of Christianity in India¹

Till the entry of the Portuguese these above-mentioned mechanisms were totally neglected by the indigenous Syrian Christians. Portuguese introduced Schools, Colleges, Hospitals, and printing press on Indian land. In the absence of fusion of folk language with the official Sanskrit, Indian population in general was kept away from the riches of traditional knowledge in India. The Portuguese were the pioneers to introduce Ayurveda to the western world. Fr. Arnose (Arnose Padre 1681-1732) had realised that unification of different languages could be made only by fusing folk literature and Sanskrit. Moreover, he understood the need for a dictionary to fuse different languages in India. Through his poetry and Malayalam-Portuguese dictionary a new era was inaugurated in Indian history. Benjamin Bailly, and Herman Gundert standardised alphabets and Fr. Francis Angelose produced a Malayalam grammar text.

The formation of text allowed Indians to detach themselves from the hitherto inevitability of the “teaching Community” (Gurukula System) and opened to them the door to read and understand reality beyond the knowledge of teachers or gurus. Thomas Babington Macaulay introduced triple R system in education. Through his policy many Indians studied English language and got opportunity to enter into international community. Our Scientists, Engineers, Technicians, Doctors, Geologists, and Agricultural experts got opportunity to be trained in European universities only because

they were and are well-versed in English language. Constantine Josep Besechi (1680- 1747) standardised Tamil language and compiled Tamil-Latin dictionary. He also produced a Tamil grammar book for the use of common man. In 1968 Tamil people recognized his contribution renovating Tamil with scientific structure and thus linking Tamil with international languages. He is known among the Tamil scholars as the Dante of Tamil.

Similarly, the North Indians were without a unified language system until 18th century. John Gilchrist (1759-1841) standardised Hindi language which came to be known as Hindustani. Hindustani, besides English, is the official language of India known in the name of Hindi.

Universities for insemminating freedom consciousness

Robert Cadwell (1814 – 1881) wrote a comparative grammar text for the south Indian languages and unified south Indian languages.

In the field of education, Bishops College Calcutta (1810), CMS College Kottayam (1815), Trichy St. Joseph College (1830), Elphinstone College Mumby (1823) St. Thomas College Thrissur (1896). BrennenCollege Kannur (1862) etc were significant Christian contribution. Following this, Pachayyappa in Madrass(1832), and FergussonCollege, Pune (1896) also started. These colleges were the hatcheries of national leaders in Freedom struggle of India. During this period printing, publication, newspapers, magazines for propaganda began.

From the period of the Portuguese intervention into the life of indigenous Christians a reformation happened in the life of Syrian Christians of Kerala. However, Syrian Christians entered into these mechanisms through the work of Chavara Kuriakose Elias (1805 – 1871). He under the tutelage of the Varapolly Bishop Baccenelli (1807-1868) started schools with every parish. He also provided educational facilities for the untouchables in Kerala. Those untouchables trained in Christian schools paved the way for the formation of SNDP yogam and the social transformation of Ezhavas. Dr. Palpu the brain behind SNDP was rejected by Travancore Medical College because of his caste but was accepted by Madras medical college administrated by Christians. He along with Sreenarayana Guru brought a new impetus in Kerala renaissance movement. E M S, C. Achutha Menon, C M Stephen, the former President K R Narayanan, Prof.

Joseph Mundassery, Prof M P Paul, Sri C J Thomas and a host of others, were trained in Christian colleges and participated in freedom struggle.

Before the arrival of the Portuguese Indigenous medical system was accessible only to those who knew Sanskrit. It was available only to those who were in the higher echelons of social ladder. Nursing, the health care service, in India was pioneering contribution of Christians. Others considered it as a medical *job*. It was the Portuguese who started modern hospital on Indian soil. King George Hospital in Chennai established in 1645 is the first modern hospital in India. 75% of the hospitals and primary health centres in Kerala were established by Christians far before Independence. Nursing education in Kerala was started by the Christian nuns from Switzerland in the General Hospital, Trivandrum. These nuns were persuaded by Archbishop Benziger of Quilon.

In Keralam the first two publishing houses were started by two Christians. Bharath Vilasam Press by Maliammavu Lona in Thrissur and Manorama Publishers by Kandathil Varughese Mappila in Kottayam. Bharatha Vilasam Press organised meetings of literary workers in Cochin and Manorama printers organised Bhasha Poshini Sabha in Kottayam. These two were the pioneers in Sahitya Academy of Kerala and the evidences are exhibited there in Academy complex.

Though Herman Gundert started newspaper in 1856, Deepika and Malayala Manorama, the two Syrian Christian endeavours gave impetus to freedom struggle.

Formation of Indian National Congress

Indian National Congress(INC) was the product of educated Christians in India. Six first national presidents of INC were Christians. In Keralam also the 5 out of 9 state executive members of congress party were Christians. The magazine 'Young India' – which was the philosophical weapon in freedom struggle- was developed by Joseph Cornellius Kumarappa, one of the National Presidents of INC. C.F. Andrews was the brain behind the travels of Mahatma Gandhi all over India. Titus ji from Kerala participated in Dandi March with Ghandi. St. Thomas College Thrissur and U.C. College Aluva became venues for organising freedom struggle in Keralam. Barrister George Joseph was behind Vaikom Sathyagraha which paved the way for the entry

of lower castes in Hindu Temples. History of Indian National Congress is the history of freedom struggle in India and that is the contribution of the Christians in making a free India in the political sense.

ⁱ An exhaustive reference of the contribution of Christianity in the making of India is obtained from the article published by Fr Pious Malekkandathil , Former Professor of Jawaharlal University, Delhi. Pious Malekkandathil, Indian Christians and Nation Building: A Historical Over view.