

History of Christian Mission in Benares: Local Challenges, Establishment and their Failure

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Abstract: *Christian missionaries added to the urban landscape of Varanasi. They brought major changes and utilized them to strengthen their empire but failed in Benares. According to the opinion of the various missionaries, they came to Benares for the expansion of Christianity. The thought behind the coming of Benares is "If they would be successful to convert the Brahmins of Benares into Christianity, then the whole of India could easily accept the Christianity". So, they wanted to convert the people of Benares for the conversion of the whole of India. The Brahmins of Benares were representative of the Hindu cultural identity. So they wanted to establish Christianity in Benares for the cultural conquest of India. Therefore this research paper is an attempt to see the history of Christian Mission in Benares. This research Paper has two objectives: First the role of Christian mission in the making of urban landscape of 18th century Benares with the introduction of numerous churches, Hospitals and English Schools, and also try to investigate the real cause of conversion. Secondly, it also explore the role of Christian mission to expand the Christianity and make the British Rule permanent in Benares, and also investigate the challenges of native peoples towards the objective of Christian Mission*

Keywords: Christian Mission, Anglican Church, Civilizing Mission, Romanticism, Eastern and Orient

I. INTRODUCTION

Both Bishop Heber and James Kennedy visited Benares as a part of the missionary duties. He was deeply moved by Anglican Christianity and inspired by the spirit of early 19th century Romanticism. According to him "Benares is a very remarkable city which represents the Eastern and orient". He was also impressed with the developed architectural form of Benares. He thought that British rule would be beneficial to the Indians particularly the poor and popularized that only the efforts of the British government could improve the condition of the poor. But He criticized the discriminatory charity of the Hindu religion and gave a clear message to the people of Benares that "It was only under the impact of Western education and with the morality of the Gospel the mental attitude of the Indians could be reformed".¹

Kennedy was appointed as an agent of the London missionary society. He arrived in Benares in 1839.² Kennedy was highly influenced by the idea of the civilizing mission. He saw the Indian society as unchanging, static, and closed. In his writing, we find that he used such phrases as a sacred monkey, well-fed lazy bulls, idle vagabonds, etc. During the 19th century, the British became the movement of imperial success in the whole of European imperialism. The conquest of Benares was essential for the growth of the British Empire in India. When we see the policies of the British find that they shifted their policies in the context of Benares. They do not want to conquest Benares with power so they adopted the techniques of sending a mission to create a loyal group who justified their rule. But they failed and it was also clear with the words of M.A. Sherring,³ where he confesses "it appears that Christianity has been more successful in many places in India than in Benares". Edwin Greaves and mark Twain also supported the view of M.A. Sherring.

¹Kenedy James, p. 2.

²MA. Sherring, p. 257.

³James Kenedy, p. 72.

II. DISCUSSION

They built various churches for the fulfillment of their abovementioned objective of conversion and cultural imperialism. The first church established by Christian Mission in Benares was Saint Marry Church. This church was built in 1815 at the Joint cost of the European residence and the government. St. Marry's church was erected under the personal supervision of James Robinson in 1815.⁴ Reverend Daniel Corrie was the chaplain who laid the first stone of the Church. This is the Gothic edifice which is the evidence of Roman Christianity faith. M.A. Sherring also explained about this church. This church was renovated by James Princep on 5 September 1824 with the help of Reginald Bishop Heber.⁵ In 1827-28, this church was renovated by James Princep. Besides this, there was a burial ground which is the evidence of three lieutenant or sepoy killed during 17th August 1781 to perform their duty. During that period Raja Chait Singh revolted against Warren Hastings. This burial ground was also removed by James Princep from the compound of St. Marry Church. He consecrated this monument with a fine stone obelisk standing on a square base. This monument is the tribute for the lieutenant, John Stalker, Scott, and Jeremiah Symes massacred at Shivala. European manifested devotion towards them which was the character of British imperialism. They were the hero of their country who ended their life to save the life of Warren Hastings at Shivala fort.⁶



Fig. 12 : St. Marry Church

Source : Photograph Taken by Researcher Self

Christian missionaries added to the urban landscape of Varanasi. They brought major changes and utilized them to strengthen their empire but failed in Benares. According to the opinion of the various missionaries, they came to Benares for the expansion of Christianity. The thought behind the coming of Benares is "If they would be successful to convert the Brahmins of Benares into Christianity, then the whole of India could easily accept the Christianity". So, they wanted to convert the people of Benares for the conversion of the whole of India. The Brahmins of Benares were

⁴P; T Nair, James Princep life and work, p. 111.

⁵Parker, p. 15-20.

⁶Kennedy, James (1884). Life and work in Benares and Kumaon on 1839-1877. London : T Fisher Unwin, p. 114-123.

representative of the Hindu cultural identity. So they wanted to establish Christianity in Benares for the cultural conquest of India. It is also clear with the statement of James Kenedy.⁷

According to James Kennedy, The Hindu mode of worship is the chief reason for the static society of Benares. He assumed that 'Christianity is the sole religion which removed the problems of the people.'⁸ He agreed that there were social, cultural, and religious differences between the colonials and the natives.

The East India Company charters 1813 opened the doors for the Christian missionaries and European Societies. The cultural fabric of Varanasi attracted them and they established their base in Benares city. In the early phase of coming in Benares, they were so hopeful to expand Christianity without any hurdle. So they came into Benares. They firstly consecrated Saint Mary Church in the Cantonment area.

Baptist missionary society was the first evangelical mission that came into Benares in 1816⁹ and worked until 1890.¹⁰ The Baptist mission was sent to the Reverend William Smith as the first missionary.¹¹ This society withdrew from Varanasi in 1890 and strengthened its Delhi mission.¹² The mission set up various agencies, schools to preach to the people of Benares but failed. They also set up an orphanage. When they came to Benares they were confident that their success in Varanasi would have a comprehensive effect on the Indian continent. This is the reason they wanted to win Benares for Christ and believed that Hinduism will not be survived. So they started their mission in Benares. But they failed to convert the people of Benares into Christianity.

The Church missionary society came into Benares city in 1817. Mr. Corries was appointed as a chaplain to Benares by the company.¹³ They set up Jai Narayan collegiate school in 1818 for the extension of their missionaries' activities. They have also a girl orphanage and a well-organized girl boarding school.¹⁴ According to Edwin greaves "2000 to 3000 girls have been trained and Educated since its establishment."¹⁵The head Quarters of this mission were at Sagra and the things of early days use the well of the mission to through their victims after strangling them.

London mission society was the next mission to come to Benares in 1820¹⁶ under the Reverend M.T. Adam.¹⁷ M.A. Sherring the author of 'The Sacred city of the Hindus' stayed in Benares belongs to this mission. They also maintain a high school and have a church and mission house near the cantonment railway station.¹⁸ William buyers of London missionary society wrote "Benares is such an awful sink of iniquity and superstition that nothing but a firm belief in the invincible power of the truth, and the faithfulness of the divine promises, could lead one to hope for its conversion at all". But the mission in Varanasi "Proved various difficult and Barren" for London missionary society also like Baptist Mission. Even Lovett's hopelessness rifle cited in their writing and accepted that after about half a country of concrete effort, The London missionary had no more than 800 native Christian, and the majority of them remained an unbaptized believer.¹⁹

⁷Banerjee, Moumine (2005-06) Nineteenth Century Benares : Changing European and Indigenous Images. India : Indian History Congress, p. 969.URL – <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44145911>

⁸R.R. Sen, p. 63.

⁹Greaves, Edwin, p. 113.

¹⁰The British in Benares, Bernard S. Cohn, p. 196.

¹¹R.R. Sen, p. 63.

¹²Bernard. S. Cohn, p. 196.

¹³R.R. Sen, p. 63.

¹⁴Edwin Greaves, p. 113.

¹⁵R.R. Sen, p. 63.

¹⁶Bernard S. Cohn, p. 196.

¹⁷R.R. Sen, p. 63-64.

¹⁸Indigenizing Effects on Christianity.From Missionary Work, p. 161-162.

¹⁹M.A. Sherring, p. 257-258.

III. CONCLUSION

Some missionaries try to search for the actual problem which puts hurdle in the progress of Christianity. According to them, the people of Benares believe in the Jesus Christ and their gospel but they did not convert due to living in their caste community." It is also clear with the submission of M.A. Sherring where he opines that "A large number of Hindus abandoned their idols but not converted into Christianity."²⁰ Thus, later on, they started to convert people into Christianity and insist that they leave their caste affiliation. During the 1840s there were 11 missionaries existed alone in Benares city. Due to the increment of their number and influence, the whole official attitude towards missionaries had undergone a logical change. This is the reason in 1848 the committee of the church mission society in Benares has both the collector and the commissioner as a member.²¹

The Jenna Bible and medical mission came in 1867 and confined its activities to girl's school and Jenna's work.²² But they started a medical dispensary for women in 1887 and constructed a well-equipped hospital known as Victoria Hospital. Victoria Hospital is situated near Sagra.²³ The Wesleyan missionary society was the last come and they settled in Benares in 1880.²⁴ They constructed their church at Secrole and a reading room and a Hall near the chowk. They have been developing work among the Doms and other low castes and try to raise them spiritually and socially. They believe that "If Christianity means anything. It means God's love and cares for all men and the uplifting of the depressed class of India."²⁵

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²⁰Bernard S. Cohn, p. 196.

²¹Edwin Greaves, p. 113.

²²R.R. Sen, p. 64.

²³Arthur Parker, p. 64.

²⁴Edwin Greaves, p. 114.

²⁵Ibid, p. 28.