

Guest Editorial: Christianity and Indian Culture

T.K. Oommen is arguably India's most prominent sociologist. His intellectual contribution to the nation has won him a host of awards, including Padma Bhushan for services in higher education in 2008. He was visiting Professor to several universities and institutes including the University of California; the Australian National University; the Institute of Advanced Studies, Hungary; and the Scandinavian Institute of Advanced Studies, Sweden. He is Professor Emeritus at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, and is Chairman, Shumacher Centre, New Delhi, where he is involved with rural development, employment generation and livelihood projects.

The contributions of Christians to the fields of education, health and empowerment of the deprived and marginalised groups particularly Scheduled Castes (Dalits) Scheduled Tribes (Adivasis) and women is widely acknowledged although the Christians count less than three per cent of the total population of India. This issue of the Salesian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities through a collection research papers and two book reviews provide concrete evidence to affirm the signal contributions made by the Christian minority in India.

The chapters are both conceptual-theoretical as well as empirical with reference to particular social categories and/or focussing on specific regions and social categories or covering the whole of India. Ancient India was justly famous for production and dissemination of knowledge but this activity was the privilege of the tiny Brahmin community. With the advent of western colonialism and the establishing of educational institutions by Christian missionaries education became accessible to a section of the traditionally underprivileged groups. The real challenge faced by Christian educators was to overcome the stigmatisation of Indian knowledge system by colonial administrators and to introduce an education system which upheld 'modern' values. The papers by Elena Philip and Anjali D'souza as well as Vedpal Singh Deswal demonstrate this.

The consequences of Christianizing adivasis is a widely discussed theme in India. The papers by Anup Shekhar Chakraborty on the Mizos, on Lepchas and Bhutias by Alina Pradhan and by Denis Lepcha on Lepchas focus on this theme. Their analyses clearly demonstrate that while Christianization did benefit the adivasis in terms of moderns education and health the process resulted in their collective alienation from traditional cultures. A systematic effort to modernize tribals causing minimum injury to their cultures could have averted this.

While the religion of Adivasis could be designated as 'primal vision', the Dalits were/are an inextricable part of sophisticated Hinduism, to whom an inferior social position was allotted according to the Doctrines of Hindu theology. Therefore, for the empowerment of Dalits one has to advocate justice abandoning the traditional doctrine of charity and this is precisely what the Jesuits who worked among Dalits in Tamilnadu did as demonstrated by M.Arockiasamy Xavier. But to brake the strangehold of caste system in Indian society the association between caste and occupation should be broken. This is possible, at least partly, by promoting industrial development as demonstrated by Jayaprakash Raghaviah through the activities of Basel Mission in Malabar during the 19th century.

Can one claim that missionary activities did bring about changes in the material conditions of traditionally under-privileged groups in Indian society? A comparative analysis attempted by Panchanan Das and Anindita Sengupta demonstrate that the Christians are better off in terms of consumption expenditure as compared with Hindus and Muslims as per data provided in National Sample Surveys. And yet, internal differentiation among Christians persists. Thus the Scheduled Tribe Christians are more deprived as compared with other categories of Christians.

Having concluded that Christian missionary work contributed to the improvement of educations, health and even material condition of the traditionally deprived in India such as Adivasis, Dalits and women can one postulate that Christians are happier as a community as compared with others? This issue is addressed by Chirodip Majumdar with special reference to Goa and Kerala and concludes that Christians in those states are more developed and hence 'probably happier'. It is good that the statement is equivocal because there is no uncontested evidence that 'development' and 'happiness' always go together.

While several of the papers are based on empirical data, the paper by Daniel Manoharan Solomon, analyses the contribution of 'native assistants' employed by missionaries drawn from archival data. Invoking the notion of cultural hegemony by Antonio Gramsci, it is suggested that the native assistants - catechists, school masters or medical evangelists - could provide counter hegemonic influence on behalf of the subalterns at the grassroots. Taking into account the prevailing restrictions on inter-sexual interactions exclusive schools for girl students were opened. Thus education was provided to all irrespective of caste, gender, and class. The contributions of Church Mission Society (CMS) and London Mission Society (LMS) to abolish everyday practices which were degrading and taxes which crippled the subalterns in the border areas of Tamil and Malayalam speaking regions are discussed at length in this paper.

Two papers attempt to analyse Christian contributions with special reference to art and social work education. The paper by Lawrence S. Fernandes entitled 'Indian Aesthetics and Christian Art of Jyoti Sahi' is a case study which illuminates Christian contribution to Indian Art. In India art is perceived as yoga but it may begin as an erotic play (*kama*) and desire for personal fame (*artha*) which gradually becomes an instrument of serving society (*dharma*) and finally in achieving liberation (*moksha*). Jyoti Sahi the Christian, who is theologizing with a brush' tries to pursue his art blending traditional Indian and Christian values.

The chapter entitled 'Religion, Spirituality and Social Work Practice: The Christian Perspective' by Pankaj Kumar Das attempts to trace the values shared by the profession of social work and Christianity. This confluence was largely possible because in establishing and nurturing several of the social work training institutions the leadership came mainly from Christians - Indian and foreign. The values of social work profession such as compassion, care, service and social justice can be traced to the Bible.

This issue of the journal closes with two reviews; one on the 'joy of love' by Pope Francis and the other book which discusses possible clash between Transcendental Meditation (TM) and Counselling Psychology (CP) by Peter Lourdes. Given the breakdown of the institutions of marriage and family in a fast globalising world, Pope Francis highlights the relevance of Christian values and practices in stabilizing these vital institutions. TM is widely cognized as

a technique developed by Indian Saints and CP is a tool developed by western psychologists. Peter Lourdes suggests that it is possible to reconcile the two tools thereby indicating that the East and the West can creatively co-operate for the benefit of human welfare.

The editors of this issue of the Salesian journal amply deserve our gratitude for bringing together these papers which highlight the much discussed contributions of Christian minority in India with clinching evidence.