

## Editorial:

### Christian Education and Making of Democratic India

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Felix Wilfred in the *Introduction to Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, makes threefold submissions about the Christian presence in India/Asia: firstly, that 'modernization' though not an 'explicit agenda of Christian mission', yet turned out to be, 'an important sequel to the project of Preaching of the Gospel'. It happened so because it was an enterprise entered upon from the religion point of view and those who spearheaded such missionary activities and enrolled to participate as disseminators of the Gospel Message were imbued with the desire to 'ennoble', 'save' and 'civilize.' Secondly, he continues to add that "Christianity has been an important force for the identity-construction of peoples and groups, especially the marginalized.' The arrival of Christianity, in its second phase, along with colonialism especially gave a voice and a recognition to a people who were getting strained out as expendables of caste culture. As a result, he makes the third point while talking about the way peoples came to accept Christian world view in saying that 'the issue was not so much a conversion in terms of change in religious beliefs as a change to a new identity.'<sup>1</sup>

Lawrence E Browne of the Henry Martyn School of Islamics, Lahore, way back in 1933 wrote in *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia: From the time of Muhammad till the Fourteenth Century*, after having assessed the emergence of Islam and its decline along with the rise of Christianity back again, in these words: 'at the moment it seems that the return

<sup>1</sup> Felix Wilfred, *Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp.9-11.

of Christianity to Asia is a task depending entirely on the missionary activities of the Churches of the West. But it may be that the faithful remnants of the Churches of the East, who, through centuries of oppression such as we have not known, have refused to deny Christ, strengthened now with fresh outpourings of the Holy Spirit, will play their part in the new evangelization of Asia"<sup>2</sup> He goes on to emphasize what has recently been defended in a study of the Christian nations of the contemporary period as standing by the same: "in actual practice we have examples throughout the period of our history of the way in which Church dignitaries on every possible occasion made use of the civil power for their purposes."

The arrival and spread of Christianity in India is prior to the arrival of British East India Company and even the Portuguese merchants and missionaries to the west coast of India. The biennial history of Christianity has been recently celebrated in the port city of Cochin, and the city's unique position has been studied by none other than Ashis Nandy. Christian presence on Indian soil is ancient and the attraction to its worldview, especially as it re-entered the subcontinent via colonialism, its egalitarian conceptualization of the human enterprise attracted many who were victims of a hierarchized and stratified society, even as they had been drawn to Sikhism, Islam and Buddhism earlier. This engagement with the idea of creating a modern democratic India, even when it has not been explicitly stated thus, has been the driving force behind the Christian Educational Enterprises owned and organized by different agencies that spearheaded such interventions, especially in the field of education, is the argument being teased out in this issue of the *Salesian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. These are mostly, except a few, the outcome of a seminar organized by the College in collaboration with and sponsored by the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, in April 2011.

Indira Gandhi, as all those placed at the helm of plural societies striving to be egalitarian sees, probably had the same concern when she emphatically stated: "Education is a liberating force and in our age it is also a democratising force, cutting across the barriers of caste and class, smoothing out inequalities imposed by birth and other circumstances." George Thadathil brings to discussion the role of a catholic institute of higher education in an emerging economy like India, seeking to position itself as nurturing a unique cultural and civilizational heritage. The paper makes the submission that Christian/catholic educational institutions across the country, despite its Colonial appearance do provide the democratic thought base upon which the systemic institutional structures are built. Pius V. Thomas takes a broad theoretical sweep, drawing on Habermasian legacy, and at the same time tries both to capture the essence of Christian Educational Institutions in the context of Indian Democracy and projects a more assertive role in the task of post-independent nation formation. This paper seeks to situate the relationship between Christian Educational Institutions and

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence E Browne, *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia: From the Time of Muhammad till the Fourteenth Century*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1933, p.185.

Christian Identity. He states that democratic Christian identity is basically intercultural identity which is acquired through deeper level fundamental democratic intercultural, dialogical self affirmations and inter/multi/transdisciplinary educational policies.

Caroline Nesabai, in her work on Protestant mission and feminist movement in Tamilnadu region focusing the years 1870-1920, highlights the path breaking work done by women missionaries of the Protestant Churches in primary education, medical care and support-services for the marginalized women. Saju Chackalackal discusses the enormous activities done by CMI congregation through its diverse educational and ecclesiastical institutions by its innovative, inclusive, and proactive vision, mission, and strategies to the society through the medium of education. He elaborates on the work done by the congregation and how it contributed towards the social transformation and empowerment, initially in Kerala, and later in other parts of the country. Mathew Thaiparambil, the director of Don Bosco Self Employment Research Institute, Kolkata, an initiative undertaken by him to skill young people, in keeping with the national mission for skilling India (years before it became the governments watchword) exposes the current scenario and challenges in India and highlights the contribution of Christian educational institutions towards the skilling India initiatives. The writer bases his reflection on his own experiences at the grassroots as well as in policy making.

Thomas Pallithanam condenses his experience of educating the marginalised youth, in the style and method of Don Bosco, along with the key insights into collective action as the probable route towards rejuvenating the emerging youth population at disadvantage socially or economically. Fleur D'Souza examines the social consciousness embedded in the educational system of the two eminent colleges of Mumbai, namely, St. Xavier's College and Sophia College, by analysing to some detail its social outreach programmes and its history and shows how it has served to promote and further development for the greater good of the society, bringing about a change. However, she also hints at the temptation of being 'citadels of conformity' even while being rated as top ranking colleges of the city. 'Education for 21st Century: Reflections from an Ashram School' by Swamy Mick is seen from the perspective of rural romantic and yet ecologically grounded education provided by Swamy Mick (Guruji) of the Gurukul School, located at Dhajia, near Darjeeling, taking inspiration from the direct lineage of the Guru Sri Narayana and Nataraja of South India, looks at the theoretical foundations of a similar venture undertaken by Meenakshi at Puvudham at Dharmapuri, in Tamilnadu, South India, and explores the Eastern and Western foundations for an ideal education in contemporary world.

Terence Mukhia and Mathew George in their article dwell on the impact of Christian educational enterprises on the people of Darjeeling hills. They highlight the role of both the Protestant and the Roman Catholic missionaries and the societal changes unleashed as a result of the educational investment in the region, by both these groups. Madhyam Moktan continues the exploration, in a similar vein, to show how English language has

helped bring development and provide some sort of a lead in the fields of education and the resultant employment opportunities that goes back to the Christian missionary institution's insistence as the pioneers of English language promotion in the Darjeeling Hills.

Scaria Thuruthiyil, makes theoretical inroads into the philosophical bases of Karl Marx's atheism, his reasons for considering religion as an alienating force and how engaging Marx can be radically revisionary project, especially from a religious educational perspective. Democracy, as the self awakening of a people, ever alive to critique prevailing strictures and self critique the reluctance as well as the easy assimilation of certain values and premises, can only be sustained through the endeavour we call 'education' - the search for and promotion of knowledge that challenges power and provides the power to trace untrodden paths.