



SOURCES OF CHRISTIAN HISTORY AND HISTORIANS: A STUDY ON ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

There are different forms of historical source materials such as archaeological; literary and archival sources. A historian can write any history with the consult of source materials available about the past events. Sources are plenty but historians are few and without historian, history has no life. Christian history is one of the major parts of historical studies not only in Odisha but also in the world. Christianity is one of the major aspects of history because major percentage of world population is Christians. Christianity is one of the major religions in the world. It has major role for formation and reformation in the world since its birth. So many histories have been written still then there is a huge space for writing Christian history. The Christianity came to Odisha in beginning of the 19th century and now more or less spread all over Odisha. During two hundred years of its existence in Odisha, this religion contributed a lot to the different directions of people's life. Some historians have written history on Christianity in Odisha but it is not complete one. Only few historians have concentrated to write history on Christianity and Christians of Odisha. Though, the Christianity has contributed a lot for formation and reformation of the society in various aspects still then no more history on Christianity has been written on Odisha because of lack of interest and lack of historians. Even after that some of historians have written history on Christianity and Christians of Odisha. In this article an attempt has been made to highlight the history of Christianity in Odisha and as well as the historians who have written Christian history of Odisha with the consultation of source materials available in different forms.

KEYWORDS: *Christianity, History, Historian, Source, Odisha*

Introduction: History is the outcome of source materials. No source... no history. Historian needs ample materials to construct and reconstruct the history and it is also the synthesis of sources. Historian can't think up beyond of materials or sources; if so, it will lead towards fiction not facts. History has been stood on the foundation of authentic source materials through the application of historical methodology. So many historians have given different definitions about history but in general, history is the interpretation and compilation of scientific study of past records. The history has

different dimensions like political history, social history, history of religion, geographical history, administrative history, and history of science, history of computer and history of so and so. You can write history in any aspects with the support of data. Now the space of history is expanding rapidly with the emerging of historians with modern theory to write history of any aspects of any society of any age of any corner of this world. The '*Subaltern history*' which is one of the dimensions of the history is the recent past origin and the '*History of Mentality or Psycho-history*' is the new trend of historical writing. So, history covers all and it can be written any aspects of the world.

Christianity is one of the major religions of the world of two thousand years old and at present the majority peoples of western countries are practicing this religion. The Christianity spread all over world countries with more or less population. So, Christianity is one of the macro aspects to write history and already it is being written in volumes. Still then, there is ample space to write Christian history of world in general and Odisha in particular.

Christians and Christianity in Odisha: The '*Christians*', it indicates the people who make practices of the preaching and teaching of Jesus Christ and follows the rules prescribed by the Church and the Bible. And in the same time the principles of the Bible and the Church which have been codified for the people to make practice in their daily life is known as '*Christianity*' because Christ is the center point of the Bible and the Church. This Preaching and teaching of Christ is rapidly spread out every corner of the world at present. The disciples of Jesus Christ propagated the message of Christ which has been accepted by the millions of people around the world. This is the largest and biggest religion of this world at present and it is believed that one of the Disciples of Christ, St. Thomas stepped into India through Kerala, state of India in second century AD.¹ Then the missionaries of different denominations came to India after the business contact of East India Company with this land. Missionaries became very active to enter into India after the declaration of British Crown as the sovereign authority. The Christian missionaries activities started in Odisha after 1822 AD.² The missionaries took lot of pain to propagate the preaching and teaching of Jesus Christ among the people of Odisha who were traditional in their living style and illiterate as well as uneducated where blind believes and superstitions were there around the social life.³ Since the beginning of Christianity in Odisha the numbers of Christians increased through different methods applied by the missionaries of various denominations. The number increased from one to total number of Christians what today in Odisha is the number of Christians from first conversion to the present total number that is 897861 out of which 443245 male and 454616 female.⁴ The Christian missionaries of within and outside of Odisha propagated this religion among the people of Odisha and became successful to create Christian environment in the state. It is the time to investigate and analyze the various aspects of the development of Christianity, role of Christian missionaries and Christians in Odisha is known as '*history and historiography of Christians and Christianity of Odisha.*' That has been discussed comprehensively as follows.

Sources to Construct Christian History of Odisha: After India's independence in 1947, Odishan historiography made rapid strides. In the 19th century, the British

administrators like Andrew Sterling, George Toynbee, John Beams and William Wilson Hunter took interest to write the history of Odisha on the basis of local legends, traditions and literature.⁵ But, so far as the theme is concerned on sources of Christian history and historians of Odisha or the sources to construct Christian history of Odisha in particular and world in general have contributed a lot towards formation, reformation, revolution, rejection and adoption of new system. Having being an important aspect of modern Odishan history, no historians have looked at properly. So, to write Christian history, it required to collect data or information from below mentioned areas which have been taken the shape of or transformed into the various sources of data. The Data are two types such as Primary and Secondary. The Primary sources are the original words of a writer in the form of speeches, eyewitness, accounts, letters, diaries, autobiographies, interviews.⁶ These sources are collected from different points. As follows

A. Archaeology sources- (I) Archaeological remains (II) Inscriptions, (III) Coins and (IV) Monuments

B. Literary sources-(I) .Religious-Brahminical literature, Buddhist Literature, Jain Literature and any other religions literature of modern times like Sikh Literature, Muslim Literature and Christian Literature and many more literature (II) Secular Literature which is secular in nature,

C. Archival Records which sources are available in each and every archives of district archive, state archive and National archive.

The above mentioned factors are the source of information from where the historians collect materials to write history.⁷ The construction of Christian history in Odisha must be consulted to the above mentioned sources. But, it is fact that the writer of Christian history of Odisha needs sources from literary and archival sources along with the oral evidences. The Archaeological source is not available regarding the discussed topic so that no historians are able till today to take the help of archaeological evidences to shape the Christian history of Odisha. Still then, some archaeological remains are there in different parts of Odisha but it has not been explored till today. The early Christian missionaries have left some information in form of monuments and inscriptions available in cemetery grounds in the shape of marble stone where the death and birth year along with name is engraved and the dilapidated old church buildings also provided information regarding the Patrons, contributors, church committee members, denomination and so many other informations.⁸

The Literary Sources are there where the historian could collect data to write history on Christians and Christianity in Odisha. Though, the literary sources divided into two parts such as religious and secular, but most probably the secular literary work may not be available to help to construct Christian history because the secular work does not relate to church and Christians of Odisha in any way but in religious literary work some early missionaries including local Christian missionaries of different denomination have been written and distributed among the people to propagate Christianity and particularly Baptist missionary society is the first to develop missionary literature in Odisha which are very essentials to write Christian history of Odisha.⁹ Dr. Ignatius Soreng, who has done his M.A in English under

Sambalpur University and PhD in Odia from Utkal University, Odisha has been abstracted the availability of sources from the letter of Mrs. Susan J. Mills, an archivist to Dr. Barbara Boal on 8-5-1992 as the possible useful sources available in the Angus Library are both in the Original Angus Collection and in the BMS Archives we have plenty of printed materials about Orissa Mission and in the BMS Archives, as well as the minute books of the General Baptist Missionary Society, and letters and reports from the Missionaries. There is a large amount of Material printed in Cuttack, including many scriptural translations and linguistic Materials printed in Oriya language. Dr. Soreng says that they have also recently purchased the British and foreign Bible Society's 1977 revision of Darlow and Moule's Historical Catalogue of printed Christian scriptures in the languages of the Indian subcontinent.¹⁰

The modern history is based on the sources of modern time which is the British Period in Indian history. The history of this time writes on the basis of sources available in the library, record rooms of Government and available in archives of the government. An *archive* is an accumulation of historical records, or the physical place they are located. Archives contain Primary source documents that have accumulated over the course of an individual or organization's lifetime, and are kept to show the function of that person or organization. In general, archives consist of records that have been selected for permanent or long-term preservation on grounds of their enduring cultural, historical, or evidentiary value. Archival records are normally unpublished and almost always unique, unlike books or magazines for which many identical copies exist.¹¹ To write Christian history of Odisha is purely referred to the sources available in the archives of different State archives. A prominent Church Archives is the Vatican Secret Archive, Archdiocese, Diocese and parishes also have archives in the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches. Most Protestant denominations have archives as well, including the Presbyterian U.S.A Historical Society, The Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, the United Methodist Archives and History Center of the United Methodist Church and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).¹² So far as our discussion is concern that the historians writes Christian history with the information available in the form of *Primary* and *Secondary* sources. So, the Christian history of Odisha has been written by so many historians on the basis of the above mentioned two categories of sources. The Primary sources on Christians and Christianity in Odisha are available in different Archives such as in London, Portugal, Holland and in India like Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Cuttack and Bhubaneswar. The missionaries of different denominations like Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), General Baptist Missionary Society (GBMS) and American Freewill Baptist Mission (AFBM), London Missionary Society (LMS), Roman Catholics etc. came to Odisha for propagation of Christianity. Their letters communicated among them, orders, personal dairies are available in these archives. The records of these denominations are so much important to write down the history of Christianity where the missionaries have recorded their daily activities in their diaries, experiences are also much more important to shape the history.

Christians composed of 2.46%¹³ of total population found in most of districts of Odisha. Boudh district is the lowest and Sundargarh district is the highest Christian populated districts. Every district has Christian community with their socio-

cultural and religious functions with different denominational unity. Each and every denominations and Christian community have their own process of functions through churches having their own records of birth, death and marriage.¹⁴ These records are very important to shape the history of Christians of Odisha. Under the proper guidance of local churches Christians celebrates various feasts and festivals. So, there is ample information available around the churches which are very important in writing the errorless history of Christians of Odisha. In the same time church leaders are there from whom we could get first hand information regarding the churches, missionaries, peoples and their activities through personal interviews, questionnaires and taking note of Oral traditions related to Christianity and Christian peoples of Odisha. The most of recent church documents are available in different Church centers of Odisha such as Cuttack which is one of the oldest and first places of church plantation in Odisha where the Baptist missionaries stepped to propagate Christianity. It is the first Diocese of Baptist Christians of Odisha where you can get available documents of recent past to construct Christian history and in the same time Roman Catholic Christians also entered into Odisha for the same purpose and now they have established five Diocese including one Arch-diocese as Cuttack-Bhubaneswar and others are Balasore, Berhampur, Rourkela and Sambalpur.¹⁵ Most of information are available in form of church records and documents. So, it is the authentic places to consult Church Priest/Pastors and records for writing of Christian history of Odisha.

Christian Historians: The historians have written so many articles in different journals, Periodicals and books from where one can collect secondary sources to construct the Christian history of Odisha. In this category scholar should collect information from books, journals and any printed sources. These sources are plentifully available with the efforts of historians who have consulted source materials and have written many things on Christianity of Odisha. We may consult that sources like the *Church Missionary Society* published journal in 1817 known as *The Missionary Register*. The Serampur Baptists published *the Friend of India*, the monthly periodical, in 1828; James Peggs published the *Pilgrim Tax*; W.W. Hunter, *Orissa*, London,1872; S. N. Mukherjee, *History of Education in India*, Baroda,1961; M. C. Mohapatra, *Adhunika Oriya Siksha*(Oriya), Cuttack,1977; James Peggs, *History of the General Baptist Mission*, London,1846; P. Mukherjee, *History of Orissa*; John Capper, *The Three Presidencies of India*, London,1853; N. Desai, *Women in Modern India*, Bombay, 1975; A. Sutton, *Orissa and Its Evangelization*, Derby, 1850; A. Sutton, *Narrative of the Rise and Progress of the mission at Orissa*, 1833, R. Pattnaik, *Social History of 19th century Orissa*, Allahabad, 1989; Journal of Orissan History, June, 1987, Orissa Historical Research Journal, Vol. IX, October/January, 1961; Dasarathi Swaro, *The Christian Missionaries in Orissa*, Calcutta,1990; Manjusri Dhall, *The British Rule-Missionary Activities in Orissa(1822-1947)*, Delhi,1997; Sadananda Nayak, *Church-Culture and Missionary Activities in South Orissa*, Kolkata,2011 and my another book published in 2016 entitled *Christian History and Historiography: A Study on Odisha* and some Odia books are there to write the history. P.K. Patra have written *Orissare Baptist Missionary Societyra Karya Ebam Christiya Mandalira Sthapanara Itihas*; Dr.Sitakanta Mohapatra have written Oriya

book *Sahityaku Christian Missionary Manankar Dana*; Dr. Ignatius Soreng, *Odissare O Odiya Sahityare Khrista Dharma*, Berhampur, 1998

The above scholars have written Christian history on Odisha. These above books are giving ample information about the Christian Missionaries, Christianity, Church, Church- Culture, management of Churches, Socio-economic life of Christians of Odisha.

Scope of Christian History in Odisha: Christianity is one of the major religions of world at present. You can find Christian population more or less in every country of this world. Western Counties are basically dominated by the Christian population. The Asian Counties are with less Christians in comparison to west World though this religion originated in Asia Continent and in every Asian country have more or less numbers of Christians. This religion became more popular in India after coming of British to this land and it became one of the growing religions in Odisha after 1822 AD when the General Baptist Mission had been established its station at Cuttack for propagation of Christianity.¹⁶ Propagation of Christianity is one of the major works of missionaries of different denomination who have come over Odisha from different parts of world and to propagate Christianity in Odisha they adopted different methods of teaching and preaching of Christianity among the peoples. Spread and growth of Churches are being focused in these works but except these, there are wider scopes to write Christian history in the field of socio-cultural and economic life of Christians of Odisha, their political participation, educational development, changes made in their life, Crisis of Identity, Castes and communities, women and gender and land labour and migration of Christians. There is a huge scope to construct Christian history of Odisha on the basis of above mentioned directions.

Conclusion: History says that history can be written and rewritten within the available source materials. We can't say much more beyond what sources says but we can interpret that source differently. It is very important to have better understanding about the sources to which we are going to use it in historical writing. The understanding of sources are regarding its writer and his ability, character, understanding to theme to write such things, understanding about the sources that when and where it is written by whom and the date and place is the same date and place where the same writer have written the similar document, where it is preserved, examination of authenticity of that sources before use, whether sources biased in the formulating time, all these should have collected by a scholar before writing a Christian history of Odisha and this is the historiography in Christian history of Odisha. It is completely impossible to write history without historians. The historians are the key persons who gives shape and reshape of past events by writing history. Christian histories have been enriched with the efforts of historians who have made labour to write Christian history of Odisha.

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