

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Executive Summary of Minor Research Project: 'CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO COLONIALISM IN SOUTH KANARA IN THE EARLY DECADES OF 20TH CENTURY'

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Erstwhile South Kanara comprises of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts of Karnataka State and parts of Kasargod district of Kerala. The region is a cultural entity, though at present visible only as one peering out of the marsupial pouches of larger presences of Kannada, and to a lesser extent of Malayalam. This land came under the Christian impact only with the advent of the Portuguese. In the beginning of the 16th Century Franciscan missionaries converted the natives and built three Churches in Kanara. In the 16th and 17th Century Kanara witnessed migration of Konkani speaking Catholic Christians from Goa. Protestants, on the other hand, were the products of colonial rule in India. They grew into a community after the advent of the Basel Missionaries to the region in 1834.

In the beginning of the 20th century India witnessed nationalistic fervour among different sections of the people as well as regions. The nationalist mood had touched the coastal district of Kanara from the beginning, although not in any spectacular way. The tremors of the activities of Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Theosophical Society were clearly felt here. However, by the time Mahatma Gandhi entered the scene, the nationalist impulse was becoming more strident, as it was in the rest of India.

The present study made an attempt to throw light on spread of nationalistic fervour among the Christian communities of the region. The study highlighted that since they were minority in India, and under the influence of foreign clergy in religious matters, they had to position themselves differently in matters regarding participation in national movement. They had to reckon with and absorb tensions between the interest of local Christian institutions, structures of the state and demands of Vatican or Protestant Home Committees of Europe.

Moreover, the Christian community had to ensure that it was not alienated in the nationalist India

The two main Christian communities such as Protestants and Catholics could not come together for common cause due to religious restrictions imposed by the clergy. Even though they have formed a common association for the economic and social interest of the community it was not supported by the clergy at the parish level or village level. Even though there were regular meetings and resolutions by Civic League its demands were not given much attention by the authorities.

The need to form associations for social changes and political lobbying was felt from the very beginning. There were several association formed for economic as well as social needs of the community. One of the main objective of these associations was the economic upliftment of the community. Educating the younger generation was the main concern of the community. Therefore, these associations strived hard to achieve this goal with the limited resources they had.

The Christian media played an important role in this activity. Contrary to the public opinion, the media also highlighted internal contradictions within the community. It expressed concerns on the status of the minorities in the event of the realization of Swaraj. The media alerted the community on the changing political scenario in India. It warned them that before they become irrelevant they must be in the mainstream of the politics of the country. The religious minority status of the community and the danger of being alienated were constantly cautioned through media. Therefore, it always kept informing about the current political situation in the country as well as in South Kanara. The media also initiated political debates on the issues such as communal electorate for the Christians. The media always expressed that the Christians of the region always remained 'moderates' in this type of agitations as well in public speeches against the established order. However, they did not lag behind in demanding their rights through 'proper' channels.

In this mood of hope and apprehension the community not only introspected but also explored the ways to be in the mainstream of politics, so as to avoid being irrelevant in the new situation. If it was acutely conscious of the nationalist call, it was acutely aware of the limitations within which it had to work, which made the members of the community largely distance themselves from radical postures. This is the reason which made them nervous to participate in the movements which led to direct action against the governmental bodies.

The charge that the Christians were collaborationists and cold to the national movement does not take into consideration the complex inner tensions they had to contend with. In fact, the story of the Indian national movement itself needs to accommodate these complexities and unevenness, the compulsions that situations had thrown up and the ways in which they were negotiated by different groups and agencies.

Principal Investigator

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