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Role of Indian Christians in the Indian Freedom Struggle

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Abstract : *'Independence cannot be attained by a single person or a particular section of the society; it is a collaborative effort. During the period of India's Independence, a major role was played by Indian Christians who formed the elite and intellectual class of the society. Despite being in minority, they actively participated in the national movement.*

This research has tried to focus on the contribution of the Indian Christians towards independence of India. There were many prominent leaders whose endeavors, till date, have still not received due recognition by their own countrymen. Thus,

through this project, an attempt has been made to ascertain their contribution during India's freedom struggle.

Keywords- *Independence, minority, movements, Christians, recognition, contribution.*

Introduction :

As we celebrate seventy one years of India's independence, the Christian community has reasons to legitimately feel proud of its contribution towards the nation. Though small in number, its endeavors stand tall in every aspect of nation building, encompassing politics, society, religion and education. Despite this, the community finds itself insecure amidst hate and vicious propaganda. Against this, Professor S.C Mukherji, a prominent Indian Christian leader, thus stated in 1923, "One immediate duty of an Indian Christian would be to remove from the minds of the people of other faiths the misconception that the Christian community is a denationalized one". Patriotism continues to be a Christian virtue. The Indian Christians sympathized very much with the national spirit and preferred to adopt constitutional methods. In fact, they were among the prominent ones who pioneered and shaped the goals of Indian nationalism. After independence too, the community has been equally active in educating the young with the ideas of secularism, universalism and

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egalitarianism. Be it armed forces or civil services, education or police, science or medicine, sports or social services, there is virtually no sphere where the Christians have not marked their presence: they have been actively involved in several grassroot movements and nongovernmental organizations.

Many Indian Christians dedicated their lives fully to the national movement. They played an important role in the early phase of the Indian National Congress, especially in the third session of the Congress (1887). Out of 607 participants, there were fifteen Indian Christian delegates who actively participated in the deliberations. One outstanding Indian delegate was Madhusudan Das of Orissa who addressed the Congress on the question of expansion of legislative councils. Another leader N. Subramaniam proposed complete separation of judicial and executive functions. The same session marked the presence of Kali Charan Banerjee, the founder of 'the movement for emancipation'. Recognizing his merit, thus noted a chronicler, "Perhaps the finest orator of the whole assembly was Babu Kali Charan Bannerjee, who is a Bengali Christian". In the 1889 session, he was responsible for a resolution demanding improvement in the educational system particularly university education. The same year, he was instrumental in protesting against the prohibition imposed by the government on teachers participating in political movements. In 1896, Banerjee again presented a resolution reiterating his demand regarding university education in the country.

Other noteworthy Christian leaders were Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya (George Thomas), the 'Hindu Catholic' sadhu and theologian, J.C. Kumarappa, Paul Ramasamy, T.M. Varghese and A.J. John and so on.

Consciousness was seen in Indian Christian women too. In this respect, Pandita Ramabai Saraswati's contribution is outstanding. In the Congress session of 1889, there were ten Christian delegates of which she was one. She was also one of the first Indians to champion the cause of women, encouraging them to participate in national politics. Ramabai also played an important role in the third session of the National Social Conference in 1889 at which she supported a resolution condemning the practice of disfiguring the Hindu widows. Other female leaders were Mrs. Annie Besant, Akkama Cheriyan and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur.

Undeniably, the contribution of Indian Christians in the freedom struggle and in the country's regeneration is commendable. In addition, they have provided valuable services in education, civil and military administration, sports, science and medicine to name a few.

Objectives:

- To throw light on the contribution of Christians in the freedom struggle.
- To highlight the role of the prominent Christian leaders in the national movement.
- To bring forth the contribution of Christians in education, health and other philanthropic activities during the British rule in India.

Hypotheses:

- The contribution of Christians in the freedom struggle is remarkable. They played a significant role in the Indian National Congress too.
- Likewise, their institutions aroused consciousness and provided the impetus towards freedom struggle and subsequent independence.
- Besides, they contributed significantly in pre independence era in education, defense science or administration, sports or medicine, social service and politics. All these led to modernism and growth. Such development helped the countrymen in building up a new India.

Methodology :

- Information will be based on secondary sources.
- Information will be collected through internet, newspaper, magazines and books.
- This project is a research-based project based both on quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Origin of Christianity :

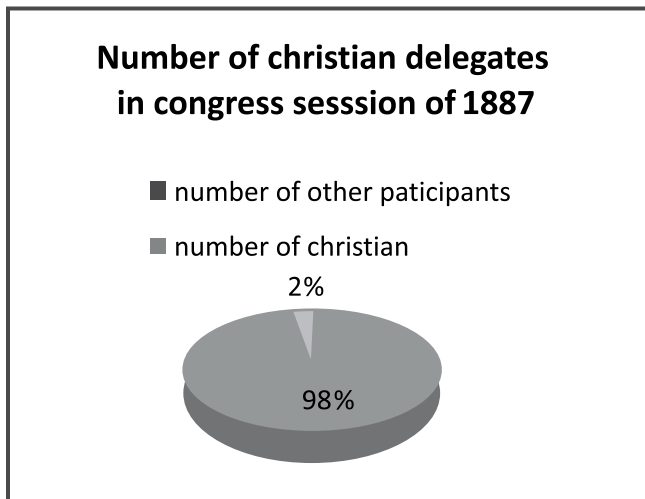
Christianity came to India long back but the advent Europeans made this religion prominent among the masses during the beginning of the 18th century. Because of its welfarian activities, people of different religion converted themselves to Christianity for a good purpose.

National Movements:

Revolt of 1857 : The very first rebellion which took place against the British in India was the Revolt of 1857.

At this time, the Indian Christians were appointed at important posts in British offices. They were not aware of the British intentions and showed loyalty towards their employers. But they were in for a rude shock: on being attacked by the Rajputana regiments, the British tried to save their own lives and in the most insensitive manner, did not provide any shelter to Indian Christians. The latter were left to fend for themselves at this perilous hour. They realized that they were being used as pawns against the British government. Thenceforth, they turned against the British.

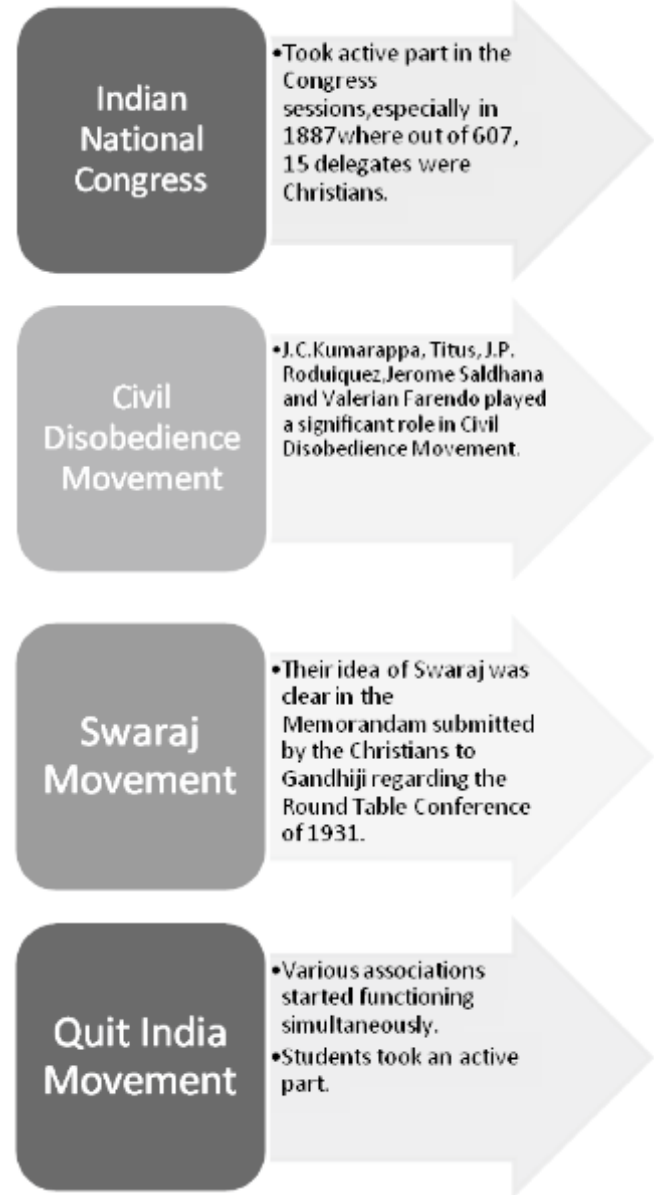
Indian National Congress : The Indian Christians took active part in the regular sessions of Congress. They adopted constitutional methods to deal with the colonial government. Prominent number of delegates took part in the Round Table Conferences.



Swaraj Movement : During the time of Swaraj movement the Indian Christians submitted a memorandum in which they stated that they wholeheartedly supported the national demands of people and took an active part in the Indian National Movement.

Civil Disobedience Movement : During Civil Disobedience Movement, the Indian Christians collectively gathered at a place in Bombay in 1930 and passed several resolutions centering around their demand of complete Swaraj. They adopted non-violence of Gandhi and boycotted foreign goods on a large scale. One of the prominent Christians during this movement was J.C. Kumarappa who stressed people to use swadeshi goods. There were other prominent leaders also such as Thevarthudiyil Titus, J.P Rodriques and so on.

Quit India Movement : With the beginning of the Quit India Movement, many Christian Associations began to be formed with similar objectives. These associations included students and women in large numbers. The writings of Kumarappa infuriated the British and he was put behind bars. Another leader Masillamani met with a similar fate.



NOTABLE CHRISTIANS OF THE INDIAN FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Christians of North and East India:

Brahmabandhaba Upadhyaya became inclined towards the Indian nationalist movement when he was in high school and contributed significantly in shaping of

new India. His identity began to emerge from the second half of the eighteenth century. He was greatly influenced by Mazzini and Garibaldi. The former's concept of Young Italy impressed Upadhaya greatly. He spread the Swadeshi agitation during Bengal Partition of 1905. His organization, 'Sandhya' touched heart of common people of India and inspired them to fight for their country.

Harendra Coomar Mookherjee was the Vice-President of Constituent assembly of India which was responsible for drafting the Indian Constitution before the partition. He began to work for the uplift of the minorities in all fields, including politics. He represented Bengali Christians. He was elected President of ALL INDIA COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS and was also a member of Indian National Congress.

Kali Charan Banerjee was also one of the great Indian Christian freedom fighters. Though born in Madhya Pradesh, he migrated to Bengal later with his family and stayed there for the rest of his life. He joined the Indian National Congress and represented his community four times in the sessions held between 1888 to 1891. His concern for the downtrodden and marginalized sections of the society was exemplary. Inspired by the Brahmo Samaj, he established Christian Christno Samaj which dealt with the socio-economic issues of Indian Christians. For poor, malaria-stricken people, he prepared a medicine "VIJAYABATIKA" and made it available at affordable rates. He also urged his countrymen to boycott foreign goods. In his work 'Hindibangabhasi' he urged the populace to use their mother tongue.

Krishna Mohan Banerjee was a member of the Young Bengal Group. In 1841, he wrote a prize essay on native female education which laid great emphasis on the government's female education policy. His major work 'Dialogue on Hindu Philosophy' dealt with the authenticity of the Hindu tracts. His bilingual Bengali text book published under the title 'VIDYAKALPADRUM' ran into 13 volumes. As a prominent member of the Indian Association, he was at the forefront of all movements for civil rights, such as the repeal of the Vernacular Press Act, the Arms Act and the appointment of the Indians to civil service.

S.K.Dutta was delegate of the Second Round Table Conference in London. He was a prominent leader of Young Men Christian Association (YMCA), and a

member of Central Legislative Assembly. Even earlier, in his Presidential Address at the All India Conference of Indian Christians in 1922, he made a reference to some of the Indian Christians who had suffered imprisonment as a result of political activities. From 1924 to 1926, he regularly addressed the International Missionary Council Meetings held at Lake Mohank and Jerusalem. He worked as an editor of YMCA's periodical 'The Young Men of India.' His important works were 'The Desire of India' and 'The Christian Student and The Indian Church.'

Madhusudan Das was an advocate of social reforms. He was against caste system and zealously worked for western and female education. He was critical of the English ways for, in his opinion, English people were materialistic and did not realize the spiritual aspects of life. Yet, he laid great emphasis on industrialization of India, about which he wrote in an Oriya weekly paper. He started the 'Utkal Tannery' in 1905. With his support, the filigree work of silver ornaments in Orissa attained great heights.

CHRISTIANS OF SOUTH AND WEST INDIA

Venkal Chakkarai was active in Madras Indian Christian Association and also, in the All Indian Conference of Indian Christians. Chakkarai was the member of Christno Samaj too. He was instrumental in organizing quite a few republican meetings under the auspices of the Madras Indian Christian Association (ICA) which discussed questions of political nature. He attended the conference led by the Roman Catholics and Protestants at Poona which affirmed joint electorates for Christians.

Pandipaddi Chenchiah's contribution in the literary field is notable. He expresses his views in the periodicals 'THE GUARDIAN' and 'THE PATRIOT'. Inspired by the teachings of Aurobindo Ghosh and many others, he spoke against western Christian theology and church practice. He developed a new interpretation of Christian doctrine. He was also one of the founders of Christno Samaj of Madras which aimed at uniting the countrymen.

J.C.Kumarappa worked to combine Christian and Gandhian values of truth and non-violence. Focus on human dignity and development, in place of materialism, formed the basis of his economic theories. While serving as the editor of 'Young India' during the

Salt Satyagraha, he helped in establishing the All India Village Industries' Association. He was also imprisoned during the Quit India.

Narayan Vaman Rao Tilak began teaching in seminary at Ahmadnagar and was ordained a Minister in the Congregational Movement. After about ten years of embracing Christianity, he began expressing his faith in local idioms, particularly the poetic style of the Varkari Hindu Sampradaya of Maharashtra. He composed many poems which inspired people to fight against British.

Joachim Alva founded the Nationalist Christian party with the goal of the drawing the Christian community into the freedom struggle. In 1937, Alva presided over a large meeting of Christians at Bombay which was addressed by Jawaharlal Nehru. He was actively involved in organizing the "NO TAX" Campaign at the Bardoli Satyagraha and appointed Director of the War Council. On 9th August 1943, at the first anniversary of Quit India day, Joachim and his associate Violet founded a weekly news magazine 'FORUM', which became popular for championing the cause of Independence.

K.T.Paul's lectures, articles and programmes campaigned for social reforms manifesting concern for Indians both at home and abroad. In 1930 he was invited by the British Government to the first Round Table Conference on behalf of the Indian Christians. He devised a large-scaled scheme called the Rural Reconstruction Programme and undertook a number of practical measures to uplift the conditions of the rural populace.

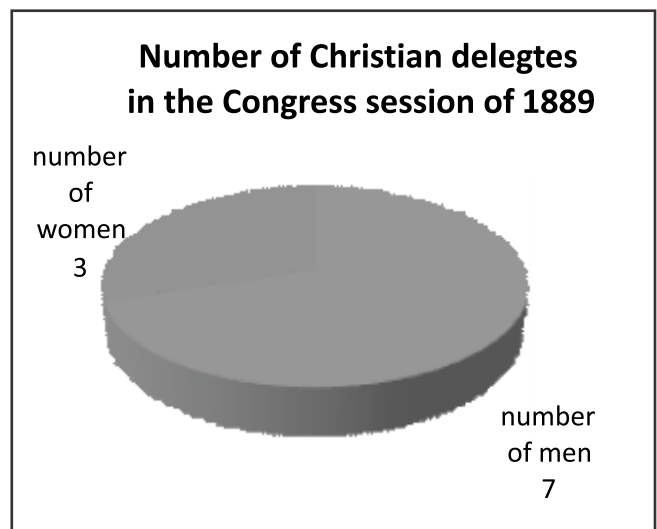
Daniel Thomas He pleaded for earnestness on all sides, for encouraging the vernacular medium of instruction, for separation of the executive and judiciary, for village panchayats, cottage industries like hand-loom weaving, and for encouraging the indigenous medical system. His efforts for the union of the Churches in South India were commendable. Daniel fought for the property rights and for a better place in society for women, for provincial autonomy, for improving the condition of the ryots and the depressed classes, and stressed the need for universal compulsory elementary education.

V.S.Azariah His argument was for the civic rights of the Indian Christians and it was not different from those of other communities. The stand of Azariah was on the basis of nationalism, which was in line with the stand of

Congress ties and other nationalists. During this time the Indian National Congress was emphasising that India should have a full freedom in determining the destiny of her own country. Azariah along with the other signatories of the mentioned letter, by underlining the demand of Congress indicated the side he had taken.

Fr Jerome D'Souza He ensured that the rights of minorities, especially of worship and education, were fully protected by the proposed Constitution and the right to practice and propagate one's religion is included in the Constitution as a fundamental right. He carried out negotiations with the pope and the French Foreign minister on behalf of India. He served as the member of the advisory committee of foreign affairs and the select committee on Aligarh and Benares University Bill. He served as a member or the Indian delegation to the UN Assembly four times. Jerome was made a Member of the Constituent Assembly which had to frame the Indian Constitution

Women's contribution in the freedom struggle: Christian women like Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Pandita Ramabai also made great contribution in the Indian National Movement. As in politics Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, bore keen interest in social welfare, and in espousing the cause of women. Both the women leaders joined Indian National Congress and under Gandhiji's inspiration, took an active part in its various activities throughout their life.



Influence of Christian missionaries on Indian Christians: Many Christian missionaries took an active part in the activities of the Indian National Congress and

the national movement. They expressed concern over the political happenings in India, especially during the 1930s. They were impressed by the personality of Gandhi and his teachings, especially by his principle of non-violence. This had a tremendous impact on Indian Christians.

What motivated Indians to convert into Christianity?

Various evil practices such as sati, child marriage, etc were condemned by Christianity. Modern Education was imparted irrespective of caste, creed, sex. Women enjoyed equal status and were not treated as objects. Various health, education, tribal welfare schemes were enhancing the condition of the Indian society.

Different Christian organizations: Various organizations were formed by Indian Christians like All-India Conference Of Indian Christian, Young Men's Christian Association, The Christian Students' Association and, The Young Women Christian Association (YMCA). All these contributed significantly in their own way in politics, social service and uplifting the condition of women.

Originator of modern education: Indian Christian contributed significantly towards the education of this country. Its impact is very much visible in numerous elementary, secondary and Collegiate institution of India with their finest libraries. The system of boarding school was initiated by the Jesuits in India. The value of education is both qualitatively and quantitatively visible. Such education has become the representative of modernism, promoting values of equality, liberty and fraternity.

Christian contribution in tribal areas: The Indian Christians have rendered the major services to the tribals of India. They established centres of education and provided extensive medical service at the time virtually when no government or other private agency bore empathy for the tribals. The Christian missionaries helped the tribals proceed from savagery to modernism, thereby taking off a heavy load from the shoulders of the government.

Contribution in rural development: Rural development was yet another area in which the community showed commendable work. The Church set up centers in remote areas and undertook literacy work, adult and child education, relief work, social service,

health care and so on. The entry of the dalits and the backward classes in Christianity helped such people move up the social ladder and lead a dignified life.

Christian contribution in health and medical services: This was the most valuable services rendered by Christian to the people of India. They opened numerous hospitals, dispensaries, clinics, welfare organisation and health centre across the country- infact, even in the remotest areas.

Contribution to Defence in post independence period-

Indian Christians made very impressive and significant contribution to National Defence, be it in terms of loyalty, bravery, professional competence or any other activity. Some of the brave soldiers are Albert Ekka, Captain Eric Tucker etc.

Administration : Harendra Coomar Mookharjee was the vice-president of the constituent assembly of India for drafting the Constitution of India before the partition of India. K.T. Paul the first governor of West Bengal after India became a republic, joined the Madras Government Secretariat and served on the committee on co-operation. He devised a scheme called the Rural Reconstruction Programme and undertook a number of practical measures to uplift the conditions of the rural populace.

Sports : They contributed alot in post independence period. Some of them are:

- Mahesh Bhupathi, professional tennis player also widely regarded as among the best doubles players in the world with 11 Grand Slam titles to his credit.
- Vinod Kambli, cricketer
- Mary Kom, Olympic bronze medallist in 2012 Summer Olympics, London are some of the people who brought laurels to the country.

Politics : The contribution of Christians in politics is immense. They actively took participation in various congress sessions and also asked for the constitutional changes. Leaders like Harendra Coomar, was the vice-president of the constituent assembly. K. C. Banerjee is another leader who was one of the main orators of Indian National Congress. One of the prominent politicians was K.T. Paul, who was not identified with any

political party, but in his religious and political outlook he was a moderate. He believed that persuasion could ultimately lead India's freedom politically and socially.

Science and Medicine : The most valuable service rendered by Christian to the people of India are those in the field of health. An enormous network of hospitals, dispensaries, clinics, welfare organisation and health centres along the length and breadth of the country, engaged in the promotion of Health and in the mission of healing, not only in the cities and towns but also in the remotest rural areas of the land. Some of them are the **Christian Medical College and Hospital (CMC)** in Vellore, The Christian Medical College Hospital, Ludhiana. The valuable services rendered by **all India Christian medical organisations** also merit attention. These organisations are the Christian Medical Association of India, the Christian nurses' leagues of India, the Catholic Hospital Association of India, the Catholic nurses' Guild of India, and the Indian Federation of medical Guild.

Findings :

- Thus, the research has shown that quite contrary to the general belief, the Indian Christians contributed significantly towards freedom struggle and in other fields. They were certainly not 'foreigners' as many had labeled them.
- The British tried all means to prevent the Indian Christians from participating in the freedom struggle but to no avail.
- Despite all barriers, Indian Christians like J.C Kumarappa, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, K.C Banerjee and many more spent their lives in serving the nation. Thus the hypothesis that the contribution of Christians in freedom struggle especially in Indian National Congress is remarkable, is proved.
- Indian Christians not only helped India attain freedom but contributed significantly in social field putting an end to various evil practices through different association. Thus our second hypothesis that their institutions aroused consciousness and provided impetus to freedom struggle, is also proved.
- Thus this research was under taken to throw light on such unexplored aspects.

Conclusion :

- The participation of Indian Christians in general in the freedom struggle of India is often questioned by many of the countrymen, mainly because of the notion that the church had a close link with the colonial State. Correspondingly, the Christians were treated as foreigners and generally the Indians believed that their interests and those of Indian Christians could never be the same.
- When the Christians realized that British were exploiting them for their own benefit, they started participating in national movements.
- Various prominent leaders from different regions of India took an active part in the freedom struggle. Such as Madhusudan Das, Kali Charan Banerjee.
- Women also played a prominent role.
- When the British prevented the Indian Christians from actively participating in the national movement, they formed their own associations to foster nationalism.
- They contributed significantly towards education, health and tribal welfare.

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