



A BRIEF HISTORY OF AMERICAN TELUGU BAPTIST MISSION'S EARLY DAYS

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Introduction

A rearward look at some of the beginnings of the Christian effort among the people of Telugu land may be worthwhile. Dr. J.A. Curtis of Donakonda has discovered some evidences of work done by the French Catholics long before the Modern missionary movement started. It is interesting to note that in that early period as in the present their approach was to the high caste people to neglect of the outcaste.

Dr.curtis writes,

" Dr. Clough's work bore rich fruit in this country from 1866. He had discovered that this was not the beginning of the Gospel here. About 1700 A.D French Romanists from Pondicherry began to penetrate the Telugu country and by 1733, there was an important settlement of their converts at Bukkapuram near Bandiveliganda.

The Roman Catholic History, compiled largely from Contemporary documents in Paris, is one of fruitful apostolic labours, severe persecutions and martyrdoms, migrations, about 150 years of neglect and wide-spread disappearance. Italian Government Received huge amount from the Pope in settlement of old claims, there is a modern revival of missionary effort, ---- all of course from the peculiar Romanist stand -point and method. Bukkapuram has been uninhabited for 100 years. By means of family names Dr. Curtis traced the descendants of those Christians, ordinary village Hindus, with not even a tradition of their ancestors having been Christians.

The Romanists taught only prayers and sacraments, made most inadequate provision for Indian Priests, sought the help of princes and the higher castes while definitely turning from the outcastes; their work was broken by the suppression of the Jesuits in 1773 and by the French Revolution and the preceding events. In 1777, there were but two foreign priests over a vast territory. How much more hopeful is the cumulative history of the outcaste Mass-Movements, Village schools, station schools, High schools, Colleges and Caste Movements which modern missions have seen ushered in and maintained. what a lesson for those who suppose our work is done after sixty -nine years of Mass- Movements.

Establishment:



The Baptists of the United States were challenged to begin work among the Telugus by a visit of Rev. & Mrs. Amos Sutton, missionaries of the English Baptist Missionary Society in Orissa. In 1805 Sutton had been sent by the General Baptist of England to start work among the Telugus but the attempt was abandoned and Sutton was shifted to Orissa. Sutton never forgot the Telugus, and used the opportunity given to speak at the convention of American Baptists to place the needs of the Telugus before the convention. As a result, in April, 1835. Rev Samuel S. Day and his wife were appointed to work among the Telugus.

The Days arrived in Calcutta in early February, 1836 and from there went to Vizag patnam to confer with the London Missionary Society missionaries. They sent them to Srikakulam to study the language. In 1837, the Day left Srikakulam and went to Madras which at that time was largely a Telugu city. Day soon became convinced that Madras was too far away from real Telugu country to be the centre for the mission and in February, 1840, moved with his family from Madras to Nellore, the district headquarters for the Southeast Telugu country. Shortly after the Day's arrival in Nellore they were joined by the van Husens. Because of poor health Van Husen had to leave India after four years but not before escorting Rev. J. C. F Heyer, the first American Lutheran missionary, from Nellore to Guntur via Ongole and Bapatla. Day's health also failed in 1846 therefore he left the mission work in the hands of two workers and gone back to America.

When Day arrived in America he discovered that the Baptist Missionary Union(BMU) was planning to close the mission among Telegus. He pleaded with them not to close it but rather to give him help and the BMU finally agreed when Rev. & Mrs.Lyman Jewett volunteered to go with Day to India. Day left his wife and children in the States. 2

This prophetic poem about the Telugu Baptist Mission came from the inspired Servant of God Rev. Dr. F. S, Smith, the author of American National Hymn in the year 1853 at Albany, while the Annual Conference of Missionary Fellowship was in session to finalize the closure of Telugu Baptist Mission. The reading of this Poem in the Conference brought inspiration and unanimity among the members to vote for the continuation of Telugu Baptist Mission. So we are here to praise God. This poem changed the course of time and pages of history and fulfilled every word to letter. So, Every Telugu Baptist must uphold the vision given to us about Telugu Baptist Mission, which is now known as Samavesam of Telugu Baptist churches. 3

On arrival back in Nellore in April, 1849, Day and the Jewetts found that the people to whom Day had absconded and that the mission school had been closed. They immediately began to rebuild the work. In January, 1850, a commission from the Baptist Missionary Union visited Nellore and recommended the reinforcement of the staff or the abandonment of the work. When this report was read the Executive Committee once again was ready to abandon the Telugu Mission but was dissuaded from doing so by a poem was "Shine on Lone Star". Since then the mission has been called " The Lone Star Mission" , The Committee voted to continue the mission and strengthen the work. However, within a month after this



decision was made Day's health broke and he had to leave Indi and he never came back to India.

The Jewetts began to seek for new preaching stations North of Nellore. They came to Ongole and early on the first day of 1854, Dr & Mrs. Jewett, their Indian helper, Christian Narsu, and two Bible women. Julia and Ruth, held a prayer meeting on the hill behind the Traveler's Bungalow and asked God to send a missionary to Ongole. In 1855 Rev. & Mrs. F.A. Douglas arrived. This enabled the Jewetts to spend more time touring areas north of Nellore. In 1860 after spending three months working in and around Ongole they were able to baptize their first convert, Obulu. At this time Jewett also was able to purchase a site for the Ongole mission. 4

In 1862 Jewetts' health was beginning to fail and they were advised to leave India at once. Though in poor health Jewett made the 180 mile trip from Madras to Ongole to bid farewell to Obulu and his brother, the first two converts there, and promised them that he would return.

On their arrival back in the States the Jewetts found that again the Executive Committee of the missionary Union was ready to close the Telugu Mission because of its unfruitfulness. When Jewetts said that if the Baptist Missionary Union would not help him go back he would go back on his own and live and if needed I will die among the Telugus, the board relented and granted a third reprieve to the "Lone Star" mission. They also agreed to send a new station at Ongole, the Jewetts and Cloughs arrived in Nellore on April 22, 1865, in time to bid farewell to the Douglasses.

While the Cloughs were studying Telugu, word came from Mrs. Shilling whose husband was in the public Works Department at Ongole to baptize a man named Yerraguntla Periah. In 1862 Periah had gone North to Eluru to purchase hides and while there he heard about Christianity through a distant relative, Abraham. Abraham introduced him to F. N. W. Alexander, the CMS missionary in Eluru, and took him to polaka, to hear Bowden preach. He returned to his home in Thalakondapadu, Kanigiri Taluk, under deep conviction. He went to Ongole seeking the missionary but found Mrs. Shilling who read the third chapter of John to him in Telugu. He accepted Christ and went home and won his wife. In March, 1866, the Jewetts came to Ongole, sent for periah and after hearing his testimony baptized him and his wife. They were the first converts in the Ongole area. This brought the total number of converts won by the Lone Star Mission in 31 years of work to 38.

After his baptism Periah, journeyed to Nellore to meet the Cloughs, arrived in Ongole and were welcomed by Obulu and his brother and English Christians in the town. Within a few months Periah sent word from Thalakondapadu, asking for help to instruct new converts and Clough sent Ezra Keller, Rangaiah and Lakshmaiah, the three workers Jewett had given him, to the village. Early in January Clough was called to the village to examine the candidates and baptized 28 candidates from six different villages in Kanigiri Taluk. Overnight the number of converts in the Lone Star Mission almost doubled.



With the help of Obulu and Periah, Clough began to reap a harvest of souls. During his first year in Ongole 124 persons baptized and within three years there were Christians in 94 different villages, totaling more than 400 in number, and by the end of 1876, ten years after Clough's arrival in Ongole, 3,000 had come and accepted Christ this was before the great famine of 1877-78.

During the famine years, Clough, who was civil engineer, took a contract to dig four miles of the Buckingham Canal. Using his pastors as foreman. During this time, he refused to baptise anyone. After the famine was over, he sent out word to a few villages saying that those who wished to be baptized should assemble on the banks of the GundlaKamma at Villumpalli, about 10 miles from Ongole. He expected that a few hundred would come but people came by the thousands and on July 3, 1878, 2,222 persons were baptized. By the end of the year more than 10,000 had been baptized. Fortunately, a seminary to train pastors had been opened in Ramapatnam in 1872 by Rev. A. V. Timpany and so some of this new Christians could be provided with pastors.

In early 1875 one of the Clough's preachers, Bezwada Paul kondaiah crossed the Nalamala Mountains and began work in and around Atmakur in Kurnool District. He made ten converts while he was there. In November and December, 1875 Rev. Clough, with Rev. D. H. Drake, made a tour via Doranal, and Atmakur as far as Kurnool Town. At Atmakur they baptized 46 converts, chose four men to be deacons and appointed ChekureKuravaiah as their first pastor. In 1876 Rev. D. H. Drake returned to Kurnool and opened the mission station there. 5

Rev. & Mrs. W.W. Campbell, after studying language in Ongole, arrived in Secundrabad on July 3, 1875 and began work. In September: Rev. Clough sent them two evangelists from his preaching band, KomaKotaiah and GombadeLakshmaiah to assist Rev. Campbell Mrs. Campbell opened a school for Girls on August 17th. On November 14th Secundrabad Baptist Church was organized with 14 members. For the few years Rev. Campbell toured S. E. as far as Nalgonda, N. E. as far as Bhongir and Janagoan and N. W. as far as Kundi and South as far as Mahboobnagar. In 1882 Rev. & Mrs. Elbert Chute came to the Deccan to assist the Campbell and opened a station at palmoor (now called mahboobnagar) in 1884. (6)

Rev. & Mrs. A. Loughridge were sent to Hanmakonda in January 1877 to open work there. In January 4, 1880 the Hanmakonda Baptist Church was Organized by Christians who had settled in the area and the first convert was baptized. By the end of that year four more had been baptized and there were 15 members in the Church. Most of those who came were from backward Communities and this mass movement among them continued well into the 20th century so that the Baptist Mission spread throughout the District of Nellore, Guntur, Kurnool, Mahboobnagar, Nalgonda, Warangal and part of Krishna. There are now 650 organized churches with 2,50,000 baptized adult members.

BAPTISMS



The American Baptist Telugu mission has passed through a similar experience. In its early history schools were started, attended mainly by high caste boys. Later on, when in 1866 Dr. Clough first entered upon the work in Ongole, he had daily religious conversations with Brahmins who seemed interested and impressed by the truth and claim of Christianity. But while these hesitated and prevaricate and delayed, the low caste Madigas came pressing their way into the kingdom. Some had Cast Away their idols, and profess faith in Christ, asked for baptism. The Brahmins said,

"If you receive these filthy people, we can see you know more."

The missionaries prayed and sought in the word for guidance, and came from the presence chamber able to say to the Brahmins, in effect if not in Peter's own words,

" God hath showed me that I should not call anything common or unclean." 7

Conclusion

Thus the die was cast, the Rubicon crossed, and though the bondage of the caste system has hitherto circumscribed, not our efforts, but our tangible results, mainly to the depressed classes, we rejoice that we have been granted among these a great and real success rather than a perpetually hypothetical one among people for higher social standing. To these poor, neglected, oppressed outcastes, the Gospel message comes as the first Ray of hope they have ever known. They everywhere listen eagerly and multitudes accept and obey the gospel; and to be instrumental not only in inspiring these down-trodden ones with new hopes and new purposes for the life that now is, but in leading them by hundreds to the feet of Jesus to lay hold of life eternal, is a privilege beside which the ambitions of earth pale into insignificance.

1. Page 4, 1934 report.
2. <https://onewaytheonlyway.com/lyman-jewett/>
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Francis_Smith
4. https://archive.org/stream/indianmissionary00badl/indianmissionary00badl_djvu.txt
5. https://www.academia.edu/1947203/MISSIONS_AT_WORKCONTRIBUTON_TO_WARDS_SOCIAL_CHANGE_IN_TELUGU_SPEAKING_REGION
6. https://archive.org/stream/baptistmissiona04socioog/baptistmissiona04socioog_djvu.txt
7. The New Testament (Acts 10:28).