

# The Missionaries, Nationalities and the Christian Education

By

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Even though the Portuguese landed on the Myanmar soil the education based on Christianity was brought by the Catholic missionary priests. Those missionary priests were given pastoral care for many decades to the mission and the society of Bayingyi villages from the upper Burma. But they succeeded in small scale. In early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Christian education was brought wider by the Italian Missionaries. Then in 1856, the French foreign missionary community took over the mission works in Myanmar. That is why Father Paul A. Bigandet had consecrated as a Bishop on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1856 and arrived to Myanmar.

When you talk about Christian Education, it also included the teaching of the Christian doctrine and among them was to understand the bible was the main task. There are the bible verses that make development of the education for the Christians are –

“**13** Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, **14** for she is more profitable than silver and yields better than gold.” (Proverbs 3:13-14)

Another verse is –

“**6** Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. **7** Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Through it cost all of you have, get understanding.” (Proverbs 4:6-7)

That is why those bible verses had given the value of the wisdom and enlighten to continue to search for it to the Christians.

Through the teaching of the bible, the missionaries continued to evangelize the meaning of the Christian education and educational tasks.

When Bishop Bigandet arrived to Myanmar, he also took responsible for the educational tasks than mission works. He extended the schools and tried to build up from the quantity to quality students. He

evangelized among the ethnic minorities and given education. At that time the Lower Burma was under the British ruled.

According to the High Commissioner report for the Pegu District Administration 1857-58, there were 3 Catholic school and 70 students were Karen in Pathein (Bassein) District.

In 1858-59, there were 5 Catholic School in Yangon and Pathein and become about hundred students.

Myaungmya is the first station established by Catholic Missionaries among the Karen people. It was begun with great zeal and determination by Father Domongo Tarolly and Father Kern. These two priests evangelized among the native Karen people and given education and there were already schools for the girls and the boys when Bishop Bigandet arrived.

In 1859 the first printing press was founded in Myaungmya. This press published the books for the Catholic Schools within Pathain District. There were the school for the Karen boys and the boarding house and also for the Karen girls school and was administered by the native mistress.

In the same year, the St. John School was inaugurated in Thinganaing Village, north of Mary Land Village, Hinthada District and all the teachers were Karens.

In 1869 the new bricks church was built in Thinganaing Village. Father Naude built the two schools for the girls and boys within the church compound given by the British government. There were also built the school for the boys in Mittaggon and Ouk Pho and also school for the girl was built in 1869 and the two schoolmistresses were appointed.

In 1860 the priests from France, Father Devos went to Kanazoegone village, Myaungmya District to assist Father Bertrand learn the Karen language and qualify himself for the duties of Missionary among the wild inhabitants of the forest of Pegu. The new church was laid down and also 2 schools for the boys and the girls and the girl school under the charge of native mistress.

In 1860 or 1861, the foundations of the Institution were at first erected with roomy place for the printing establishment. It was managed by the Christian brothers and also taught the classes. There were also English teaching classes. Father Dumollard opened the Normal School and raise up the teachers and catechists for the Karen youths.

The press from the St. Peter's Institution published books for the both in English and Myanmar teaching schools and for the native Karen Christians as well as printed the English salable for day school girls. For the administration of the orphans, Myanmar and Karen had arrived from the Yangon. According to the report of the Administration of Province of Pegu Division (1862-63) there are 110 students and 44 were Pow Karen girls.

The students from the St. Peter's Institution helped in the printing press. Even though the books were published in Myanmar for the basic educational schools it was useful for the English - Myanmar two languages teaching schools according to the 1867-68 report by the Department of Home Affairs. This school was divided into two departments, Karen School and Free School. Even though it was not reaching to the level of Normal school of teacher's training but it can trained teachers for the village schools in the District. According to the 1868-69 Report from the Education minister, the 3 students from that school became the head masters of the village schools.

In 1864, Father Tartivel arrived to Asu Village and built the small church. He was devoted to the Our Lady so that he built the grotto side to the Mayoe stream and later that place was named Mary Land Village. In 1870 the brick church was began to build and in 1876 the church and the residence of the priests have been completed. In addition to this the priest has not forgotten the schools. There are two substantial buildings erected for the two schools, one for boys and one for girls. The number of Christian belonging to the place of Maryland, is about 800.

In Myanaung area, even though the majority is Burmese the missionaries opened the village schools only in Karen populated areas so that native Karen people improved the education. That is why

the Burmese people have to come and study in Roman Catholic Mission Schools according to the 1867-68 Report of the Education Minister.

Henzada District was the government office erected place at that time. In 1870 the church was completed in that region and later opened the normal school.

In that normal school had taught the subjects of History, Geography, Mathematic and the Bible. So that the salable from the Normal School and the Middle School running by the missionaries were basically the same and rest of the subjects were different according to the region.

In 1870 the population of Bassein (Pathein) was about 18000 but there were only St. Peter's School. That is why the Education Minister commented that it will be a great privilege for the Pathein if the middle school can open there.

St. Peter's school was under the guidance of the Catholic Missionaries and to be able to bring out the teachers for the schools in the Karen villages. The subjects of reading, writing, assay, geography, history, philosophy, algebra and geometry are teaching in this school.

In academic year of 1876-77, there were 50 students out of 110 are from the boarding Karen students. The Christian brothers gave a special training course for the land surveying in that year. When the education minister came for the inspection, he commented that the students were skillful in land surveying rather than other subjects.

The time of Suez Cannel completion was Myanmar rice imported to the Europe so that rice plantation increasing from local sufficient into trading.

In 1876, the British government implemented the land and tariff law. According to that law a farmer who works more than 12 years in an acre of land and pay the tax regularly be owned the land. It was the time of excavating rough lands into farm land so that it was the important role took by the Christian brothers had taught the land surveying subject in St. Peter's Institution.

In 1868 the technical training department was opened and the vocational subjects of the printing press, binding books, electrical, photography, carpenter and black smith courses were taught to the students during the time of Father De Cruz.

In 1868 the Catholic Mission in Myanmar was divided into 3 parts, Southern Myanmar Mission, Upper Myanmar Mission and Eastern Myanmar Mission. The Southern and Upper Myanmar Missions were taken charge by the French Missionaries and the Eastern Mission was taken charge by the Italian Missionaries. That's how the Italian PIME missionary priests, Father Eugenio Biffi, Father Rocco Tornatore, Father Sebastiano Carbore and Fateh Tarcredi Conti had arrived in 1868 February 22.

In 1955 Father George de Cruz, Myanmar local priest arrived back to Myanmar and began to serve in Mawlamyine after studied in Propaganda Fidel College in Italy. After a year he moved to Toungoo and giving with zeal, the benefit of his ministry to the Catholics soldiers belonging to the British troops in Toungoo as well as given education to the 18 students.

There were about 150 Catholics including British Military Servicemen nearby Toungoo area in those days. Bishop Biffi has vision of the hill tribe people have needed to get education, which can improve their social life so that he established the RCM School in Toungoo. Father Conti has supervised that school and it was the boys and girls combine school including the boarding orphanage girls.

Later, English Myanmar middle schools were able to open apart from that school. The teacher's training school was attached with the school and the succeeded students were sent to the hills as the teachers.

In 1870-71, the institute was extended technical training department and taught the vocational trainings of text book preparation, shoe making, etc. So that it can consider that the Science and Technology Institute has been introduced. According to the High Commissioner of Education comment, that institute was the best in writing of English Essay among the schools from Lower Burma.

Father Conti was fluent in ethnic language so that he invented the Gheba script with the Roman alphabets. Later Father Paolo Manna invented the script for Ghekho with the Roman alphabets. Because of the

missionaries' invention of the ethnic writings, the hill tribes Karen people can communicate with their own writings.

In 1876-77, The principle of the Toungoo RCM school was Peter Mariano and according to the Education Commissioner, this school was well discipline, the students were outstanding in physical and mental as well as had zeal in learning.

The two sisters from the Sisters of St. Joseph congregation had arrived to Toungoo by the invitation of Bishop Biffi. They opened the St' Joseph Convent School for the girls in Toungoo and divided into two departments and began to teach the native Karen girls and Indian girls. Similarly the students from the Roman Catholic Mission School were also achieved the high level examinations.

The missionaries let the native hills tribes Karen people clear the land near Leiktho area and taught them coffee plantation. These coffee ranches were successful so that the native people had earned income. The villagers away from Leiktho area also came and studied how to plant coffee and brought back the method to their own place and implemented. The agriculture training school was able to open in Leiktho, Toungoo District.

In 1895 Bishop Tornatore invited the Sisters of Reparation from Italy and replaced the Sisters of St. Joseph on their mission works. Their mission was to taking care of the native ethnic tribe girls, open schools, caring the children and the sick and running clinics.

Mother Maria Amalia Nazari from the Sisters of Reparation arrived from Italy and became the first principle of St. Joseph School from 1895 to 1905.

The sisters were walked on foot through the tough path way to the hill and made their mission works for the Tribal people. In 1899 they were able to open the St. Francis Xavier Convent in Kyaungkone Village, Leiktho Township and Mother Nazari became the first superior.

By the efforts of the missionaries, the ethnic tribes around the Toundoo District became more civilized in a society. They were raised up from without scripts into literate people. It was very much fruitful for the

Hill tribes Karen people due to native teachers were able to produce. According to the 1900 census the Roman Catholic population in Toungoo District has 9330.

The educational activities of the Roman Catholic Missionaries in 19<sup>th</sup> century made higher to the education level and disciplinary of the schools in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The efforts of the missionaries for the higher and modern education based on the Christianity were guided by the Lord Jesus Christ.

They have privileged to evangelize in Myanmar through the invention of the ethnic writings to be able to teach Christian education. The good reputations of language of the Catholic Missionaries in Myanmar were the evangelizers of the Gospel through formulated the ethnic's language scripts.

By learning Christian education the students not only learnt spiritual literatures but also worldly literatures as well and helped to emerge the new phase of the education of Myanmar. Later, the modern schools were opened and giving higher education in Myanmar. The Sister's congregations were also run the schools for girls and in the name of Lord Jesus Christ they had served their best for development of all the ethnic tribes without distinction.