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A SURVEY OF LITERATURE ON CHRISTIAN MEDICAL MISSIONS IN MEGHALAYA

Research paper in History

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In Christian mission history studies, health or medical work is generally treated as a part of missionary activity and not a distinct activity on its own. As such, not too many historical works dealing exclusively with Christian medical missions are available. Godfrey E. Phillips¹ and Francis M. DuBose² lay down the theological basis and Biblical foundation of Christian missions in general and explain the missionary motive and attitude. Christian missionary work is essentially spreading the Gospel across different parts of the world. While DuBose's work makes no specific reference to medical missions, Phillips speaks of education and medical mission as "second line activities" which "have no justification unless they support the first line, which is evangelism and church building." Some Christian scholars³ however, try to show that health and healing are an integral part of the gospel, are present throughout the Bible and have always been a concern of the Church. The lectures published in a collection⁴ by the Edinburgh Medical Mission Society, the first established Christian medical mission organisation, also deal with the concept of health mission and the duty of the Christian health missionary. The idea of providing health care being a missionary duty is also reflected in Gillian Paterson's work⁵ on the CMC Hospital, Vellore.

The above are works representing the type that focuses on the motive of the missionary in

general and the medical missionary in particular. The study of Christian health missions also requires a look at the history of Christian missions in general. The focus of these works is on missionary activities which may not at all include medical work. Many works on Christian mission history contain nothing on medical missions. Two well-known works by J. Herbert Kane on mission history viz. *A Global View of Christian Missions from Pentecost to the Present*⁶ and *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission: A Panoramic View of Missions from Pentecost to the Present*⁷ as well as *A History of Christian Missions*⁸ by Stephen Neill make no reference to medical missions. The work of David Jenks contains references to missionary social service in Africa, the Far East, India, Iran and the Arab countries. However, education was the social service more concentrated upon than medical work.⁹ In the Indian context too, there are works on medical missions which make scanty or no reference at all to medical missions. S. Manickam¹⁰, George Kottupalil¹¹ and P.T. George¹² make scanty references to medical missions in their rather elaborate works on mission history. The absence of focus on medical mission is also seen in mission history works dealing with North East India. A work on the history of the Catholic Church in North East India edited by Sebastian Karotemprel¹³ contains no reference at all to medical missions. Stray references to medical work by missionaries are found in works by George Maliekal¹⁴ and Christopher Becker¹⁵. Nalini Natarajan¹⁶ dwells at length on the impact of missionary work on different aspects of Khasi society but made only incidental references to missionary medical work. The first volume of Milton S. Sangma's work on Baptist missionaries¹⁷ in the region refers to evangelistic work among Kalazar patients treated in Government hospitals by Baptist missionaries but there is no reference to medical aid. The absence or near absence of the medical work element in many works on Christian mission history is indicative of the fact that health care was not considered an evangelical tool by some missionaries, the early missionaries in particular.

There are a good number of works on Mission history making specific references to medical missions. One of the earliest works referring to medical missions is that of Charles Henry Robinson¹⁸ published in 1915. It describes medical missions as one method by which missionaries have sought to appeal to non-Christian races. It talks of medical work in China, India, Korea, other parts of Asia as well as Africa. Phillip Eichman¹⁹ briefly outlines the development of Christian medical missions in the world till the 1970s. C.B. Firth²⁰, in his work

on the history of the Church in India, briefly discusses the works of Christian missionaries in India on the medical front. Otto Wack²¹, writing on the work of German missionaries in southern Orissa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries makes references to the missionaries' contribution to education, development of literature and the printing press as well as medical aid. References to the rendering of educational and medical services by missionaries are found in the early works of the Welsh Presbyterian missionaries²², including one in Khasi.²³ A comparatively elaborate treatment of health missions is seen in the works of Frederick S. Downs²⁴ and O.L. Snaitang²⁵ as well as in the second volume of Milton S. Sangma's work on the American Baptist mission.²⁶ The inclusion of health care in works on missions represents a step forward in medical mission studies but the lack of detail and analysis reveals a huge lacuna.

The analytical component is discernable in Phyllis L. Garlick²⁷ who shows how medical work, initially not considered as part of missionary activity, came to be recognized an evangelistic agency by the end of the nineteenth century. Garlick's work is one among the few works that deal entirely with medical mission history. David Hardiman makes an analysis of medical missions in the world, the recognition of their importance in evangelism in the late nineteenth century, their growth till the 1960s and their wane post-1970. Walter Bruchhausen sought to explain the specific relationship between the mission hospitals and different other agents of health care in South East Tanzania in the last century. Hardiman's and Bruchhausen's works are part of a published collection edited by Mark Harrison et. al.²⁸ Another work, edited by Hardiman²⁹, studies medical missions exclusively, though not from the historical perspective. Echoing Garlick and Hardiman, Rosemary Fitzgerald³⁰ and Raj Sekhar Basu³¹ observe that in India the Christian missionaries realized the importance of health care to evangelisation by the end of the nineteenth century. Fitzgerald also makes an interesting observation that missionary medicine gained popularity in India in due course of time but at the same time, Indian patients largely rejected its religious component.³² Though medical missionary work involved women, there is a lack of separate treatment of their contribution. Basu³³ and Amena N. Passah³⁴ have made significant contributions by highlighting the role of women medical missionaries in their respective works.

In the context of North east India, specific works of analytical nature on medical mission history are lacking. Apart from Amena N. Passah, Dr. H. Ghonglah has written a paper "The

Church and Health Care in North East India” published in *Impact of Christianity on North East India*.³⁵ It deals in part with history of medical missions but dwelled more on other aspects of health care. Published books apart, a few papers on medical missions have been published in conference proceedings and journals. These include work on the Baptist medical mission in the region by David R. Syiemlieh³⁶ and Wati Imchen³⁷ and on the Welsh Presbyterian medical mission by Amena N. Passah.³⁸ An article by a scholar focuses on the impact of medical work by the Welsh Presbyterian missionaries on the traditional beliefs and practices of the Khasis.³⁹ The unpublished theses of Vihuli Sema⁴⁰ and Amena N. Passah⁴¹, dealing with the American Baptist Mission in Nagaland and the Welsh Presbyterian Mission in the Khasi-Jaintia hills respectively, contain sections on missionary contribution to society including the field of health care.

In this review, we may also include biographical works related to medical missions. One may get an insight into the early stages of Welsh medical missionary work in the Khasi-Jaintia hills from a work on the life of Dr. Griffith Griffiths who established a dispensary at Mawphlang in 1878.⁴² The biography of Dr. R.A. Hughes⁴³ is intrinsically linked to the history of the Welsh Mission Hospital now known as Dr. H. Gordon Roberts’ Hospital. Biographical works apart, the creative non-fiction work of Nigel Jenkins, *Gwalia in Khasia*⁴⁴, which dwells at length on the work of the Welsh Presbyterian missionary Thomas Jones and his colleagues, also throw light on Welsh missionary activity in the Khasi-Jaintia hills, medical service included.

From the above review of available literature, it is clear that though the study of Christian medical missions is an explored area, detailed research on the history of Christian medical missions in Meghalaya is yet to be undertaken and therefore this is a gap area.

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