

Chapter IV

METHODIST CHRISTIAN WOMEN IN BARODA

1880- 1980

As noted in the previous chapter, during the period of famine (1899-1901) there was a large-scale enormous conversion known as mass conversion of lower castes especially the untouchables into Christianity. Of course, they were illiterate and their essential needs were met by the missionaries at the very crucial time of famine. As a result missionaries became the only hope of survival for the poor unprivileged people and they turned to Christianity. But in Christianity they also found opportunity of renewal of life, a scope for education, equality and liberation from the yoke of the higher castes.

The missionaries of the Methodist church paid special attention to the lot of girls and women. As far as women of Baroda district and its surrounding villages was concern, medical and education works were immediately by opening up of orphanage, baby-folds, girl's primary and high schools. For domestic women different sort of home industries were found in order to make them self dependent. With the passage of time, the Christian women got education in the institutions and started getting jobs of teaching, nursing and other clerical and administrative jobs.¹

¹ Interview with Dr. Arvinda Chandra on 25.5.2006 at Vadodara.

By 1930s most of the Christian and Parsi women were working outside the walls of home unlike the caste women. As a result, they became more independent. They Church introduced the concept of equality of women. They were not only respected in their own families but in the society too. Therefore Christian women gradually came to enjoy social status little higher than the non Christian women.²

Conversion to Christianity resulted in the discontinuance of certain earlier cultural practices. Child marriages were condemned and stopped by the missionaries. In fact, the girls also in majority of cases come to exercise their choice in the selection of their mates. And slowly the inter-denominational and inter religious marriages also became normal.³

The missionaries succeeded in inculcating new gender values among the Christians and accordingly the converts stopped treating girls badly and never thought that girl child should be killed. The emphasis of Church on love for children removed any doubt on such issues.⁴

The role of young women missionaries in the improvement of the converted women was very important Miss M. Ferest, the first woman missionary arrived in Surat in 1876 and started a small dispensary for women in Surat and year by year this work grew until 1881 the visits of women and girls to the dispensary totaled almost 10,000.⁵ This work continued under Miss Roberts till 1888. It was estimated that more than 50% missionaries who came to India were from the women for Foreign Mission of Methodist Church of U.S.A. These women missionaries broke new

² Interview with Dr. Anupama Shah on 28.5.2006 at Vadodara.

³ Lancy Lobo, *Religious Conversion and Social Mobility*, Surat, 1991, p. 16.

⁴ Interview with Dr. Anupama Shah on 28.5.2006 at Vadodara.

⁵ R. H. Boyd, *The Prevailing world*, Belfast, 1952, p-67.

grounds on the mission field in the area of medical and education as Badley writes:

The strength and success of the work of the women's foreign missionary society has added very greatly to the development of the missionary program. In all lines of service they have carried on a work that has been as successful as co-operated with the Board of Foreign Mission most fully and happily (1930).⁶

Work of Christian Missionary Women in Baroda

The very early years when Methodist church initiated its work in 1880s, there were a number of anonymous women who played a remarkable role to give a good-shape to the Methodist Christian community by their valuable hidden and unrecorded services. Possibly the early work of women intended to strengthen the newly formed congregation by prayer, fellowship and need indeed. The recorded work of women came to light during the year 1889. Mr. and Mrs. Frease were sent from Bombay in 1888 to open work in Baroda.⁷ Miss Anna M. Thompson, the sister of Mrs. Frease, came later in the year in 1889. The US Women's Foreign Missionary Society appointed Miss I. Ernsberger, MD, the same year as its representative in Baroda.⁸

⁶ Domnik D. Israel, A Missiological Evaluation of the Methodist Church in Gujarat during the period of 1921-1987, 1989, p. 48

⁷ B.T. Badley, *Beautiful Gujarat: A Presentation Of The Work Of The Women's Foreign Missionary Society Of Methodist Episcopal Church In Gujarat Conference*, India, p-6. MTH Diss., Michigan: UMI 1989.

⁸ B.T. Badley, *Visions And Victories In Hindustan: A Story Of The Mission Stations Of The Methodist Episcopal Church In Southern India* Vol-II, 1931, p-712. The Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized on 23rd March, 1869 in Boston, U.S.A.



Dr. Ernsberger began her medical work in the city while Miss Thompson began Zenana work among the high caste women. Two dispensaries were opened in the city and the patients were visited in their homes. Dr. Ernsberger was succeeded by Dr. Miss Hodge. The village Christian community was making many calls for the doctor and Dr. Hodge then spent much of the time in going from village to village with her box of medicines and attending to the wants of the patients. To cater to the growing health the needs of people William Butler Memorial Hospital was built in 1906. A nurse's training department was also organized which has continued

to be a part of the hospital work under the supervision of the missionary nurses.

The Baroda school was begun by Miss Thompson in 1889 when four girls, daughters of two Christian families were taken into the missionaries' home. In 1902 the school became Anglo-Vernacular school.⁹ In 1907 it was carried on as a Co-educational scheme with Rev. A.C Parker as principal and Miss M.D. Crouse as vice principal. In 1915 the co-educational feature was discontinued as the Indian public opinion was strongly opposed to boys and girls studying together. In 1917 the new Webb Memorial School building for girls was erected.¹⁰

The city evangelistic work in Baroda was being developed under the leadership of Miss Thompson. Two or three families of sweepers were baptized in 1901 and then followed the baptism of groups of Dheds, 3000 at one time and 600 at another, thus in a few months thousands became Christians. Summer schools and training classes for Indian preachers later developed into Florence B. Nicholson School of Theology, where many women were trained for better service in the educational and evangelistic work.¹¹ The evangelistic work was conducted by means of pastor-teachers and women teachers and Bible women¹² supervised by the district superintendent and by the evangelist representing the Women's Foreign Missionary Society. Many former students of Webb Girls School became teachers, nurses and Bible women, but the great majority of the girls who

⁹ B. T., Badley , *Beautiful Gujarat* p-2.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p-6.

¹¹ *Ibid*. p-7, and *Official Minutes of the second session of the Bombay Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church held at Bombay*, Methodist publishing house, Bombay, 1893, p.23., 1894

¹² B.T. Badley, *Visions and victories in Hindustan*, Vol.-II, 1931, p-712.

finished their course in the school were reigning in Christian homes as beloved wives and happy mothers.¹³

Mrs. Parker was the first missionary appointed to the School of Theology. She was succeeded by Mrs. R. D. Bisbee, Mrs. F. Wood, Mrs. Linzell and Mrs. J. Lampard and each woman missionary had added her share to the development of this school which provided pastor teachers for the Christians in the villages of Gujarat.¹⁴ Gradually a continuous shortage of missionaries compelled the placing of responsibility on the shoulders of the Indian co-workers hence much progress was made to train local girls and offer them employment.¹⁵



¹³ *Ibid.*, pp 713, 716.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 720

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p 721

They were proposed for leadership and responsibility and became members of the W. F. M. S. of India. The missionary ladies exercised great power as they also handled finances along with all their duties. When the Indian women were ready to assume responsibilities they made them their co-workers. If the Indian women proved to be devoted and efficient leaders the missionaries willingly promoted them to be hospital superintendents, principals, managers and lady evangelists, the missionaries would step down and take the secondary place.¹⁶ This was the greater achievement of the W. F. M. S. and the Methodist church.¹⁷

In December 1940, when the Central Conference met in Delhi, the women delegates to the central conference assembled and organized the Woman's Society of Christian Service (W.S.C.S.) for India on the pattern of the W.S.C.S. of the U.S.A. The members of the women's conference played an important role in enlisting the rural and urban Christian women as members of the W.S.C.S.¹⁸



Starting out on the Evangelistic Campaign

¹⁶ *Encyclopedia of Methodist Women's work* p- 4

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p-5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p-9.

Women leadership came to be encouraged as Virginia Solanki and Tara Parmar were admitted as the first Indian woman to become members of the women conference in Dec. 1942. Many women became Bible-women in the conference.¹⁹

Mrs. Fisher was the in-charge missionary of the Baroda circuit in 1899. The workers conducted schools for women and children in their own villages, besides holding prayer meetings and doing special work among the women visiting them in their homes, influencing them for good. Miss E. H. Hodge, M. D. was doing Medical work in Baroda circuit. She was assisted in her work by Miss Nunan, Miss Neory, Metheebai Chita, and Tajeébai Dhula were the local Bible women.²⁰ In 1900 Sickness, suffering and death had been the order of the day. Early in the year an epidemic of measles lasting with intermittent vigor for almost a year broke out. In common with the other schools of Gujarat, they had cholera measles and in one case small pox as well besides ordinary diseases resulting from famine conditions.

During the year 1900 more than four hundred famine victims had been taken into the school. While many had died some had run away and a few had been claimed by their parents. There were two hundred and fifty children in the school. An additional bungalow had been rented, giving room for the number taken into the school. Miss Williams was the efficient co-worker in the work of the school.²¹

¹⁹ Domink D. Israel, *op.cit.* p.52.

²⁰ *Eighth Annual Report and Minutes of the Bombay women's Missionary Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Bombay*, Dec. 15-19, 1899, Bombay ,Methodist Publishing house, 1900, pp. 59-62.

²¹ *B.W.C.R.M.*, 1900, Baroda, Bombay Methodist Publishing House, 1901 pp. 35,36.



In the year 1901, thirty-five women workers had been at their jobs in the villages. The Bible women had gone from village to village in the circuits in which they were stationed, explaining and teaching the Bible to the Christian women and girls and looking after the work of the Evangelistic teachers. The evangelistic teacher had taught the schools in their respective villages and held meetings with the women.

Mrs. Frease had made seven trips among the villages and 1,330 people were baptized half of them in happened to be women. The Christian population in the district had increased to over 10,000 that year, of whom between 4,000 and 5000 were women and girls. More than 3,000 were ready and waiting for baptism, half of them being women and girls.²²

During the sitting of the 1900 conference Miss. Holmes was ordained as Deaconess of the Methodist Episcopal Church to among the Christians of Gujarat. She had personally visited fifty villages, conducting

²² *Ibid.* 1901, Jabalpur, Bombay, Methodist Publishing House, 1902, pp. 34-39.

gospel meetings with the help of a Bible woman. There was a considerable increase in the number of women and girls baptized in 1902. In the Baroda district, a number of famine boys were put under the care two of their women teachers in the boys' school. Personal contact with the people proved most effective especially the Gujarati women. The missionaries wanted to put before their women and girls an ideal Christian life.²³

In 1903 the Head Mistress of the Women's Training School, Jivibai Yusuf, had done excellent work. Sarabai Uttamdas was the assistant teacher in the school until October when she and her husband were appointed to the district work and Phulmanibai Kalidas and her husband were appointed to the school.

The Christian community of Padra and Warnama circuits numbered 1998. Thirty five Sunday schools were held in the circuit attended by 800 women and girls and 95 girls were enrolled in the day schools.²⁴



²³ B.W.C.R., 1902, Jabalpur, Bombay, Methodist Publishing House, 1903, p. 38-39.

²⁴ B.W.C.R., 1903, Baroda, Bombay Methodist Publishing House, 1904, pp. 26-27.

An important factor in the spiritual work by the missionaries was the work of women for and among women in 1907-08. The work of the three evangelistic missionaries Misses Holmes, Morgan and Austin contributed much to the general advancement of the local women.²⁵

The dedicated work of these young missionaries which left them exhausted leading to sickness and early deaths are reflected in the reports of W.F.M.S. for the years, 1909 to 1912. Miss Curts died leaving the southern villages uncared for, Miss Holmes returned to England on a furlough and Miss Morgan was laid aside for months on account of severe sickness. Thus no W.F.M.S. missionaries were available for the village work the supervision of this work fell on the shoulders of Mrs. A. A. Parker and Mrs. A. C. Parker who were already loaded with work.

Dora L. Nelson



²⁵ B.A.C.M., 1907, Bombay, Bombay Methodist Publishing House, 1908, p. 52.

During the year 1912, Miss. Dora I. Nelson was a missionary in-charge who was looking after the girls' school in Baroda which was passing through its transition stage for its new development. Miss Helen E. Robinson was the missionary in-charge of Boarding school (Girl's orphans) trying to make their girls more self supporting women by teaching them industrial work.²⁶

During the years 1913-1917, Miss Morgan had had charge of the women's village evangelistic work over the entire district and she was assisted by eighty-seven Bible women and sixty helpers in thirty eight schools. Like a ministering angel, she had passed from circuit to circuit, but repeatedly during the year had stated that the work was too heavy. She knew that without the constantly help and guidance of a lady missionary the Bible women of this district cannot minister to the people and if the women were not reached their efforts to help the people must be fruitless. As Cora L. Morgan was the missionary in charge of evangelistic work among the women in Baroda and Godhra city a pleasant and winsome personality amazingly learned Marathi and Gujarati languages which made her work more effective. She and her workers started teaching in day schools and also Sunday schools.²⁷

In 1922, Mrs. Lampard was carrying out a well arranged evangelistic work in Baroda. Miss Morgan had large plans for reaching the women and girls throughout the Baroda district. It was her desire to arrange in every village with Christians, societies which would be called 'The Women's helping Bands'.

²⁶ B.W.C.R. 1909, Bombay, Bombay Methodist Publishing House. 1909, p. 27, 37.

²⁷ B.W.C.R., 1913, p. 82 & B.W.C.R. 1917, Bombay, Mysore Wesleyan Mission press, 1918, pp. 11-12.



A Village Woman and her Educated Daughter

The object of these organizations was to instruct the women and girls in the real meaning of the Christian life and to lead them to the place of usefulness which God had for them. They felt that the whole future of the Christian church was largely what the women will make it. Unless the women help women help in purifying the church of the superstitions and errors of Hinduism the church could be purified. So they were anxious to enlist the women in this holy work by establishing women's helping bands in all villages.²⁸

In 1926, the work among the women and children was in charge of Miss M. V. Bailey. With her experience in the city work and with her winning way she was been able to open up work in many new homes. The Bible women had been faithful and besides conducting Sunday schools were

²⁸ G. A. C. R, 1922, p.37.

regularly visiting many of the homes to bring the gospel and its message to many a weary heart.²⁹ The Bible women's department worked under the guidance of Mrs. Bisbee. There had been 16 women taking the course and they had made a good progress at Florence B. Nicholson School of theology.³⁰ In 1928m the city evangelistic work was carried under the supervision of Miss E. Richards. The Bible women visited home and held meetings in the camp, Nizampura, Pensionpura. Old Station, New yard and in the neighboring villages. There were six Bible women engaged in this special service. During the year 1928-29 Miss Hanna together with her other duties had charge of the Bible women's work of the Baroda district.³¹

During the years from 1935 to 1956 the work for women in Baroda district continued the same pattern. The Women Foreign Missionary Society's work was more a part of the Gujarat Conference. There were 9 missionary ladies in the field doing good for the girls. There were 203 girls in the Baroda Girls Hostel of which 28 were received in the full membership of the church. Two girls of this Hostel were the daughters of a Muslim sub-judge stationed at Umreth. There were the non-Methodist girls living in that hostel and taking education in the Methodist Mission School. The village education and evangelistic work was well cared for by this women's society. The Butler Memorial Hospital gave good treatment to the sick and also trained Christian nurses for the welfare of the community. It was estimated that about 45 Nurses were graduated from the Nursing school of this hospital during the past 25 years. Methodist church was indebted to WFMS for its fine co-operation.³²

²⁹ *Ibid.* 1926, p.187.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 1927,p. 268

³¹ *Ibid.* 1928, Godhra, Madras Methodist Publishing House, 1929, p. 31.

³² *Ibid.* 1935, p. 185.

The W.F.M.S. trained the Bible women along with the men in the Florence B. Nicholson School of Theology Baroda. This was the only theological school in India where the women study side by side with their husbands. In few instances the women received higher marks than the men which disproving the old notion that Indian women could not learn that easily. Mrs. Parker contributed lot in the development of the Methodist women in this school of theology. Dr. Miss Samuel with the co-operation of Dr. Kulshestra enabled the Butler Memorial Hospital had continue rendering a real service to the people in 1950.³³

The Report of 1957 states says that one of the most effective methods of teaching is through an institute. Since the Christian church means Christian families and Christian families mean truly Christian women in the homes. The missionaries worked with the village women through holding four such teaching institutes. A total number of 71 women representing 28 villages had attended these institutes in Jambusar, Alasra, Narukot and Vasad. Religious teaching was given by Miss L.U. Dass while Ruthben Thomsbhai conducted the adult education classes through the evangelistic zeal of Miss Dass, there had been a new emphasis and an awakening among the women's societies. These eleven societies in the two districts were meeting regularly and had been studying the same small booklet, 'Jesus words to women'. Miss Dass had also been most enthusiastic in the sale and distribution of Christian literature.³⁴

³³ *Ibid.* 1935, p. 186.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 1957, p. 85

In the year 1959, two institutes were organized at Jambusar and Vasad. At both these institutes Christian women from villages attended and took great interest in the adult education, Bible study discussions and on home cleanliness. The Bible dramas like Ten Virgins, Lost Coin and Samaritan Women were played by the women. They also took interest in sewing and handicraft, garba and other indoor games. In Dora, the women of the village had organized Mahila Mandal (W.S.C.S.) and 10 women became its members.³⁵

In 1966, under the leadership of Miss Lucy U. Dass, a District Women's Society was organized. Other leaders such as Miss Esther M. Desai focused on Christian education while Miss E.C. Fairbanks emphasized on reading.³⁶

Mrs. Bauman, an American Missionary, was the pioneer to start vacation Bible school in Baroda church and also taking it to other churches in different villages of Gujarat during the years from 1967 to 1969. There was a total enrolment of about 200 children in these four Bible schools including a number of non-Christians. Miss Lucy Dass helped them in the holding of two of these schools. The Baroda church also held a vacation Bible school during the Diwali holidays, which was well attended and had a good response.³⁷

In the year, 1972-73, both the diwali and summer vacations were used in organizing the Vacation Bible Schools. This was a concentrated program of Christian education of about four hours a day for one or two

³⁵ G.A.C.R. 1959, Ahmadabad, Lucknow Publishing House, 1960, p.30.

³⁶ G.A.C. & G.W.C.R. 1966, Nadiad, 1966, p. 41.

³⁷ G.A.C. & G. W.C. R., 1967, p, 42.

weeks that included periods of singing and worship, of Bible study, of work and games. A team of teachers under the direction of Mrs. Bauman held these schools in four villages during the diwali vacation and in six villages during the summer vacation, particularly in villages which had never had such a Bible school before. Mrs. Bauman used to go to different villages to meet the people and to teach the women. In a village which was 35 miles southwest of Limbasi in the Bhal region they had organized three day institute for the women and with the help of a trained Bible woman of Mehmedabad they spent three full days teaching women classes and children's classes.³⁸

The education of Indian women was favored priority by the Christian missionaries for which purpose they founded primary and secondary schools; dispensaries, hospitals, nurses' training schools and teachers' training schools. They visited women in their houses and taught elder women how to read and made them literate. They gave education related body and health. They taught them handicraft work like knitting and canning, to make them self sufficient and prepared many women for missionary work and church activities.

Earlier in the U.S.A. there were two different parts, but became one in 1966 according to which male and female's works were merged. But this was not the case with Methodist mission in India as women conference in India continued along with the annual conference and there were highly qualified women members. This was very important and influential group. Later there

³⁸ *Ibid.* 1972, Baroda, pp-32-50

were some constitutional reforms by which women conference became less powerful. Now all the appointments were done by bishop. And budgets are mixed with mission's general work activities. According to the new system evangelistic work done by women in different villages of Gujarat fatally decreed. Some women took leadership and continued the old Institutions like Web Memorial Girls High School and girls hostel in Baroda. In the Methodist mission, the Mahila Mandal remained is within the conference. They used to hold retreat for fellowship and always remained successful in raising finance.³⁹

Religious Life of Methodist Christian Women in Baroda

It was during the last quarter of nineteenth century that rural dalits in many parts of India began to convert in unusually large numbers especially to protestant Christianity. Those mass movements mostly among illiterate and landless dalit agricultural laborers, continued right into the 1930s. The basic underlying motivation for conversion was the quest for dignity and respect, something which the converts discovered the Christian gospel gave them. Christian preaching was generally reinforced by placing a teacher in the villages where dalits were seeking baptisms. This man and his family provided leadership in creating village congregations as well as in helping dalits enter a new way of life and improve their situation within the village community itself.

The role which dalit women played in these conversion movements is largely unknown and requires scholarly investigation. Most of the women simply

³⁹ R.H.S. Boyd, *op. cit.*, pp.197-198.

accepted passively the decisions made by the men in their families.⁴⁰ The general pattern of women's involvement remains unclear. However, women were given Christian instruction along with the men. They were expected to give up old religious practices and adopt Christian practices instead as well as join in changing family lifestyle with regard to working on Sundays and eating carrion. One missionary commented that dalit women found it particularly difficult to give up using charms because these were all the women knew for the preservation of the life and health of their children.

Two things which the missions introduced touched the dalit women converts directly. The first was the visits of woman missionaries and particularly the many Bible women assisting those missionaries, who nurtured dalit women in their new faith, advised them on some of the practical problems they faced, and offered them genuine friendship. The second was the opportunities for the education of dalit children including girls, which the missions opened up. Village primary schools were the first step for the capable not only towards more education in the mission training institutes and secondary schools, but also towards occupational mobility and migration to the towns and cities. Wives of missionaries and wives of local preachers were used to teach the girls women in the villages. They taught and prepared the girls to become teacher or Bible women.⁴¹

The influences which religion exercises on a woman's self-image and identity are many and varied. Religious scriptures and traditions often provide believers with a moral and even divine justification for the status

⁴⁰ John C. B. Webster, Ida Swamidass, Deborah Premraj, Roshilda, Udaya Kumar, Chandra Yesuratnam, *From Role to Identity: Dalit Christian Women in Transition*, ISPCK, 1997, pp. 33-34.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp 35,36

and roles which society should assign to women. At the same time both religious beliefs and religious practices help to nurture a woman's own self image and sense of identity as a person. Moreover, religion can serve as a mirror in which woman can see their self understandings and aspirations reflected.⁴²

Most of the Methodist women in Baroda came from strong religious backgrounds. They attended worship services, Sunday schools, and vacation Bible classes regularly as children. They were taught Christian songs at an early age and had regular family prayers at home. They became Sunday school teachers during their adolescent years, in some cases their parents had laid strong foundations for their later religious life and set a good example for them to follow.

The major focus of Methodist women's religious life is the local congregation at the centenary Methodist church, Baroda. The local church provides fellowship in which personal problem and burdens can be shared. It is also a place of education and of social life.⁴³ Collective prayer meetings, Christmas and Easter dramas as well as Bible studies immersed the women in the Christian tradition as such activities offer direction and meaning for their individual lives, by exposing them to a wider world than that of the home and work place. The congregation's educational work also provides help to the family in bringing up their children within the Christian tradition. Some of the Methodist women have been involved in evangelistic work and are not afraid to discuss and even argue religious questions with those who hold differing views.⁴⁴

⁴² *Ibid*, p-80.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p-88

⁴⁴ *Ibid*. p.89.

The Methodist church thus seems to have helped dalit Christian women in their roles as wives and mothers. It has enhanced their social awareness, built up their self-confidence, and expanded the range of their experience and social concern. If it has not reinforced their sense of being primarily a role rather than a person, it has not been effective in giving them a strong sense of their own personhood. Their main priority appears to live a God-fearing life. They do not seem to have great ambition beyond educating their children well and enabling their families to occupy a respectable position in society. They are content with what they have. If an unforeseen misfortune occurs, they accept it as god's will. Thus, the Methodist church, Baroda as a place of worship, education service and social life appears to have played a vital role in their lives.⁴⁵

During the early twentieth century missionaries prepared the Bible women for evangelistic work in Baroda city and the district. Prominent among them were late Mrs. Chandibai, Nanibai Jethalal Masihi, Sumatiben Lawrence, Graceben and Surajben Chaturbhai Farmer.

According to Prof. Arvinda Chandra the Methodist church stressed regularity honesty and hard-work and these virtues helped a Christian woman to be a good student and to be a good teacher. Thus Christianity and Methodist church had contributed in her life as the Church turned out be the first institution which had shaped her life.⁴⁶

Mariyamben Dabhi, a lawyer, says that the Methodist church taught them the values of concentration, sincerity and social service and also encouraged them to go forward for progressive development. It was through

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p.91.

⁴⁶ Interview with Dr. Arvinda Chandra on 25.5.2006 at Vadodara.



the efforts of the church and missionaries that she got higher education and became the first woman lawyer in the Methodist society Baroda.⁴⁷

According to Prof. Anupama Shah, church life and personal life is very close. They used to attend Gujarati worship services regularly in the Methodist church of Baroda. If they wanted to go to the garden their father would insist them to go to the church first and then anywhere else thereby bringing the personal public preferences closer to the church life.⁴⁸ Kusumben Martinbhai Immanuel who was a teacher at Rosary school says that her life was shaped by the church through American missionaries who increased their faith. They learnt from Sunday school and revival meetings virtues like regularity discipline, hard work and honesty right since childhood.⁴⁹

Elizabeth Justinebhai Christie, a retired school teacher, says that she acted as the treasurer of the Mahila Mandal at local church and as Project Secretary in at the district level. These responsibilities along with her being a teacher made her a strong, responsible and independent person.⁵⁰

Hildaben Sharadbhai Varma a retired school supervisor, who also served the Mahila Mandal as president for 3 years echoed Elizabeth's sentiments sayingthat visiting deprived ladies, widows and providing them with daily needs like food, clothes, medicines made her a different person. Her faith in the human good increased and it was all due to the services revered as member of the church. According to Radhaben Jhadav the missionaries and the church were very kind and helpful to the girl students

⁴⁷ Interview with Dr. Mariyamben Dabhi on 15.7.2007 at Vadodara.

⁴⁸ Interview with Dr. Anupama Shah on 28.5.2006 at Vadodara.

⁴⁹ Interview with Kusumben Immanuel on 19.8..2006 at Vadodara.

⁵⁰ Interview with Elizabeth Christie on 22.8.2007 at Vadodara.

and women. They always encouraged women in their education and overall development.⁵¹

Sumitraben Winston Elliot expressed her gratitude to the church saying that when she was studying in missionary school in Baroda her fees was paid by the Methodist church through Bishop. Thus church contributed a lot in her development as later on she became a school teacher and a successful human being.⁵²

Dinaben was a teacher and lived in Baroda from 1948 to 1994. She was an active member of the Methodist church and was the president of Mahila Mandal for few years when she got the opportunity to helped the orphans, poor, widow, students, retired pastors. She also used to visit the Sayaji Hospital for helping the sick there.⁵³ Nirmala Christie a Sunday school teacher and superintendent and secretary of Mahila Mandal at Methodist church, used to teach crafts to various Methodist women including play Christian garbas and dramas.⁵⁴ Estherben Desai was engaged with Mahila Mandal activities in Methodist church Baroda while Lucy Dass was engaged with evangelistic work at Baroda district level.⁵⁵ Miss. Jesica Raijibhai Masihi wanted her community women to make their children spiritually strong by going beyond the formal education for the betterment of their whole life.⁵⁶

Education among Methodist Christian Women

Women in Gujarat from any caste did not enjoy much freedom. They were not allowed to have education. The disabilities and degradation

⁵¹ Interview with Hildaben Varma on 5.6.2006 at Vadodara.

⁵² Interview with Sumitraben Elliot on 2.2.2007 at Vadodara.

⁵³ Interview with Mr. Sole Christie on 17.3.2007 at Vadodara.

⁵⁴ "as per written statement in the questionnaire" dated 29.12.2007.

⁵⁵ G.A.C. & G.W.C.R.1966,p.41.

⁵⁶ Interview with Jesica Masihi on 10.11.2008 at Vadodara.

were largely due to orthodox religious teaching of many. In such a social atmosphere the women were generally confined within the four walls of home. In such circumstances Christian missionaries launched various programmes of women's development.

Rev. E. F. Frease, the American missionary of Methodist church at Baroda opened one school for girls in 1889. This was both a boarding and day school combined. In the beginning there were three girls only but the famine of 1900-1901 filled the girls' school known which came to be known as Webb Memorial High School.⁵⁷ This girls' school contributed greatly for the improvement of the local women of Gujarat especially those coming from the low castes women. Through education the missionaries slowly won the confidence of some sections of the people in their endeavor to fight against poverty, superstition idol worship and illiteracy.

According to Samuel Lawrence before conversion into Christianity, the condition of women in Baroda was very poor with regard to education. After becoming Christians women got education and started working and this credit goes to the American Methodist missionaries of Baroda Methodist church who started girls' school and boarding school for women in Baroda.⁵⁸

Methodist missionaries, thus, educated women gave them jobs and arranged their marriages gradually improving the condition of Christian women. The women came to be respected in the Methodist Christian society. Some generous women missionaries used to give poor girls' education fees. Daughters of widow were also given free ship. The contribution of Mr. & Mrs. Bauman was unmatched in helping the poor girl students.

⁵⁷ B. T. Badley, *op.cit.*, p-716.

⁵⁸ Interview with Samuel Lawrence on 3.10.2003 at Vādodara.

Anil Jaituni is of the view that due to education there was gradual liberalization in the Methodist society. Earlier, society was conservative but things changed especially due to education of woman. The females became free. She is free to do whatever she wants to do. Their husbands changed their views towards their wives and they respect them.⁵⁹

According to Prof. Anupama Shah, education and learning English was given importance among the Methodist Christians. In fact, her mother wanted to study but the elders did not allow. Many girls studied up to SSC while side by side they also learnt English. She and her sister Dr. Arvinda Chandra were sent to the USA for their higher studies, in these days. It could happen because of Christianity and the role of the church.⁶⁰

Radhaben Sadashiv Jadav and all her sisters studied in the Webb Memorial Girls School Baroda, where the missionaries used to give free books to the students. The school environment inculcated in them the Christian values and discipline.

There used to be a baby-fold near the Butler Memorial Hospital where people used to leave small orphan babies. American women missionaries working in Baroda used to bringing up those orphan girls and got them educated in the Webb Memorial School. Later those orphan girls started working, standing on their own feet, accepted professions like teaching, nursing and secretary.⁶¹

Notable educated women from Methodist community are many. Dr. Mr. Arvinda Chandra and Anupama Shah were the first women who became Professors in the Faculty of Home science of M.S. University of

⁵⁹ Interview with Mr. Anil Jaituni on 22.5.2006 at Vadodara.

⁶⁰ Interview with Dr. Anupama Shah on 28.5.2006 at Vadodara.

⁶¹ Interview with Radhaben Jadav on 22.9.2006 at Vadodara.

Baroda as they got then Ph.D. degrees from, U.S.A. Miss Sharlet Kunjrawya went to the Phillipines for her Ph.D. in medicine.

Radhaben Jadhav did her MA. & MEd. and became principal of the Godhra Methodist Teacher's Training School. Mariyamben Dabhi emerged was the first women Lawyer in Baroda from Methodist society. While Sharlet J. Dabhi did her Ph.D in Chinese medicine in the USA, Smita J. Chauhan became another woman Lawyer from the Methodist society of Baroda, Anita Thomas did her P.h.D. in Home science while Dipti Shah did her doctorate in Microbiology.

Sefali Jayant Palmer, Varsha Gurjar and Siddhi Macwan are working as lecturers in different universities and colleges. Several Methodist women like Kumudeben Palmar, Shardaben Varma, Elizabeth Christie, Nilaben Christian joined the profession of teaching. Most of the Methodist girls have graduated with their bachelors' and masters' degrees while several of them have pursued professional courses with diplomas and degrees.

One young Methodist woman Ms. Seema Shah has opened her own Garage in Baroda. She is the only woman in the Methodist society who is known as Automobile Girl of Baroda. She did her M.Sc. in Home science from M.S. University and did an automobile diploma from a private institution of Baroda. Her mother Prof Anupama Shah was once a Dean of the Faculty of Home science.⁶²

Most of the Christian women have experienced some discrimination at their workplaces. One such lecturer working in a college

⁶² Interview with Dr. Anupama Shah on 28.5.2006 at Vadodara

has endured sufferings because of her gender as she has consistently faced gender, caste, religious biases. Obviously the working with Christian missionary institutions in Baroda like did not face such discrimination.⁶³

Position of Single Women in Methodist Christian Society

There are many single women in the society. If they are confined to the four walls of home, people do not respect single women. But a single woman, whether she is unmarried, a divorcee or a widow, but who work outside with a good salary is respected. Dependence on others steals the dignity of any individual but it is more so with women. The Christian boys lag behind girls in studies. The highly educated girls find it difficulty in searching a good partner and in certain cases they don't want to marry. Once the working girls have stable and good jobs the parents and society also don't insist them to marry.⁶⁴ Such woman led independent life. But living as a single woman is not free from troubles; everyone is ready to take her for ride for which she has to be strong to survive the circumstances.⁶⁵ Single women are encouraged to work and mostly they become teachers. The Webb Memorial used to sustain many single women in teachers' quarters in the old times.

Most of the women respondents felt that the Christian women stand very highly as compare to women from other communities. They enjoy higher status and dignified place within the family and much greater status within the community and in the public at large. Christians don't have rituals where only married couple can perform conjointly. Single women are not

⁶³ Interview with Dr. Anupama Shah on 30.5.2006 at Vadodara.

⁶⁴ Interview with Hildaben varma on 5.6.2006 at Vadodara.

⁶⁵ Interview with Jesica Masihi on 10.11.2008 at Vadodara.

despised. Generally Christians think that single women make better career women as they don't have to spend much time for the family. During 1930's many Christian women remained at single and they were not looked down. Many women chose to be unmarried so that they could devote to work fully. Working women definitely have a good standing because it was never a taboo among the Christian. Their daughters also followed their mother's example as they grew up seeing their mothers work.⁶⁶

Marriage Life

Dowry system is not prevalent among the Methodist Christians. On the contrary, some people take bride price as a marriage expense to compensate for educating their girls. Bride price in a way was good as an indicator of value of daughters in the society unlike in the upper caste Hindus, among whom female infanticide was practiced.

The Church encouraged and enforced simplicity among Christian women. Wearing the expensive ornaments by women was always discouraged. The church also dissuaded its members from spending unnecessary large monies on social functions like weddings. The church also succeeded in decreasing the incidence of child marriage among Christians and the result is that now many Methodist women tend to get married late and more often they work outside the home. They bring greater maturity and independence to their marriages. The Christian women were unanimous in wanting to be understood and respected and expected their husbands to

⁶⁶ Interviews with, Dr. Anupama Shah, on 28.5.2006 at Vadodara and Dr. Arvindra Chandra on 25.5.200 at Vadodara.

be reasonable people. They want their own individual personhood and identity to be honored and even cherished by their husbands.⁶⁷

Life Stories of Some Christian Women of Methodist Church

Dr Anupama Shah

Anupama was born and brought up in the Methodist Christian family in Baroda. She did her M.Sc. and P.h.D. from Home Science Faculty of M.S.U. where she worked as a teacher reaching to the position of the Faculty Dean. Being a research oriented woman and educationalist; she has very progressive ideas for the woman's plight as she doesn't agree with the traditional values for women as were imposed by the society. She is critical of the old church laws respecting women. According to Dr Anupama, women should be appointed as ordain pastor because 50% of the population and they also take theological training. With the rise in women's consciences in the twentieth century, they also need a share in the religious leadership. Under such pressures the Methodist church in-trounced women ordination. There is one women pastor, Smita Rosia for the last 15 years serving with Ahmadabad Methodist church in Gujarat.

On the question of divorce, she is of the view that there should be equal treatment. The old Christians laws were favorable to men that except on grounds of adultery women could not have divorce. Laws should be equal for both men and women. Her sister Arvinda Chandra was the first Methodist Christian woman who went to U.S.A. during 1950 to do her M.Sc.

⁶⁷ Interview with Dr. Anupama Shah on 28.5.2006 at Vadodara.

and P.h.D. Christian parents educated their daughters because of missionary influence. Some people if they did not have enough money preferred to educate their boys rather than their girls. But her family was educated and encouraged their daughters to go abroad for higher education. Her father was a pastor and then became head-master in the Hill Memorial School. He was very progressive right from the beginning.

Her message for community women is not only to achieve the economic independent but to seek independence of mind for overall development of the individual, family, community and society at large. She added that some church leaders try to stick to old ways. The level of leadership was low. Once Arvinda Chandra was asked by the Director of Bible vacation school to cover her head if she wanted to go to church pulpit and read the report but she was not favour such command and accordingly refused to do so.

She counter questions St. Paul' command, for women's covering their heads at it symbolizes respect to God as if it means that men don't respect God? Lord Jesus never made such differences between men and women. Such laws as St. Paul's were added by the later societies and their leaders, only to control the women. Similarly, dressing and food habits should be changed in according to the changing times.⁶⁸

Dr. Arvinda Chandra

Arvinda Chandra was born in 1933 in a Methodist Christian family of Baroda. She did her M.Sc. in home Science and received her P.h.D. in U.S.A.

⁶⁸ Interview with Dr. Anupama Shah on 30.5.2006 at Vadodara.

She taught as a lecturer, became the departmental head and then the Faculty Dean of Home Science, M. S. University of Baroda. During her interview Dr. Chandra expressed her thoughts very openly and boldly shared her understanding about unpleasant role of the church due to its rigid doctrine about women. She does not believe in the existing rules and regulations and discipline especially pertaining women. She is critical of rules for women given in the New Testament as she says they were made for those times 2000 years ago and they could have applicable in there societies but change in time and space require changes in the rules as well.

Once, being the made chairperson of the Christian Education in the Centenary Methodist Church of Baroda she had to conduct the programme. The pastor gave her a hint that to read the report from the pulpit she had to cover her head. But she told the pastor that she has no intension of that woman never covering her head. If a women does not cover her head at home, she questions, why she needs to do so while talking to God. Even though St Paul might have issued commands for women of histories, they are irrelevant today; hence she will not abide by such rules. Even though she believes that we should be good in our behavior but the men should not make rules for women. Let the women decide for them. Women do not make rules for men's dresses why they should accept theirs. She says that the rules regarding women's dress should be challenged and changed. When women are professionals serving various sectors there is no need for them to keep quiet. In fact, women should be consulted by the priest and accordingly make policy chages.

Dr. Chandra believes that both man and woman are equal partners in marriage and there should be no question privileges of men. The modern women would not be able to accept the man's headship. They should be

considered as they are, as equal. She does not believe that man is 'such a figure' that nothing can be decided without 'his' approval.

Prof. Chandra is critical of church's rule of cancelling the membership of such Christian girls who get married to non-Christian boys. Even in cases where the girls wish to continue following the Christian faith such a hostile attitude of the church it discourages them to continue their Church's rules regulations Christian faith. She strongly feels that should be modified.⁶⁹

Mrs. Mariyamben Dabhi

Mariyam ben was born and brought up in a Methodist Christian family of Baroda. She is the first woman to become lawyer in Methodist Christian society and she has been working as a lawyer in Baroda for the last 38 years. She was a good speaker in her school and college and wanted to be a public professional and hence decided to be a lawyer. She is a brave and straight forward person. While working with non-Christian male lawyers, she never got scared and handled gender, caste and religious biases with tact and poise. She also took part in political activities with great courage and enthusiasm when Christians of Baroda encouraged her to fight against Anti - Conversion Bill introduced by the Govt. of Gujarat. As a leader of the church, she arranged many meetings amidst tense and threatening atmosphere. Many Christians and non-Christians supported her against this bill and succeeded in making the Government of Gujarat withdraw the controversial bill.

⁶⁹ Interviews with Dr. Arvinda Chandra, 27.5.2006.at Vadodara.

She was the first Christian woman appointed by government as the chairman of Baroda Nagar Prathmik Shikshan Samitin which capacity she helped many people for getting the Jobs. Because of her political activities the church came to appoint her as a Vice President of Judicial Council of Methodist Church in India (MCI).⁷⁰



Miss Seema Shah

Seema was born in Baroda, in 1974. Her father died when she was very young and brought up by her mother Dr. Anupama Shah, Ex-Dean of Faculty of Home Science at M.S.U. of Baroda. She did her M.S.c. in Food and Nutrition but she was highly influenced by the revolution in the field of automobile engineering and one day she decided to establish a car repairing Garage. To achieve that goal she joined the Institute of Automobile and Engineering Training School at Baroda. The members of Management Committee were surprised that a girl wanted to join the automobile course

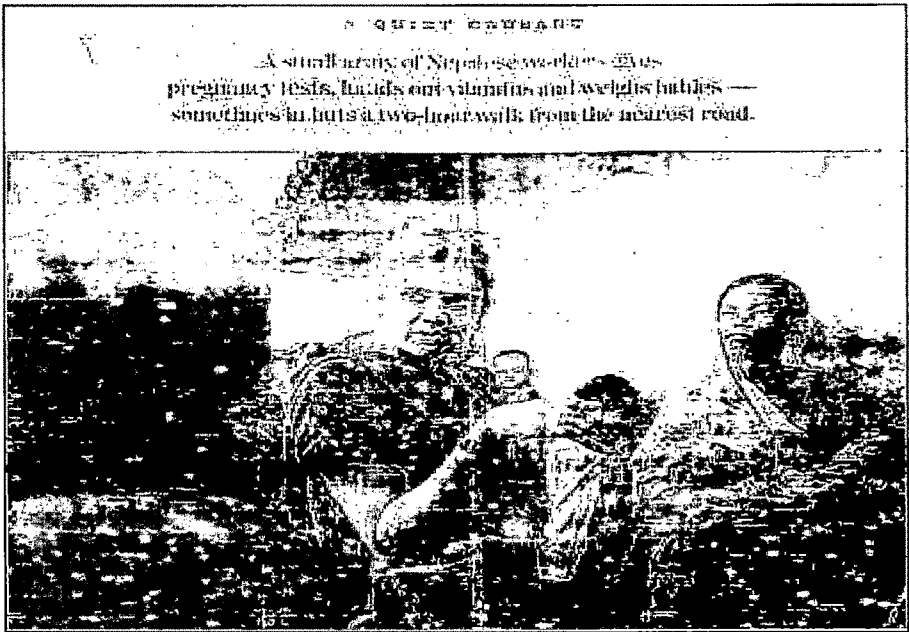
⁷⁰ Interview with Mariyamben Dabhi on 15.7.2007 at Vadodara.

as she happened to be the first woman who had gone for this course. Seema was the only girl in the batch of 120 boys. Being the only girl the boys used to harass her but she endured while challenging them and ultimately she accomplished her task. Her male students were shocked when she seemed the second rank in the class. After finishing her course she did her apprentice and training in a private garage and learnt all kinds of repairing work and pickup service training. Eventually she opened her own garage and workshop in March, 1999. Her successful work for the three years earned her sufficient credibility to launch a Maruti service station. In the 'only men profession she did not find any difficulty to run her service station. Workers are not allowed chewing pan and smoking in Seema's garage and the male workers maintain the required discipline here. Now her service station has 900 customers of which 85 are women clients. She keeps her garage very clean. No wonder Seema became a role model for other girls. One girl did her training at her garage and started a technical laboratory. She says that she would continue her garage 'dream machine' even after her marriage because garage was her life time dream.⁷¹

Dr. Parul Samsonbhai Christian

Parul Christian, daughter of Samsonbhai and Hansaben Christian, was born and brought up in Baroda. She did her M.Sc. and Ph.D. in Home Science from M. S. University. She has been working as a Health Supervisor with one American Company, for last many years in the rural areas of Nepal.

⁷¹ Vipul Bhatt, *Vama Vishesh*, May, 23, 2003, 'Automobile Girl Seema Shah'.



A project was first set up by researchers from the John Hopkins in 1987 to address the effect of Vitamin A deficiency in childhood mortality. Since then implementation that program reached nearly half the country, averting up to 30,000 childhood deaths a year from diseases caused by Vitamin A deficiency. With the efforts of Dr. Parul Christians the project expanded to include pregnant women, with daily prenatal vitamins and minerals.

She says that "The most satisfying aspect of my work is to observe women's awareness rise, it is also very rewarding to see their appreciation of my interest in their lives and health".⁷²

⁷² Johns Hopkins Public Health, 'Spring', 1999 p. 38.

The Christian women of Methodist church in Baroda experienced a variety of changes in their lives in the century of existence as Christians from 1880 to 1980. They were suppressed under the pressure of various power relations and social customs as they were also placed at the bottom of the Indian society. There was no question of education and awareness of their basic human rights because poverty and dependence of their families rendered them subordinate and vulnerable to all kinds of exploitation. But conversion to Christianity was to make some difference in their lives as they slowly came to realize the worth of their existence as human being who enjoys the equal status with men and other castes in the eyes of God.

The missionaries played an important role in educating the converts not only the Christian ways of life but also inculcating in them the values they brought with them from the west. Conversion to Christianity meant discontinuance of certain cultural practices and ways of living. The women missionaries played a leading role in the church's social work which was for the betterment of all group of people in society. By their restless efforts, they were slowly transforming society by providing new dimensions of work facilitated by founding the schools, dispensaries, hospital, training schools for nurses and teacher's training colleges'. They would train Bible women and organize evangelistic work, they would visit women in their homes and teach the adults how to read. They trained the women in handicrafts to make them self supportive.

Methodist women came to experience total freedom and right in their religious lives. They could participate in any religious activities and sacraments just like men. The freedom and equality in religious led to other freedoms.

Slowly through education provided by the missionaries women started working as teachers, nurses, typists, clerks and secretaries. With better education in the second half of the twentieth century, many women professionals like doctors, lecturers, engineers, social-workers, lawyers, and also entrepreneurs. The status of women within the church community tremendously improved as was the case within their families. But the same was not true of the large society. The Christian woman continued to be considered as low by the upper caste Hindus. But as there was general advancement of Indian society at large the older prejudices and discriminations weakened and the Christian women came to acquire respect and dignity which was a radical different scenario from the late nineteenth century before their conversion to Christianity. A number of Methodist women as 'achievers' scaled the social heights and served as role models for the young girls. The next chapter has highlighted such achievements reflecting the contribution of the church and modern institutions.