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## **Churches in Odisha: A Comprehensive Study**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*The world is a store house and everything is available so anybody can search for anything in this world. The world witnesses of having multi kinds of things, ideas and ideologies. The present world is composite of multi- society, multi-habits and multi-practices on the basis of time, region and peoples. Religion is one of them which have multi practices by multi-practitioners and Christianity is one of the major religions of this world having its multi-character and multi-practitioners. Though, Christians are fractioned into denominations still then they unite under single platform of different places for religious activities. That is known as prayer houses or churches. After occupation of Odisha in 1803 by the British, Christian missionaries came to this land and propagated Christianity among the peoples of this region. Within two hundred years of Christianity in Odisha, this religion gradually developed and spread all parts of Odisha and became one of the rapid developing religions. Church is the key stone of this religion which have a separate identity in this province. In this paper a humble attempt will be made to discuss various aspects of church and role of church for growth of Christianity in the state as well as this paper will focus about the physical structure of church in Odisha.*

**Key Words:** Church, missionary, Christian, Religion, Odisha

### **INTRODUCTION:**

World is a stage of multi habits of food, cloth, culture, custom, tradition, usage, language and religion and out of this multi habits, religion is one of them which is deep rooted in the minds of common peoples of Odisha in particular and world in general. Odisha is a village and tribal based state in India. Most of peoples are living in villages and tribal areas of Odisha. From 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BCE to Indian independence peoples have different taste of different

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religion. A numbers of religion have its origin and development like tribal religion that was/is worshipping to different objects of nature. The tribals worship sometime in their houses and sometime identified places. The Jainism and Buddhism gradually developed in Odisha and followers of this faith constructed Jain caves and Buddhist Shrines for worship and ritual. The Hindus have been constructed temples in the name of Gods and Goddesses and worshipping. The Muslims came to Odisha after second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and with the growth of Muslim population they have also constructed Mosques for worship to Allah. The Christian missionaries entered into Odisha after second decade of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Within span of two hundred years of missionary history in Odisha speaks lot things about the many aspects of this land. They also constructed houses which known as churches where they pray and worship to Jesus Christ.

#### **DEFINITION AND MEANING OF CHURCH:**

The word “church” designates the liturgical assembly, but also the local community or the whole universal community of believers. These three meanings are inseparable. The Church is the People that God gathers in the whole world.<sup>1</sup> Church is a building uses for religious activities and particularly worship services. The Church indicates a building where all Christians gather for prayer services. The term Christian Church is in one understanding does not refer to a particular denomination. However, the majority of Christians belongs to groups that consider them to be the one true church to which other Christians do not in a full sense belong. The three largest such groups are the Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Communion. Thus, some Christians like Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox identify the Christian Church with a visible structure while General Protestant Christian understand it as an invisible reality not identified with any earthly structure. The other equate it with particular groups that share certain essential elements of doctrine and practice though divided on other points of doctrine and government such as the Branch theory as taught by some Anglican.<sup>2</sup>

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## **DEVELOPMENT OF CHURCHES IN ODISHA:**

The Church is a house where Christians are gathering for prayer and it is believed that the house of Gods. The concept of church in Odisha developed after coming of Christian missionaries to this land and established mission stations in 1822 and Mission Academy in 1846AD.<sup>3</sup> There were no Christians in Odisha before 18<sup>th</sup> century but only British Officials who were Christians. The missionaries came to Odisha to propagate Christianity among the people of Odisha through providing health and education facilities to the poor Odias. Christianity developed slowly and gradually with the development of Christians in this land. The development can be measured into two aspects such as *quality and quantity*. The *quantity development* can be estimate with the availability of infrastructure of Christianity like the church buildings and related buildings which uses for church activities and also the numbers of Christian who practices this faith. The quantity development of church can be concluding with the development of churches and increase of Christian population of all denominations in Odisha. The *quality development* can be evaluated with the deep practice of Christianity by the Christians as well as the development of spiritual life of Christians of Odisha.

The church development started when the first conversion occurred in Odisha with the conversion of Mr. Gangadhar Sarangi, the first Odia Brahmin<sup>4</sup> who took Baptism in Christianity and declared himself as a Christian and begun to propagate Christianity by preaching Bible and telling against prevailing practices of Hinduism in Odisha. The missionaries of various Christian denominations like the Particular Baptists, the General Baptists, the American Freewill Baptist, the Evangelical Missionary Society and the Roman Catholics were engaged in preaching and teaching of Christianity in Odisha.<sup>5</sup>

With the efforts and labour of Christian Missionary Societies and Missionaries, Christianity developed rapidly in Odisha and at present it became a popular religion in Odisha with the total number of 8,97,861 out of which 4,43,245 male and 4,54,616 female.<sup>6</sup> The above mentioned missionary organizations like the General Baptist Mission established its mission stations in Cuttack(1822 ), Puri (1823), Balasore (1825), Piplee(1849), Berhampore (1836), Ganjam(1840), Padri-palli and Russelkonda(1861), Khondstan and Loisingha(1893),

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Telanpalli(1897) and Aska(1899). The American Free-will Baptist Mission had its stations at Balasore(1865), Jellasore(1840), Mitrapore(1855), Santipore(1865), Chandballi(1885), Bhadrak(1890) and Contai(1892). The Roman Catholic had their stations at Cuttack(1850), Balasore(1866), Nagalakata(1879), Surada(1853), Dantilingi(1854), Berhampur (1855), Kattingia(1883), Gopalpur(1896) and Mondasoro(1900).<sup>7</sup> The establishment of above Christian mission stations says that there is a development of churches with the development of Christian population. Every mission stations have its church for prayer and religious activities of local Christian people. Church is the center place of Christians of all denominations where all religious and social activities are done with the participation of all believers under the concerned church.

#### **PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF CHURCHES:**

Though the meaning of church what we have discussed above as church is a body of Christ and church itself Christ but in general church is a prayer house where Christians or believers of Christ come to pray.<sup>8</sup> The word Church often refers to the physical building in which Christians met for worship. This notion of Church derives its meaning from the Greek adjective *kuriakos* meaning belonging to the Lord.<sup>9</sup> Its fuller derivative would have come from the Greek word *kuriakon doma* which translated means the *Lord's house*. However, the word used in the scriptures is *ekklesia* which translated from the Greek word means an official assembly of people. The primary reference of *ekklesia* as an assembly of worship is in the New Testament<sup>10</sup> and the use of the word is extended to refer to the community of the faithful in any give place. Church could therefore be defined as a community of Christians established in a particular locality and accustomed to meet regularly together for worship. This definition of the word Church will be the focus of this model. However, the physical structure of Church buildings will be considered in one activity titled, Designs of Churches under the module organizer Cultural Influences of Structures. The church as a building for worship, not the broader definition of Church as an official assembly of people. The building which we call a church is the house of God. As the house of God our father, the church is also the house of his children.<sup>11</sup>

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The Church structure of any kind expresses socio-economy status of the people of concerned locality. It may be ancient, medieval or modern structure of any nations of this world speaks about the ideas and thoughts of the people of that age. Churches developed in Odisha after rapid growth of Christian population. The Christians of various denominations have been constructed churches in Odisha for their prayer and religious activities. From local prayer house to diocesan prayer house all called as church of various size and shapes. The Roman Catholic Churches are different in structure and design inside and outside of Church but other denominational churches are not like that of Roman Catholic churches. In my field study it is seen that the Roman Catholic Churches in villages and Mandalis are not structured at par with the Parish and Diocese churches of Roman Catholic in Odisha. The Churches of most of denominations are very simple in design. The Churches in villages of Odisha are made up with mud and roofing with straw and some churches have been constructed with bricks walls and tin roofing. Most of the village churches have only one entry and exit door and having some windows and some Churches without windows. Most of Christian peoples of villages opine that financial constraint never allows them to build up decorative churches in their villages. There is only one table and chair to use by the village preacher and all Christian peoples are sitting on floor to facing Preacher.

The Churches of Parishes and Dioceses of Roman Catholics are very attractive and decorated nicely. Even the churches of other denominations in urban areas are also very nicely decorated having sitting arrangement for believers of that church. The Roman Catholic Churches are different than the other denominational churches in Odisha. Most of churches have its boundary and there are cross mark made up with wooden or with bricks on the both side of entry gate of the church. There is huge cross mark in the top of the front side of Churches. This mark says that the house is a church. The Parish and Diocesan Churches of Roman Catholics are uniquely structured in Odisha. In the entrance door of church is placed a stoop or Vessel containing holy water. While the Roman Catholic Christians enter, they may dip the extremities of the fingers of their right hand into this holy water and make the sign of the cross which indicates purification before enter into the churches.<sup>12</sup> The major portion of church is the Altar. The church is built mainly to house and protect the altar which is for the sacrifice. The walls and roof of the church are erected to protect the altar and to group

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together the faithful who join in the worship of God. When the church functions going on, Catholic Christians should try to occupy a place from where they can see the altar and follow the service.<sup>13</sup>

The tabernacle is situated in a conspicuous place of inside the church. A *tabernacle* means originally a tent or dwelling place in which reserved the *blessed Eucharist*, the sacred Presence of Christ. A lamp or light is kept burning before the blessed Eucharist, in front or beside the tabernacle, as a mark of respect. A crucifix stands on the altar, above it or close to it, to remind Christians the passion and death of Christ. On one side of the altar is erected a pulpit or stand which serves *for the proclamation of the Word of God*. From there texts of Holy Scripture are read and explained to the congregation. In Roman Catholic Church it is found that there are one or several confessionals. A confessional is a special seat which the priest occupies when penitents approach him to accuse their sins to obtain forgiveness in the sacrament of penance. Statues representing Christ, our Lady, an angel or saint may be placed above the altars. Especially inside walls of Catholic Churches are fixed the Stations of the Cross. These are fourteen pictures representing the various phases of the passion and death of Jesus and in every Parish Churches have bells. The bells call the faithful to holy Mass and other religious functions.<sup>14</sup>

#### **ACTIVITIES IN THE CHURCHES:**

The Church promotes an individual's and munity's journey towards the reign of God. Many Christian Churches also focus on their advocacy for peace and justice. This area of Church activity is faithful to the example of Jesus' care for the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed. The Church extends religious and social activities of the believers under its purview. The Church is the center place of Christians where they come to prayer to God for blessings. The Holy Scripture (Bible) read and explained to the believers. Most of the religious activities are done in the church. The Sacraments like Baptism, confirmation, the holy Eucharist, Communion, marriage are done in the church.<sup>15</sup>

The first and foremost activity of church is to channelize the faith holder about the preaching and teaching of Jesus Christ through the process of reading and learning of Bible. Including Sunday Prayer, there are so many religious feast and festivals held in the church where all



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Christians participate. The Bible reading and preaching is mandatory in every function held in the church. Secondly, education is another important aspects of church activities through which missionaries try to mobilize common people towards education.<sup>16</sup> Unless education, common people could not be able to understand on Christ and Christianity. So, whenever and wherever missionaries established churches, then there they have established school for education of local boys and girls. Thirdly, it is seen in my field visit that the most of Roman Catholic Parishes are attached with convent Nuns (Sisters) for girl's education including medical facility to the poor people of that areas. The medical services are one of the major activities of missionaries in remote and tribal areas of Odisha where peoples are far away from modern medical services without having financial power to access.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Truly the church is the house of God and the house of his people. The church is not only the prayer house but also it is a center of transformation of an individual into complete human being. Though, Odisha was unknown to this religion but within span of two hundred years of Christianity it became one of the major developing religions of the state at present. The role of church is very important in the field of education and health services as well as eradication of evil social systems like Human Sacrifice (Meriah), Child marriage, Sati and Caste barriers. The love, affection, cordial behave, simple living and selfless services of missionaries attracted suppressed, oppressed, Dalits, tribal and poor and common mass towards teaching and preaching of Christ and they became Christians in the state. When the numbers of Christianity increases, the churches built up for them.

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