



A Missionary with Intentions to Improve Indian Society: The Role of C.F. Andrews in

Indian Social Transformation

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Abstract:

With the advent of the colonial rule in India, the Christian Missionaries also came along primarily to convert people to Christianity. But C.F. Andrews was a missionary who merely did not have an evangelical spirit, but also pondered over the plight of the Indians and did his best, through his activities and writings to ameliorate the conditions of the Indians, especially the hapless and lower-caste people. The research paper, “A Missionary with Intentions to Improve Indian Society: The Role of C.F. Andrews in Indian Social Transformation”, aims at probing the role of C.F. Andrews in modernizing India as well as in making its society a pragmatic one.

Keywords:

British, C.F. Andrews, Caste, Education, Imperialism, Indian Society, Missionaries
Social Transformation, Social Reform.

Many Christian Missionaries came to India in their mission to “civilize” the Indians. But C.F. Andrews was one among such foreign missionaries who took keen interests in Indian social life. He did contribute a lot to its reconstruction through his writings and related activities. Andrews understood Indian cultural traditions because he could defy or conquer the limits of culture and caste tradition (Shrimali, 1971). He grew up in such an atmosphere with such virtues that filled him with feelings of love and service to humankind.

He found that methodical socialism was as distasteful as capitalism as he thought that both of these tended to disrespect human personality (Marjori Sykes and B.D. Chaturvedi, 1967: 31). Andrews had an unshakable belief in men, even apparently worthless men (John S. Hoyland, p. 11).

Contrary to a typically British and Christian Missionary thinking, he did not look upon Indian society and prevalent social customs with contempt. He firmly believed that there was an element of goodness even in the most reactionary and deprived system. Thus, along with criticizing the social evils, he tried to develop public consciousness against them. He also praised the positive elements simultaneously. He wrote, “We cannot simply ignore all this that is going on openly (humiliation of India and Indians) under our eyes—often with political motives behind it” (C.F. Andrews, 1939: 20). He further said, “There must be provided some simple antidote to these deliberate assaults upon the fair name of India which we are bound to defend.” He reacted against those books that had described Indian customs and social evils in a feeble light. Andrews thought that every society necessarily had to pass through a rough period. He felt, “It is indisputable that more than a century ago, in the days of Ram Mohan Roy, the decay of ancient Hinduism had become almost complete” (Andrews, 1939: 20). Indian society was on the path of progress.

C.F. Andrews adopted a two-way strategy; 1. to campaign against the social evils in India and 2. To counter the misconceptions about Indian society in the West. Due to these misconceptions, westerners considered the question of Indian freedom lightly.

Andrews believed that before achieving its political goals, it was necessary to respect Indian culture and its expectations in the West (K.M. Shrimali, 1971: 5). However, he did not close his eyes to reality and fought against the Indian social evils. He wanted “to be bound up with the life of India in every respect, ... to be among them as one of themselves, and not an alien and a foreigner” (Nicol, Macnicol, 1944:31).

In 1907 he played an essential role in getting an Indian (S.K. Rudra) appointed as the Principal of the St. Stephens College. By doing these, he had set his foot on the realm of India’s vindication. He firmly believed in the golden rule of Christ: “Do to others what you expect to be done to you.”

While travelling in India, he came to know the accurate picture of British imperialism. He “watched at close quarters, the rigid determination of English men, to create at all costs, a white domination- from which colours, races shall be, as far as possible, excluded” (Andrews, 1922: 3). He saw that the system of competitive examinations had brought such people to India who had no interest in this nation.

C.F. Andrews considered British racial discrimination and Indian caste discrimination as the same type of evil. It pained him deeply, and he wrote, “This was an issue as wide as humanity - the breaking down of the white ‘race supremacy’ which I hold to be the greatest menace on earth today, and the most potent incentive” (Andrews, 1922: 43). He

found that even the missionary society was involved in such an attitude. Andrews, however, was deadly against the 'colouredridden Christianity'. He saw the hardening of 'White-Race, idea everywhere among the English. He observed, "India cannot remain within the British Empire with that position hardening and stiffing like ice all around her till she is stiff and dead with cold. We must get outside and feel ourselves freeman or alas perish"(C.F. Andrews, Letter to Gandhi, 11-09-1920).

C.F. Andrews thought that unless Indians are free from social and domestic bindings, their case of political freedom will remain weak. He found that wrongs had been done to India. He wanted to "break down every middle wall of partition between man and man".

Regarding religious conversions, he was unhappy and wrote, "I found in missionary efforts as they were carried on in India, the conventional touch of a religious imperialism"(C.F. Andrews, India and the Simon Report, p. 115).

Beforecoming to India, Andrews had studied a lot about India. He could witness several social evils that were prevalent. Though he wrote to launch any large-scale movement against these evils, by spreading his ideas through writings, he tried to bring some reforms.

He had to walk on a challenging path. On the one hand, he fought with racial dissemination from the Britishers. On the other hand, Indians also hated the British. Once C.F. Andrews touched a vessel used by his Hindu students. While describing the impact, he wrote, "I saw the Hindus glancing at one another and realized that I had done something wrong. When I

enquired about it, I found that the vessel I had touched, could now be used again by the students”(Marjori Sykes: 163).

Untouchability was another social evil that had plagued Indian society for a long time. Andrews tried his best to eradicate this practice. He wrote, “The Indian goal of independence is clear to us. We must begin side by side with our own claim, a claim for the independence, if I may call it, of the untouchable.”(Young India, 24-11-1920). He thought that unless untouchables are given rights, political freedom was meaningless. He said, “50 to 70 million of untouchables whom Indians themselves will not admit to equality. ... India might have independence tomorrow if the untouchable problem were solved”(Young India, 20-10-1920). In a meeting, he asked the students to stand against this evil. He declared that till there are millions of depressed untouchables, it would be challenging to attain freedom. India could be a country of dreams if it did not give freedom to its Dalits.

Andrews started service of untouchables at St. Stephens College itself. He asked his Christian students to follow his example. Many students started helping the sweepers working in the college. Though the conservative people were watching all these activities in their dismay, he even inspired many of his students to live in the areas near the sweepers’ colonies.

During his visit to South India after 1917, he saw the horrible face of untouchability. The caste system was very rigid in these areas. Andrews wrote, ‘Their faces told me by the lines of suffering the truth of their tale (C.F. Andrews, 1949: 172). He found that in Travancore, even the Church itself was not free from this evil practice. According to Andrews, “I have even in the past been interested partners and have countenanced ‘untouchability’ in practice” (Andrews, 1949: 175).

Andrews wholeheartedly supported Gandhi Ji's movement for the upliftment of untouchables of Travancore. He observed, "But alike among Hindus and Christians, along the Malabar Coast, this evil is still terribly prevalent, and sights may still be seen even today that would shock human hearts"(Andrews,1949: 176). For him, this was equivalent to the practice of racial superiority practised by the whites. Slowly situation began to improve, and C.F. Andrews found the millions of depressed people rose against the injustice committed against them. This was supported by many upper-caste Hindus who had liberated themselves from the evil bondage of the caste system. Andrews wrote,"At last it is offering to these millions of outcastes an honourable place within the social order ... the whole outlook is changed radically"(Andrews, 1939: 148).He advised the Church that it was indispensable for the Christians to put their own house in order.

The political use of untouchability was also present. Andrews thought that political use of this practice was a thoroughly demoralizing expedient.

The British, led by Macaulay, believed that the Indian education system was worthless and modernized on the western educational model. But Andrews had quite a contrary view concerning Indian education. He thought,"Indian past is no blank page. It is rather like an illuminated manuscript"(Andrews, 1912: 38). Though there were some shortcomings, they could be amended. He observed, "To neglect the past of India is to fail to utilize the deepest springs of India national life"(Andrews,1912: 38).

Andrews thought that there are some benefits of founding universities on communal lines. However, in India, the situation is very complex. He found that the Hindus and Muslims would be drifting further apart when educated separately.

He found education as a powerful tool for the development of India. He thought that if education were ignored, it would be like putting the foundation of modern India on the shaking sand.

He felt that the system of government and aided schools and colleges had failed grievously. He opined that under a foreign yoke, education could be used for political benefits commenting on the famous Rislely Circular in 1907. He wrote, “it insisted that teaches should not be permitted to discuss current politics with their own pupils” (Andrews,1921: 33). Without bothering about the government’s unhappiness, St. Stephens College decided to disobey this circular;C.F. Andrews played an essentialrole in this decision.

On one occasion, Andrews found a government spy who was searching his private papers. When questioned, the spy admitted that he was sent to spy upon C.F. Andrews.This angered Andrews greatly, and while reacting sharply,hewrote, “It has meant the prostitution of true education to serve the foreign government”(Andrews, 1922: 52).

C.F. Andrews found that women illiteracy was a significant hurdle in the progress of India. He was a strong supporter of women’s education. He thought that the dead hand of customs was so heavy that Indian fathers neglected their primary duty to educate their daughters. Illiterate women had become only the means of physical pleasure for men. He knew that the uneducated mothers were not able to teach their girl children. Instead, they taught them about fabulous legends and old-world superstitions. However, as time progressed, Andrews observed clear signs of new desire among the women of upper classes for education.

Andrews was against the custom of the Purdah system as well. He thought, “the purdah, by its cramping and confining atmosphere, kills both body and soul” (Andrews, 1939: 137). He opined that it should be removed at the earliest. Once public opinion was formed against it, formal legislation would be required to eradicate this social evil.

Andrews condemned the custom of Child Marriage also. He found the force of public opinion turning against this cruel practice. He noticed that every reform movement (Hindu) in India had advocated its removal. Along with this, Andrews also condemned the practice of the Devdasi system prevalent in some parts of the country. He tried his best for that to be eliminated.

Andrews took a keen interest in opposing the opium trade. He found that there was a sharp rise in revenues from the export of opium. He considered that to earn some money, poisoning people with opium was immoral and inhuman. In 1924, he persuaded the Congress leaders to pass a resolution against the government’s opium policy. The Indian National Congress appointed Andrews to enquire about the harmful impact of the opium trade in countries like Malaya and Burma. He studied this problem intensely and tried to create public opinion in this regard. At his request, a committee was formed in England to publish official information concerning the opium trade.

He found that with the spread of awareness, people were getting determined to do away with the evil of opium. He prepared an article to help in debate in the Legislative Assembly and Council of States in 1925. Soon many states came forward and enacted laws with effect to ban this trade. His efforts and the spirit of struggle behind his anti-opium steps always inspired others.

Andrews also worked against the practice of Beggar, which was prevalent in Rajputana and some hilly states. In this connection, he reached Kotgarh and wrote that the terms of Beggar were so harsh that the villages could not get rid of this practice. Andrew met the District Commissioner of Kotgarh, who took positive initiatives in solving the problem. He agreed upon the view that no villager would be asked to perform Beggar regarding postal activities.

It is evident from the above description that after coming to India, C.F. Andrews tried to understand Indian society very closely. He tried to eradicate prevalent social evils as well. He watched and experienced the Indian lives very closely. He found that a lot of outdated customs had gripped society with its orthodoxy and superstitious practices.

Though Andrews did not launch any movement against these evils but by his ideas, writings and other activities, he tried to better the situation. For him, there was no scope for any further activities as well. Though Indian society was progressing, any foreigner's interference in their social matters was not considered encouraging by Indian people. It was the impact of his personality that Indians did not oppose him as well. Or otherwise, also Andrews adopted a very balanced approach in social matters.

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