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Charles freer Andrews: The Renaissance man

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Abstract

Charles Freer Andrews has played a very crucial role in highlighting the condition of the masses, not only in India but also in the colonies that were under British rule. Charles Freer Andrews was a British citizen, an Anglican priest, a social worker who gave his entire life selflessly for the service of the poor and downtrodden. He who was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's quest for freedom. This paper attempts to highlight his background and upbringing that played a major role in shaping his thinking and approach to society and his reasons for working toward the betterment of the downtrodden. The paper encompasses the life and works of Charles Freer Andrews, who is better known as Deen Bandhu.

Keywords: Independence, national movement, indenture

Introduction

Several Protestant missionaries, either independently or attached to societies, agencies or missions began arriving late in the 18th century in India and precipitated a revolution by preaching the Gospel and winning Indians to Christianity. They branched out to different parts of India in order to serve India and its people. Much of the social and cultural renaissance and reform that took India by storm in the 19th and 20th Century was due to the reforms in education etc., advocated by these Christian stalwarts. They also played a tremendous role in India's struggle for freedom by influencing the makers of the new India. One such missionary and prominent personality was that of Charles Freer Andrews.

Early Life of C. F. Andrews

Born on February 12, 1871, to John Edwin Andrews and Mary Charlotte Andrews, a Catholic Apostolic family, in Newcastle – upon – Tyne in the north-east of England, he was one of the fourteen children. His father was a minister of a small sect known as the Catholic Apostolic Church. He spent his boyhood in a family atmosphere of “close prayerful fellowship and mystical aspiration...” (Fern:64) He spent his youth in Birmingham and went to King Edward VI School after which he graduated from Pembroke College, Cambridge, in 1893. At the end of his studies, he resolved to work among the poor. Andrews began his apprenticeship in the Pembroke College Mission in London, after which he was ordained to the ministry of the Church of England. Later, an offer made him return to Cambridge as a Fellow.

During his Cambridge days, he held many intimate conversations with Bishop Westcott of Durham, whose four sons were serving in India as missionaries. Influenced by the teachings of B. F. Westcott and Charles Gore, Andrews became an Anglican in 1895, working as a lay priest in Westcott's Diocese of Durham. He became “an out-and-out opponent of capitalism” (Chaturvedi and Sykes 1949:22) [2]. In 1903 he offered his services to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts for missionary work in India, but, it was when Bishop Westcott's son - Basil, died of cholera in Delhi, that Andrews decided to take his place in India. Andrews set foot on India's soil on March 20th, 1904, and began his new life in the East which he considered to be his second birth (Rao 1969:16) [6]. On his arrival, he was formerly admitted into the Cambridge Brotherhood and joined the staff of St. Stephen's College, Delhi. Andrews lived in the home of fellow professor Sushil Rudra, who later became the first Indian Principal of the St., Stephens College.

His intimate friendship with Sushil Rudra not only helped him to understand India's goal and aspirations but also brought to the fore racial discrimination perpetrated by the British on the natives and even in the Churches (Eddy 1945:16) [3].

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It was the denominational exclusiveness that eventually led to his parting ways with the Cambridge Mission. Both Andrew's and Rudra's reformist ideas transformed the college by divesting it of its foreignness. Separate hostels for Indian Christian students of the college were abolished. He saw the college as a place of friendship, transcending creed and race, a place where "life is not broken by narrow domestic walls" (Rao 1969:16) [6]. Along with Rudra, Andrews raised his voice against the imposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Athanasian Creed on the nascent Indian Churches. It was his faithfulness to Christ, which led him to dedicate himself to India and her people.

C.F. Andrews and Nationalism

Impressed by the growing feeling of nationalism Andrews decided to extend his missionary activities to help Indian realize their goal of Independence. He came into close contact with national leaders like Gokhale, Lajpat Rai and others and in November 1914, proceeded to South Africa, on Gokhale's appeal to rectify the wrong done to the Indian community by the British regime (Studdert-Kennedy 1999:170) [9]. It was through Andrews' endeavors that the Indian Relief Act (1914) was passed which abolished the £3 tax imposed on Indians who had not renewed their indentures. It also recognised the validity of the Indian customary marriages of settlers in South Africa. His concern for the poor and the forlorn brought him closer to Gandhi. Andrews enthusiastically accepted Gandhi's twin principles of non violence "ahimsa" and insistence on truth "Satyagraha".

His passionate desire to help Indian labourers oppressed under the indenture system, took him to South Africa. Over the years, he visited British Guiana, British Columbia, Kenya and Fiji Islands. Andrews soon became an ambassador of inter-racial friendship. Andrews is best remembered for the role he played in the highlighting the predicament and woes of the indentured labourers in Fiji, Mauritius, South Africa and Guyana. He wrote a book *The Indian Indentured Labour in Fiji* (1916) where he gives a detailed account of the plight of the indentured labourers in the colony. While Gandhi's activism was centred on South Africa, Andrews brought his global experience with and knowledge of, indenture to the struggle. Tinker notes that he was twice dragged by, then assaulted by a European from the train (188). Testament to the global reach in high places, of news about Andrews, his treatment came to the notice of Winston Churchill, who regretted the behaviour of the miscreants: Andrews refused to name them (Tinker 1979: 189) [10].

His errands of mercy were frequently called for during earthquakes, famines or floods. It was his love for the "lowest and the lost" that caused Gandhi to call him "Dinabandhu" (friend of the poor) (Rao 1969:6) [6]. According to G. S. Eddy, "Whenever a great catastrophe occurs in nature or at the hands of man, whether by famine or flood, by slaughter or as the result of race prejudice, there Andrews goes and ministers to human suffering, and there he makes his appeal for distressed humanity... He has barely escaped prison several times. He moves freely and fearlessly, equally with oppressed Indians or Negroes and with viceroys and prime ministers. In his combined gentleness and boldness, he is not altogether unlike Francis of Assisi or Gandhi, whose closest friend he is, but he is more a man of sorrows than the gay troubadour of Assisi." (Eddy, G.S.1935: 217) [4].

On his return from South Africa, Andrews resigned his work at St., Stephen's College, in 1914 and gave away his life's savings. Though he was a devout High Churchman, he was no more orthodox than his Master had been. Unable to tolerate the cast and colour-ridden Christianity practiced in the Indian Churches, he finally decided to leave the Cambridge Mission brotherhood. But he never severed his connection with the Anglican communion. He then accepted the invitation of the great Ravindranath Tagore to live at Shantiniketan, the "Abode of Peace", which then became his home (Eddy 1945:114) [3]. Andrews taught at the institution and also went out to minister to India's deepest needs.

During the turbulent years, following the First World War, Andrews began to advocate total independence for India. He worked "shoulder to shoulder" with Gandhi in the struggle for India's political emancipation and was deeply concerned about maintaining high moral level during the independence movement. He lent whole hearted support to Gandhi's program for national regeneration, the redemption of the outcastes, the brotherhood of the Hindus and the Muslims, the emancipation of women, freedom from drinks and drugs providing basic education, encouraging cottage industries, etc. Andrews stood up against the exploiters whosoever they might be, defending the cause of the exploited poor; against every kind of bullying and oppression and he upheld before the nation the ideals of non-violence and truth which to him were absolutely Christian.

From 1920 onwards, Andrews worked very closely with the Congress leaders. He took part in the second Round Table Conference with Gandhi during 1931-1932 (Studdert-Kennedy 1999: 173) [9]. From 1920 to 1930 he completely identified himself with the cause of the labourers and was elected President of the All India Trade Union Congress in 1925 and 1927 (Eddy 1945:15) [3]. He also intervened in the Madras cotton workers strike in 1913. During his pursuit to rid India of the evil of untouchability he joined the Vaikom Satyagraha in 1925. He enthusiastically supported Gandhi's effort for the removal of un-touchability. He worked strenuously in the Harijan Sewak Sangh - a nationwide organization, created to work for the uplift of these people. He rejoiced in the success of the Harijan Temple entry movement and allocation of seats to Harijans in provincial councils (Rao-Sheshagiri 1969:45) [3]. He worked with Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in formulating the Harijan demands in 1933. Andrews was always ready to help the Hindus fight against inherent social evils like the "devadasi" system (Rao-Sheshagiri 1969:45) [3].

He lauded the efforts of the Arya Samaj, the Brahmo Samaj, Rama Krishna mission and other such movements, in the eradication of the longstanding social evils. Religion, to Andrews was more than a creed or an ideology. "To be a Christian", he wrote means "means not the expression of an outward creed but the living of an inward life" (Chaturvedi & Sykes 1949:102) [7]. Aware of the daunting task that confronted Christianity in India, he said, "The first thing to be done is to meet the psychology of India rather than impose upon India what we in India think is good for her... We have never yet touched India's heart, and therefore, in spite of all our good intentions, we have blundered" (Chaturvedi & Sykes 1949:102) [7].

Andrews stood before the Indian mind as a true representative of the Christian way of life. His vision of Christianity was simple, profound, all-embracing and above all else, practical. He strove to translate his vision of

Christianity into a life of practical service. Wherever he went he carried with him a message of reconciliation among individuals, among communities and nations. He lived a large part of his life among the youth and was attracted to the Oxford Group Movement (Sharpe, p 119) ^[8] which was initially confined to the care and training of Indian Christian children (Andrew, 1908, p 84) ^[1].

He was a prolific writer and wrote numerous books, his first being a prize essay on *The Relation of Christianity to the Conflict between Capital and Labour* (1896), *North India* (1908), *The Renaissance in India* (1912), *Non – Co-Operation* (1920), *To the Students* (1921), *India and the Simon Report* (1930), *India and Britain: a Moral Challenge* (1935), *Christ and Human Need* (1937), *India and the Pacific* (1937), *The Challenge of the North – Western Frontier: a Contribution to world Peace* (1937), *The Rise and Growth of the Congress In India* (1938), *The Inner Life* (1939) and many more. He wrote books about his heroes – Gandhi, Tagore, Sunder Singh and Zaka Ullah. His remarkable character influenced leading Hindus and Muslims and they called him “Christ’s Faithful Apostle” after his initials C.F.A. He died in Calcutta on April 5, 1940, at the age of sixty – nine.

In 1962, Principal Sircar of the St. Stephan’s started the C. F Andrews Memorial Lecture, whose first speaker was Jaiprakash Narain. In 1971, the Indian Post and Telegraph issued a commemorative stamp to celebrate his birth centenary on February 12th 1971.

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