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The Legacy of William Carey

There had been quite a good number of foreigners who immensely contributed to socio-cultural and political life of our society. If we have to name the one who was instrumental in bringing about social reformation and total revival of Indian languages in printed form, then we must name Dr. William Carey. Therefore, it will be worthwhile to remember him on his 176th death anniversary today.

Carey was born on August 17, 1761 in Paulerspury, Northamptonshire of England. He left school when he was twelve and learned the trade of shoemaking and thus earned his livelihood as a cobbler. When he was seventeen, a great change took place in his life when he prayed to God for conviction of cheating his master's money. He grew up spiritually through reading the Bible and pastor's guide. Carey married Dorothy in 1781. After her death, married Charlotte in 1808 who also died soon and thus he married Grace in 1823. Carey was an ardent follower of Jesus Christ and began his religious service as a pastor at Moulton and Leicester. He learned Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French and Dutch along with science and history and the like. In 1792, he authored a book known as the 'Enquiry' and through his preaching and encouragement, the Baptist Missionary Society was formed that sent Carey as a missionary to India. Carey after a long voyage reached Calcutta on 11 November 1793.

Carey soon mastered Sanskrit, Bengali and other Indian languages. He could support his mission by farming, running an indigo factory and teaching Bengali. The 10th January of 1800 was a redletter day in the history of Indian printing. On this day, Carey along with William Ward and Joshua Marshman, known as the 'Serampore Trio' set foot at Serampore and founded the historic Serampore Mission. This Mission with the help of natives, 17 printers, 5 bookbinders and a paper mill, extensively involved in translating and printing the Bible in more than 40 Indian languages including Assamese. The efforts of Carey and his colleagues had started the important process of modern prose writing in

vernacular languages. Carey's work such as Grammar books in Sanskrit, Bengali, Marathi, Punjabi, Telugu and Kanarese and dictionaries in Sanskrit, Bengali and Marathi are worth mentioning. His work 'Colloquies' and 'Garland of Indian Stories' were of human interest and humour. He translated Mahabharat and Ramayana from Sanskrit (1802). Carey published in Bengali 'Digdarshan' (1818) which was the first Indian language periodical and 'Samachar Darpan', a newspaper. Carey was instrumental in English periodical 'Friend of India' (1818) which latter amalgamated with The Statesman. It must be mentioned that Assam is proud to have the first printed Assamese book 'Dharmapustak Antabhag' (1813) i.e. the New Testament and the entire Bible (1833) called Dharmapustak that Carey brought out the help of Atmaram Sharma, an Assamese scholar from Koliabor. This also marked the beginning of Assamese prose in printed form.

Carey was a linguist and educationist per excellence. His mission founded the Serampore College in 1818 for higher education in which Carey himself taught Divinity and Biology. He built a system of elementary schools with over a hundred such ones and separate schools for girls. Carey taught Sanskrit, Bengali and Marathi at Fort William College in Calcutta. Under his guidance, modern textbook writing in Bengali also started here. Carey was a philanthropist who pioneered in introducing Savings Bank. This he introduced at Serampore in 1819 to safeguard the innocent poor people from the hands of the greedy and cruel moneylenders. After ten years, William Bentinck, the Governor General established Savings Bank upon the same principle. Carey started a Botanical Garden with 427 species in five acres of land at Serampore. He planted economically productive trees like teak, tropical fruit trees, and many flowering trees. A plant has been named after Carey as Careya Herbacera. Botanists say that many plants found today in Bengal came from seeds carried by wind and birds from Carey's garden. In 1812 Carey Printed the Hortus Bengalensis, a catalog of plants in the gardens at Calcutta. He was also editor of the three volume work, Flora Indica, written by William Roxburgh. He established the agricultural Society of India in 1820. In 1823, Carey became the Fellow of the Linnaean Society, a Member of the Geological Garden has become a centre for research. Carey wrote many articles on Agricultures and Botany. He founded a library and developed a museum with rich collection of shells, corals, etc. that were latter given to the college.

Carey was a great reformer. A dreaded practice that Carey fought tooth and nail was infanticide that Governor General Lord Wellesley abolished in 1802. He witnessed sati; the worst evil prevailed that time. Carey collected data of sati and reported that nearly 300 windows were burnt alive around Calcutta and 10,000 in all of India within a short span of time. Carey started his relentless campaign against this gory practice. He published many articles against sati and worked with Raja Ram Mohan Roy who was also a great social reformer. Carey could persuade William Bentinck who carried a regulation on December 4, 1829 declaring sati as illegal and criminal and thus abolished it. Carey fought for

eradication of other social evils such as 'ghat murders' by which the sick and dying were left by the riverbank to die and the rejection or burning of lepers by their families. Carey taught people to love the lepers, provided medicines and established hospital for them. Still another social evil prevalent in those days was the cult of 'thug' which was a belief that goddess granted sanction to certain people to strangle others and to take their valuables. The Serampore Mission relentlessly fought against this evil that led to the suppression of thugs by William Bentinck in 1830. Carey also fought against caste system, which he understood as a social evil. He preached goodwill and love among all people and encouraged inter-caste marriage. Carey's mission pioneered in emancipation of women through education by establishing schools for girls and women. Carey was also instrumental in establishing a leper hospital and an institution for poor and neglected children in Calcutta.

Carey after labouring for 41 years in India, not even returning once to his native place, died on June 9, 1834 at Serampore and he was buried there. Carey, whose motto was Expect Great Things From God, Attempt great things for God, is honoured as the Father of Modern Missions. He indeed was a versatile genius who made major, even foundational contributions in literature and print technology, translation, education, medical, agriculture, and horticulture, botany, forest conservation, industry and socio-cultural reforms. Carey played a central role in modernization of Indian Society. The Government of India released a postal stamp on January 9, 1993, honouring him. Let every Indian Pay rich tribute to this great soul.

–Aziz-ul Haque (The Writer is Pastor, Guwahati Baptist Church)

