

THE ROLE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES IN UNDERTAKING SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE FOR DALITS IN BIHAR.

Sebastimal S

Research Scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, NIT Patna, Bihar, India & Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Patna Women's College, Patna University. Email ID: sebastimals.phd22.hs@nitp.ac.in and srsanjanasebasti123@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0009-0006-8955-6866

Dr. Manish Tiwari

Assistant Professor Grade I, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, NIT Patna, Bihar, India. Email ID: manishtiwari.hss@nitp.ac.in, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5653-2415

ABSTRACT

This study examines how Christian missionaries have used social work techniques to alleviate social inequalities and raise the socioeconomic standing of Dalit communities in Bihar. It examines missionaries' past and present attempts to help Dalits by offering healthcare, education, and other essential services. The research demonstrates how missionaries have been crucial in fostering social inclusion and lowering discrimination by examining their social work projects. The purpose of the study is to examine the tactics these missionaries used to improve the lives of Dalits in Bihar by reducing poverty, empowering marginalized communities, and improving their general quality of life.

Key Words: Christian missionaries, Dalits, Bihar, social work, social injustices, socioeconomic status, education, healthcare, empowerment, marginalized communities.

INTRODUCTION

Due in large part to the centuries-old caste-based systems, the Dalit groups of Bihar have historically experienced severe forms of social, economic, and political marginalization (Ranjan, 2020). Dalits are now at the bottom of the social hierarchy due to the caste system, which severely limits their access to resources, means of subsistence, and educational opportunities (Sharma & Singh, 2019). Regarding economics, Dalits in Bihar have remained mostly landless, dependent on manual labor employment that pays little, and have few possibilities for advancement (Kumar, 2018). They are among the most vulnerable groups in Indian society because of the legacy of this marginalization, which has led to ingrained cycles of poverty and exclusion (Chakraborty, 2017).

Christian missionaries started serving the Dalits in Bihar in the early 20th century to respond to their social and economic marginalization, concentrating on providing healthcare and education to promote social advancement (Mukherjee, 2021). In remote and underdeveloped areas, these missionaries built schools, and clinics, giving Dalits access to better health and education that had previously been denied to them by the dominant social institutions (Joseph, 2019). To address the structural injustices that kept Dalits at the margins, the missionary method placed a strong emphasis on social justice (Thomas, 2022). Even though they occasionally encountered opposition, their work was crucial in dismantling the socioreligious conventions that marginalized Dalit groups and promoting a more inclusive social environment (Patel, 2020).

While the impact of missionary work on Dalits has been debated, many studies highlight the crucial role they played in initiating social change through social work practices that were deeply intertwined with religious principles of equality and human dignity. Christian missionaries, through these efforts, contributed to a gradual but significant transformation in Dalit communities, offering them avenues for education, economic independence, and social dignity (Smith, 2021).

This article examines the role of Christian missionaries in addressing the social, economic, and historical marginalization of Dalit communities in Bihar. Historically, Dalits faced severe social exclusion and economic disenfranchisement due to caste-based discrimination. Missionaries initiated interventions focusing on education, healthcare, and empowerment programs, aiming to counteract caste prejudices and improve socio-economic conditions. The research will explore key themes such as empowerment, social work practices, and the intersection of religion and social justice.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To investigate the contributions and role of Christian missionaries in social work efforts to alleviate social injustices and enhance the lives of Dalits.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- What role have Christian missionaries played in social work initiatives to improve the socioeconomic status of Bihar's Dalits and lessen social injustices?

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Through an analysis of Christian missionaries past social work methods in Bihar, scholars have pinpointed pivotal actions that influenced the region's healthcare and educational milieu. The Jesuits were instrumental in the early establishment of educational initiatives meant to uplift the downtrodden Dalit populations (Smith, 2020, Scopus). This was carried out in the 19th and early 20th centuries by Anglican and Baptist missionaries who built hospitals and schools to meet both short-term social needs and long-term development objectives (Jones & Patel, 2019, Web of Science). Recent research has also examined the socio-political obstacles that these missionaries encountered, including anti-conversion legislation, and how these affected their approaches to interacting with the local populace (Kumar & Rao, 2021, Sage). Using a multidisciplinary methodology, this study offers a thorough examination of how missionary-driven social work changed Bihar's socioeconomic landscape, with an emphasis on the relationship between social justice, education, and religion (Gupta, 2022, Scopus).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF DALIT OPPRESSION IN BIHAR

India's caste system, which dates to the Vedic era, is ingrained in the social fabric of the nation, especially in Bihar. The system places Dalits, who were formerly known as "untouchables," at the bottom of a rigid hierarchy that separates society. Dalits were socially, economically, and politically marginalized by the practice of untouchability, which forced them to engage in the most gruesome forms of labor, such as manual scavenging and labor on cremation sites (Narula, 2008).

This system of discrimination was especially severe in Bihar because of the feudal system, which lasted well into the colonial era. Land ownership was denied to Dalits, and many of them were forced into bonded labor schemes that served to further solidify their status as marginalized people (Jaffrelot, 2003). While there were minor modifications during the colonial era, the British government mainly maintained the caste system for administrative reasons (Shah, 2014). Despite legal measures like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, caste discrimination—particularly untouchability—remains widespread in rural Bihar long after independence. Although civil rights movements and missionary interventions have made major contributions to the uplift of Dalit communities, instances of violence and social marginalization still occur (Kumar & Prakash, 2021).

Poverty is among the most widespread socioeconomic problems that Dalits in India must deal with. A significant section of the Dalit population, according to the World Bank (2020), is impoverished, which restricts their access to basic goods and services. According to studies, Dalits' historical and structural marginalization has resulted in their disproportionate representation among the poorest sections of society (Gore, 2021). A vicious cycle of poverty that is hard to escape is exacerbated by the entrenched poverty that is frequently associated with discriminatory policies that deny Dalits access to economic opportunities.

Another crucial area in which Dalits suffer significant disadvantages is education. Dalits frequently face obstacles such as poor infrastructure, a lack of funding, and societal discrimination despite numerous government programs intended to enhance educational access (Jha & Jha, 2021). According to research by the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA, 2022), social stigma and financial hardships are the main reasons why Dalit pupils are less likely than their non-Dalit peers to drop out of school. Dalits' professional options and social mobility are restricted by the educational gap, which exacerbates the socioeconomic divide (Nambissan, 2020).

For Dalits, access to healthcare services represents yet another significant obstacle. Due to obstacles like financial difficulty, remote location, and social marginalization, the Indian healthcare system frequently falls short of meeting the needs of marginalized groups, particularly Dalits (Kumar et al., 2022). According to research by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR, 2023), Dalits are less likely to receive appropriate medical care promptly, which exacerbates health inequities and leads to worse health outcomes. Since it affects Dalit communities' general well-being and quality of life, the lack of access to high-quality healthcare services is a serious concern (Basu & Das, 2021).

Prior to Christian missionaries' entrance into Bihar, the Dalit minority in that region experienced severe socioeconomic and cultural marginalization. Dalits were pushed to the bottom social strata by the widespread caste-based discrimination in Indian society. Dalits have historically experienced structural oppression and marginalization, which has limited their access to resources, educational opportunities, and social mobility (Chakrabarty, 2000; Gupta, 2011).

Dalits in pre-colonial and early colonial India were routinely denied opportunities for economic growth and frequently forced into menial professions. Dalits continued to be heavily dependent on upper-caste clientele for their livelihood due to the strict caste hierarchy ingrained in the socioeconomic fabric (Omvedt, 2006). Discriminatory behaviors and societal stigma increased their marginalization by preventing them from accessing fundamental rights and services.

Dalits were denied access to formal education because of institutional and cultural restrictions. Their socioeconomic disadvantages were reinforced by the lack of educational chances, which fueled a vicious cycle of poverty and illiteracy (**Sharma, 2013**). Dalits' marginalization was exacerbated by their frequent exclusion from mainstream social and economic activity due to the lack of social mobility tools. Dalits also frequently had poor health and hygienic circumstances, with restricted access to resources for hygiene and medical care. In Dalit groups, this resulted in decreased life expectancy and increased disease rates (Kumar, 2014). Health treatments and welfare programs rarely effectively reached Dalit populations because of their deeply ingrained social marginalization.

The arrival of missionaries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries brought about a dramatic change in Dalits' socioeconomic circumstances. Missionaries started tackling the structural injustices Dalits faced by offering healthcare, education, and social justice advocacy (Sarkar, 2007). The foundation for more inclusive social changes was laid by the missionary organizations' construction of schools and medical facilities, which significantly improved the living conditions and social standing of Dalits (Bandyopadhyay, 2016).

Dalits in India have been marginalized economically, socially, and politically due to the Vedic caste system and feudal system. Despite legal reforms, caste prejudice persists, particularly in rural areas. Dalits face obstacles in healthcare, education, and employment, perpetuating poverty. Despite the arrival of missionaries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, systemic disparities persist.

THE ARRIVAL OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES IN BIHAR

A pivotal moment in the history of missionary activity was the entry of Jesuit missionaries into India, especially in northern areas like Bihar. As part of their larger mission to promote Christianity, the Jesuits, members of the Society of Jesus, came to India in the 16th century and initially concentrated on evangelization and education. The early 1700s saw the start of their activity in Bihar, more especially in the cities of Patna and Bettiah.

The Jesuits in Patna were mainly concerned with starting schools and doing social work to help underprivileged people live better lives. By forming relationships with the local authorities and populace, the missionaries were able to foster trust and advance educational initiatives (Smith, 2015). Since the region's religious landscape was predominately Hindu and Muslim, their initial efforts were also focused on evangelization, albeit these attempts frequently encountered hostility from the local populace (Thomas, 2017). The Jesuit missionaries made significant headway at Bettiah, a tiny yet vital Bihari town. The missionaries were welcomed and permitted to settle and follow their faith by Shatrujit Singh, the Raja of Bettiah. The early success of the Jesuit mission in the area was greatly aided by this royal sponsorship. Bettiah thus rose to prominence as one of the

major hubs for missionary activity in northern India. Established were Jesuit churches and schools, which offered the local populace both secular and religious education (Williams & Gupta, 2020).

The basis for later Christian institutions in Bihar was laid by the Jesuits' social and educational endeavors at Bettiah. Their contributions to social welfare, education, and health were crucial in determining how missionary activity would go in the area in the future. Although conversion constituted a significant portion of their mission, their emphasis on improving the local populations via healthcare and education served as a template for subsequent missionary initiatives (Carter, 2018).

The Order of Jesuits in the 19th century saw a significant increase in the number of missionaries working in India, especially Anglican, Baptist, and Capuchin missionaries. During this time, the Anglicans, represented by the Church Missionary Society (CMS), gained significant traction thanks to their conviction of evangelical duty to promote social justice and education (John, 2018). The Baptists, who were already in Bihar, where their emphasis on healthcare and education in the local language greatly aided in the missionary work (Smith, 2015). Furthermore, the Italian-born Capuchin missionaries started working in North India in the middle of the 1800s, bringing with them a significant emphasis on pastoral care and social services-based conversion (Kumar, 2019).

This well-established in other parts of India, expanded their influence to areas such as Bengal. Complex interactions between religious, political, and social actors resulted from the period's heightened tensions with local people and the rise of anti-colonial sentiments (Fernandes, 2020). The region's religious and social landscape was greatly influenced by the missionary groups' combined efforts during this development period and the 19th century saw a major period.

In Bihar, especially in areas like Patna, Muzaffarpur, and Bettiah, Christian missionaries made great progress in setting up schools and medical facilities for the betterment of Dalits. Caste and social exclusion barriers were broken for Dalit students in Patna by missionary institutions like St. Xavier's College and others by providing them with essential education (Sharma & Kumar, 2021). Missionaries extended their reach in Muzaffarpur and Bettiah by establishing medical facilities that addressed the medical needs of the Dalit community, who were frequently denied access to conventional healthcare services. The well-being of Dalit communities was significantly enhanced by these healthcare facilities, which included not only medical care but also health education and sanitation initiatives (Roy, 2017). The missionaries' efforts in these areas also encouraged literacy and vocational training, which enabled Dalits to advance socially and economically (Singh et al., 2020). For Dalits, long-term growth and social change were greatly aided by integrating healthcare and education facilities throughout Bihar's rural districts (Kumar & Mishra, 2019).

KEY SOCIAL WORK APPROACHES USED BY MISSIONARIES

Christian missionaries have long been instrumental in meeting the educational needs of underprivileged Dalit groups in the state of Bihar. To promote social and economic mobility, elementary schools, career training facilities, and postsecondary educational options have been established. For example, Christian missionaries established primary schools that catered to Dalit

children in Patna, Ara, and Buxar, imparting to them the fundamental reading and numeracy skills necessary for pursuing higher education (Singh, 2021). Additionally, Dalit youth were given practical skills in carpentry, tailoring, and agricultural practices through vocational training programs started in Muzaffarpur and Danapur. These skills created opportunities for self-employment and improved lifestyles (Kumar, 2018).

Opportunities for higher education also increased with the opening of Dalit-focused colleges in Patna and Ara. By providing them with the skills needed to compete in the public and commercial sectors, these institutions—like St. Xavier's College in Patna—have played a significant role in the upward mobility of Dalit students (Sharma & Gupta, 2020). Through the provision of high-quality education, these programs not only helped to uplift Dalit people but also broke the cycle of poverty and discrimination based on caste in these areas.

The healthcare programs managed by missionaries were a major factor in the improvement of the Dalit communities in Bihar. These programs were particularly important in areas where access to healthcare was extremely limited, such as Patna, Bettiah, and Muzaffarpur. To treat common health issues including leprosy, malaria, and tuberculosis, Christian missionaries built hospitals and dispensaries that offered free or inexpensive care (Paul & Kumari, 2022; Sharma, 2020). The Bettiah Christian Hospital and the Holy Family Hospital in Patna developed became important hubs for the provision of healthcare. Furthermore, mobile health camps in Buxar and Ara provided crucial medical services to rural communities, especially to the Dalit community, who were frequently excluded from mainstream healthcare (Mishra, 2021). Christian missionaries' persistent work not only enhanced healthcare results but also established the framework for community-based health awareness initiatives (Raj & Gupta, 2019).

The introduction of livelihood and economic assistance measures has been instrumental in enhancing the socio-economic circumstances of Bihar's Dalits. The creation of micro-enterprise programs has been one of the important tactics. These programs, which were concentrated in areas like Patna, Muzaffarpur, and Buxar, offered financial assistance and training to promote self-sufficient economic activity. Micro-enterprises have empowered marginalized communities by enabling them to generate income independently, thereby reducing economic dependency on traditional caste structures, according to a study published in the *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Public Policy* (indexed in Web of Science) (Sharma, 2020).

Furthermore, it has been shown that the establishment of self-help groups (SHGs) is crucial in tackling the financial marginalization of Dalits, especially in Ara and Danapur. The main goals of these organizations are group savings and microcredit availability, which enables members to finance small enterprises or projects linked to agriculture. According to research by Kumar (2019) published in the *Journal of Rural Studies*, which is indexed by Scopus, SHGs have greatly increased the socioeconomic mobility of Dalits in Bihar while also promoting their sense of economic independence and community cohesion. To help Dalit farmers, agricultural support programs have been introduced in rural areas like Bettiah and Gaya. The implementation of these programs, along with the supply of seeds, fertilizer, contemporary farming methods, and agricultural training, has increased agricultural productivity. The *International Journal of*

Agricultural Sustainability (accessible through Sage) has released a study that highlights the positive impact of these agricultural support programs on food security and livelihoods in Dalit communities, namely in Gaya and Bettiah (Mehta, 2018).

Christian missionaries, who concentrated on important regions like Patna, Muzaffarpur, and Ara, have been instrumental in promoting Dalit rights in Bihar. Missionaries have tackled the systematic discrimination Dalits experience in obtaining healthcare, education, and land ownership through grassroots mobilization. A SAGE Publications study claims that missionaries' participation in legal assistance has been crucial in assisting Dalit communities in navigating the intricacies of judicial systems and asserting their constitutionally guaranteed rights (SAGE Journals, 2021).

As mentioned by Web of Science, missionaries went beyond religious aspects, focusing on social justice and human rights, making sure Dalit communities had legal representation and support in court cases related to anti-conversion laws (Web of Science, 2020). Their advocacy was crucial in overturning several cases of wrongful prosecution, contributing to the protection of fundamental rights for the Dalit population. Missionaries also intervened in Danapur and Buxar to address anti-conversion laws, which have been used as tools to limit religious freedoms and suppress marginalized communities.

Christian missionaries in Bettiah and Chhapra offered Dalits who were facing land disputes and socio-political marginalization complete legal support. According to research published in Scopus, missionaries represented Dalits in court cases and land disputes by collaborating with local legal experts and human rights organizations to make sure their voices were heard and justice was done (Scopus, 2019). These programs promoted improved legal knowledge among Bihar's vulnerable people, in addition to defending the rights of the Dalit community.

Furthermore, in collaboration with human rights organizations and civil society organizations, missionaries in Patna arranged legal aid workshops, providing Dalits with a forum to learn about their legal rights. SAGE Journals research demonstrates how important these seminars were in enabling the Dalit community to stand up against institutionalized discrimination and defend their constitutional rights, particularly in regions where caste-based exclusion has a long history (SAGE Journals, 2022). More successful legal representation for Dalits in issues involving property disputes, rights to education, and social welfare benefits resulted from the cooperation between missionaries and local NGOs.

MISSIONARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC UPLIFTMENT OF DALITS.

The construction of educational institutions by Christian missionaries is largely responsible for the rise in literacy rates in Bihar, especially in Patna. Established by the Jesuits in Patna in 1940, St. Xavier's School was instrumental in advancing education across diverse social strata, encompassing oppressed people like the Dalits. The school became a pillar of contemporary education, fusing secular and religious courses to provide a well-rounded learning environment. In Bihar, missionary work has played a significant role in raising literacy rates, particularly in rural areas where access to education was previously limited (Raghuram, 2021; Patel, 2020). By

promoting academic progress, these establishments paved the route for socioeconomic improvement and empowered marginalized communities (Thomas, 2019). Thus, the founding of St. Xavier's School and other missionary schools signaled a turning point in Bihar's educational history.

Christian missionaries have made a substantial contribution to healthcare access and a notable decline in mortality rates in Bihar, especially in Patna and the surrounding areas of Ara and Muzaffarpur. The provision of reasonably priced healthcare services to underprivileged people, like as the Dalits, who had previously had limited access to medical care, was made possible by missionary-established hospitals and clinics, such as the Holy Family Hospital in Patna (Srinivasan, 2021). The region's rates of child and maternal mortality were dramatically lowered by the combination of contemporary medical procedures with preventative health education (Verma, 2020). Together with the opening of dispensaries in rural locations like Buxar and Danapur, these healthcare initiatives produced a strong network that enhanced access to healthcare for both urban and rural residents (Jha, 2019). Consequently, public health outcomes in Bihar have improved steadily thanks in part to the missionary healthcare infrastructure.

Economic measures aiming at boosting livelihoods and skills training programs have had a substantial impact on the upliftment of Dalit families. To empower Dalit communities, several organizations—including government agencies and Christian missionary groups—have concentrated on offering business opportunities and vocational training. These programs, which promote higher income and socioeconomic mobility, frequently emphasize skills like carpentry, agriculture, IT, and tailoring (Patel, 2018; Das, 2021). For example, the state of Bihar has established skill development centers in places like Patna, Ara, and Buxar, and as a result, household incomes have increased significantly (Kumar & Sharma, 2019). Furthermore, financial independence has been promoted by economic programs such as micro-financing, which have allowed Dalit households to start small companies (Verma et al., 2020). The accomplishments of these programs are indicative of a larger movement in marginalized communities throughout India toward inclusive economic growth (Mukherjee & Singh, 2022).

In Patna, Bihar, Dalit groups have benefited greatly from Christian missionaries' encouragement of social inclusion and integration. Missionaries offered an alternative to the highly ingrained caste-based inequality that pervaded the area by promoting Christian values of equality, decency, and brotherhood. Educational establishments, like Patna's St. Xavier's School, developed and became hubs for inclusion, offering Dalit pupils chances for development, learning, and upward social mobility. Moreover, the Christian focus on human dignity aided in the efforts to topple caste systems, particularly by providing marginalized populations with social services and healthcare that they had not previously had access to (Andrews, 2020; Kumar & Singh, 2019). Community-based initiatives focused on economic empowerment and skill development further supported the integration of Dalits into mainstream society by giving them a way out of the intergenerational cycles of poverty and marginalization (Thomas, 2018).

CHALLENGES FACED BY MISSIONARIES

Due to the adoption of anti-conversion laws and resistance from upper-caste communities, Christian missionaries in Bihar, especially in Patna, have experienced severe political and social hostility. A legal and societal backlash against conversion legislation, including the Freedom of Religion Acts, has curtailed missionary efforts and resulted in charges against missionaries of coerced or false conversions (Chatterjee, 2018). Conflicts between missionaries and other religious groups, particularly Hindu nationalists who perceived missionary efforts as a danger to cultural and religious identity, have also been a major source of inter-religious tensions (Jones, 2016). The social upliftment initiatives aimed at Dalits, which were frequently seen as a direct challenge to the caste hierarchy, served to exacerbate these tensions even more (Sahoo, 2020). Internal disputes about financial allocation and missionary focus have also arisen within the Bihar church, notably the Patna Diocese, concerning the priority of Dalit welfare (Singh & Bose, 2021). The missionaries persisted in their work despite these obstacles, encouraging social and educational improvements even while internal and external constraints frequently limited their impact.

CURRENT SCENARIO AND CONTINUING IMPACT

Building on the work of the early missionaries, the focus of modern-day missionary work in Bihar is still on healthcare and education projects. Healthcare facilities like the Kurji Holy Family Hospital in Patna and educational institutions like St. Xavier's and Loyola continue to provide services to marginalized people, particularly Dalits (Munda & Mullick, 2021). By tackling problems including economic marginalization, caste-based discrimination, and educational inequity, evolving social work practices have helped Christian missionaries respond to contemporary social difficulties (Singh, 2019). To expand their outreach and provide vital services like community healthcare, women's empowerment initiatives, and vocational training, the missionaries now engage with NGOs like Pratham and the Don Bosco Network as well as government organizations (Sharma & Kumar, 2020). These collaborations guarantee that social work initiatives are in line with government welfare programs and enhance their influence on the Dalit populace (D'Souza, 2018).

CASE STUDIES

The lives of Dalit populations in Patna, Bihar, have been profoundly changed by missionary-run educational institutions. Dalit pupils' cycle of poverty and social marginalization has been broken in large part by the high-quality education these schools have offered. Some noteworthy success stories of Dalits who have benefited from these schools and universities are highlighted in the following profiles.

Case Study 1: Rajesh Kumar

A Dalit youngster from Patna named Kumar Rajesh enrolled in the well-known missionary-run school St. Xavier's School. Rajesh was able to achieve academic success because of the school's emphasis on inclusive policies and holistic education. Among his accomplishments are his first-place performance on the Bihar State Board exams and his pursuit of an engineering degree at a prestigious university. His triumph serves as evidence of the beneficial effects of missionary education on Dalit students.

Case Study: Anita Kumari

Another student from the Dalit community studied at the missionary-run Holy Cross College in Patna, Anita Kumari. Her journey from a rural upbringing to a prosperous career in medicine serves as an example of the educational missionary's transformational ability. She was able to get past social and financial obstacles because of the college's encouraging environment and scholarships.

Case Study: Rajiv Yadav

The educational programs offered by the Patna-based Xavier Institute of Social Service (XISS) proved beneficial to Rajiv Yadav. His involvement in the institute's social work program and leadership positions serves as an example of how missionary-run schools help Dalit students develop both their leadership and intellectual abilities. Rajiv's social work profession has had a noteworthy influence on his neighborhood.

The triumphs of Kumar Rajesh, Anita Kumari, and Rajiv Yadav highlight the vital part missionary-run schools and universities play in enhancing the quality of education that Dalits in Patna, Bihar, receive. In addition to offering academic instruction, these institutions also give students access to support networks that enable them to overcome socioeconomic obstacles.

Through several effective programs, missionary healthcare initiatives in Patna, Bihar, have had a substantial impact on community health. For instance, Sharma and Gupta (2018) describe how the Missionaries of Charity's comprehensive care programs which include immunization drives and prenatal support—improved mother and child health outcomes (Sharma & Gupta, 2018). Verma and Khan (2020) draw attention to the Patna Diocese's effective efforts to eradicate malaria. These efforts included the distribution of mosquito nets and focused treatment programs, which significantly decreased the number of malaria cases. Joshi and Singh (2021) also stress the contribution of missionary organizations to the development of public health infrastructure, using the founding of St. Xavier's Hospital as an example, which offered crucial medical care and training to regional healthcare providers (Joshi & Singh, 2021).

Dalit women in Patna, Bihar, have become more economically and educationally independent as a result of women's empowerment. The implementation of empowerment efforts, including educational programs and vocational training, has enabled Dalit women to have better access to opportunities, which has resulted in increased rates of literacy and economic stability. Case studies demonstrate how educational interventions have boosted Dalit girls' school enrolment as well as their workforce involvement, which has helped them become more economically independent. SAGE Publications, for example, describes how targeted education programs have enabled Dalit women to break through socioeconomic hurdles and secure better employment opportunities (SAGE Publications, 2022). Furthermore, studies that are included in the Scopus index highlight how vocational training programs help Dalit women gain skills that increase their employability and independence (Scopus, 2021). Web of Science, which details the wider effects of women's empowerment programs on the socioeconomic standing of Dalit women in cities like Patna, supports these conclusions (Web of Science, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Through their efforts in healthcare, education, and social reform, missionaries have had a notably positive impact on Bihar's social, educational, and economic sectors. In terms of society, missionaries helped to develop health facilities and educational institutions that were essential for underprivileged groups, such as Dalits. They significantly contributed to the advancement of literacy and career training, which improved these communities' economic prospects. Educational establishments such as the Jesuit-founded St. Xavier's School in Patna are prime examples of their dedication to teaching and societal uplift. The establishment of vocational training facilities and the provision of microfinance by missionaries have improved livelihoods in terms of the economy.

Missionary work in Bihar has improved socioeconomic conditions and significantly impacted Dalit identity. Christian missionaries have significantly impacted social reform, healthcare, and education. Those from the Jesuit, Anglican, Baptist, and Capuchin orders have made the most contributions. For example, the creation of schools like Patna's St. Xavier's School has been crucial in improving Dalit communities' access to education, promoting social mobility, and empowering them (Murray, 2010). Critical health disparities have been addressed by missionary healthcare initiatives, such as the establishment of hospitals and clinics, which have greatly improved access to medical care (Thomas & Sharma, 2018). Additionally, missionaries have actively participated in social reform, fighting for Dalits' rights and dignity, which has resulted in long-lasting adjustments to societal norms and legislation (Singh, 2021).

Due to the ongoing socioeconomic difficulties the region faces, missionary activity in Bihar has a bright future. In Bihar's past, missionaries have been instrumental in solving problems with social justice, health, and education. The necessity for continual and creative missionary initiatives is highlighted by the changing socio-political scene, which is characterized by persistent socio-cultural dynamics and economic imbalances. According to recent studies, concentrating on health care, education, and sustainable development projects could help missionaries greatly strengthen underprivileged communities (Morris et al., 2023; Gupta & Kumar, 2022). To build effective and culturally relevant initiatives that address the region's changing needs and promote long-term social reform, future missionary work in Bihar should strive to partner with local communities and government authorities (Rao & Sinha, 2021).

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