

# Rev. Isaac Henry Hacker and Six Years' Movement in South Travancore – A Glance

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**Abstract:** Rev. I.H. Hacker was one of the pioneer missionaries sent by the London Missionary Society to do missionary works in Travancore. As a missionary he arrived at Neyyoor on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1878. His services were remarkable in the history of South Travancore Christian mission. The work of I.H. Hacker was a milestone in the churches of South Travancore. A remarkable movement among the Christian people, called the “Six years’ Movement”, took place about this time. How it began cannot well be traced, but its central place in Travancore was a small village near Mavelikarai, and the leading spirit of the movement was one Justus Joseph. He proclaimed in 1875 that he was commissioned to declare that the second coming of Christ was to take place in six years’ time, in October 1881. During the last three years of his supposed prophecy the movement spread like wildfire, and many of the established churches were disorganised. Some people sold their little bits of property, threw their money into a common fund and devoted themselves heart and soul to the proclamation of what they believed to be the truth of God. When 1881 ended the movement collapsed and most of the people returned to their respective missions.

**Index Terms** - Travancore, Movement, Embroidery, Kannanvilai, Amsi, Putteti.

## Introduction

The erstwhile Travancore State the present Kanyakumari District was formed on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1956 as a result of the reorganization of state on linguistic basis. This District is the smallest in the State of Tamil Nadu lying at the southernmost tip of the country. As in the case of the rest of the Districts in the State of Tamil Nadu, the economy of this District is also agriculture based. Handloom industry flourished especially at Vadasery, Kottar and Palliyadi even though raw cotton is not locally available. Perhaps the conducive climate for handloom industry had taken a section of the people combined to contribute for the flourishing of the industry [1].

Rev. Isaac Henry Hacker was one of the pioneer missionaries of the London Missionary Society came to do missionary services in Travancore. He was born on July 7, 1848 in the town of Birmingham in London. He joined at Spring Hill for school education and Western Hill College for Theological study. He was ordained at Caer’s Lane Church on October 3, 1877. On May 17, 1877, Rev. F. Baylis expired in Neyyoor at the age of 58. To fulfil his place Rev. I.H. Hacker arrived at Neyyoor on January 8, 1878 and he took charge of the Neyyoor Church which was under the control of Rev. James Emyln who was the missionary of Parassala Mission Centre. He started God’s Ministry in Neyyoor in 1878. Though his mother tongue was English, he spoke Tamil fluently. So he preached the Lord’s message in Tamil. Rev. I.H. Hacker’s message urged people to accept Jesus Christ as their saviour and got baptism as Christians. During this time, he helped the weavers to purchase cloth materials and also protected them when they were in distress especially, from the persecution of high caste people. Rev. I.H. Hacker was responsible for the conversion of a group of weavers in Neyyoor District in 1899. In 1900, there was a great revival among the weavers in Neyyoor Mission [2].

When Rev. I.H. Hacker came to South Travancore he found many people practising unholy life. His teachings urged the people to accept Jesus Christ as their saviour and got baptism as Christians. On 4 November 1879, at the age of thirty he married Elizabeth Dyamond pollarol of England in Darmoth church of Neyyoor. She was highly talented and very much interested in the missionary activities. Her sole concern was towards the uplift of women. Trained Bible women were appointed to preach the gospel. They visited each and every house and sowed the seeds of confidence through the words of God. To improve the living standard of women Mrs. Hacker concentrated in developing the Neyyoor Embroidery centre [3].

## Services of Hacker

During those days there was great opposition to preach Christianity from Brahmins and Nairs. Even then Rev. Hacker was very strong in spreading the gospel. He frankly spoke the gospel of God among the common people. After 24 years of glorious service Rev. Emyln Iyer retired from Parassala Mission. During this time, the missionary activities increased beyond the limit. The successor of Rev. Emyln Iyar was Rev. I.H. Hacker. He was responsible for the construction of various Churches in and around Parassala. The missionary activities of Rev. I.H. Hacker in Parassala Mission District was mostly confined to the Nadar, Paraya and Pulaya castes. Due to his hard labour, the Pulayas and Parayas embraced Christianity on a large scale [4].

Rev. I.H. Hacker served the Lord’s work from 1878 to 1920. During this period the Travancore Missionary Committee established many churches in various centres. Bangalore Federal Theological College Professor John A. Jacob, said that, Rev. I.H.

Hacker was a builder of Churches, he built several churches at various centres including Neyyoor. In addition to spiritual activities, Rev. I.H. Hacker contributed much for the social upliftment of the poor people [5].

In 1852 the founder of Neyyoor Mission Centre Rev. Mead left due to disagreement with the co-workers. Rev. Palis was placed in the place of Rev. Mead. He had organised the mission from 1817 till 1854. After the demise of Palis, the Mission head assigned Rev. I.H. Hacker to take over his position. Rev. Hacker was in charge of the Neyyoor Mission from 1878 till 1920. During the time of Rev. Hacker, Vazhathottam Church was built and allowed to join with Neyyoor District. Rev. Hacker called Vazhathottam Church as Nattalam Church [6].

As a result of the ministerial performances of Rev. I.H. Hacker in Kalkulam and Vilavancode Taluks the weaving people at Palliyadi, Amsi, Putteti, Nattalam, Kannanvilai, Palapallam, Colachel and Malparai embraced Christian faith. Rev. I.H. Hacker visited all the places, preached the Gospel and brought enough Church congregations. While he reported to the headquarters in 1908, he mentioned that nearly 2000 people from this particular weaving community had got baptism and joined the Church. Western missionaries helped a lot to these people to carry out their occupation and added helpful sources to this particular people [7].

In Vazhathottam (Nattalam) Rev. Hacker renovated the small hut like Church. Stone pillars were erected. One can see these stones in the Church compound walls even today. As per his Report in 1907, 150 adults were baptized and 80 children were trained [8].

Rev. I.H. Hacker was responsible for the conversion of a group of weavers in Neyyoor District in 1899 especially in Kannanvilai. Kannanvilai is very near to Karungla the famous administrative centre of the erstwhile Travancore State.

Due to his hard work the whole village in Kannanvilai about 300 persons accepted Christian faith. Subsequently the people of Kalkulam and Vilavancode Taluks of Kanyakumari District embraced Christianity at the instigation of Rev. Hacker. Rev. I.H. Hacker helped the Christian weavers to purchase cloth materials and also protected them when they were in distress especially from the persecution of high caste Hindus [9].

Colachel, the former famous harbour of the erstwhile Travancore State was highly concentrated by Rev. Hacker. His services in Colachel had resulted in the conversion of many to Christian faith. As a mark of respect for the services rendered by Rev. Hacker, the people of Colachel had erected a church which has been designated as Hacker Memorial C.S.I. Church [10].

Likewise in Neyyoor the services of Rev. I.H. Hacker have been considered and a school has been founded to commemorate his name. Very near to the school a street has also been named after him. Rev. I.H. Hacker had rendered services in helping the poor and kept the poor destitute at high position along with the high caste people [11].

### **Six Years' Movement**

A remarkable movement among the Christian people, called the "Six years' Movement", took place about this time. How it began cannot well be traced, but in Travancore there was a small village near Mavelikarai, and the leading spirit of the movement was one Justus Joseph. He proclaimed in 1875 that he was commissioned to declare that the second coming of Christ was to take place in six years' time, in October 1881. During the last three years of his supposed prophecy the movement spread like wildfire, and many of the established churches were disorganised. Some people sold their little bits of property, threw their money into a common fund and devoted themselves, heart and soul to the proclamation of what they believed to be the truth of God. When 1881 ended the movement collapsed and most of the people returned to their respective missions [12].

### **Demise of Mrs. Elizabeth Hacker**

While both Rev. I.H. Hacker and Mrs. Elizabeth Hacker deeply engaged in the missionary activities, tragic incidents happened in Hacker's family. One of their three children, Edith Dorothy suddenly died on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1881 at Mutton. Her body was buried in the Neyyoor graveyard. It affected the physical and spiritual life of Mrs. Elizabeth Hacker and Rev. Hacker considerably. Moreover it was a rude shock to Mrs. Elizabeth Hacker. Within few year she too died miserably on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1885, at the age of thirty five. Her service to the people of South Travancore is unforgettable. The memory stone in the Neyyoor graveyard highlights the sacrifice of Mrs. Elizabeth Hacker for the cause of Christianity [13].

### **Second Marriage of Rev. I.H. Hacker**

After the death of Elizabeth Rev. I.H. Hacker married Winifred Dewing, the daughter of Rev. F. Baylis at Buckingham Town on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1887. Her father too was a missionary and hence she had a thirst for missionary work. Mrs. Winifred Hacker continued the work left by Mrs. Elizabeth Hacker. She took charge of women's ministry in Neyyoor. Mrs. Winifred Hacker greatly involved in the Embroidery industry. Girls were given proper training to do the embroidery neatly and artistically. For the beautiful embroidery work made by this industry, it received Silver medal at the exhibition held at Mysore. The profit got from this industry was utilized for the benefit of the girls school at Neyyoor in 1890. Mrs. Winifred Hacker appointed her own meritorious students to work as teachers in this school. Subsequently there was a significant growth in the personality of the girls. In recognition of their improvement, they were awarded medals on the occasion of the coronation of king George V. The students of this school grew up with full confidence and intelligence. Moreover she emphasized the need for the contribution of one tenth of their income towards Dorcas fund for the benefit of poor, needy widows. Even men were given training in nursing [14].

In 1905 I.H. Hacker went to Martandam and started ministry there. Through medical mission he spread the gospel to kanis who resided in the hilly region. Many kanis accepted Christ and got education. A missionary bungalow was constructed at

Martandam in 1908 and now it functions as the Nesamony Memorial Christian College. From there he extended his missionary activities around Parasalai. There he confined the work to the Nadars, Paraiyas and Pulayas and they embraced Christianity on large scale. Rev. I.H. Hacker ministered for forty two years in Neyyoor District and established many churches at various centres. The church built at Neyyoor received great progress. During the period of his service Kodyyur, Karungal, Maruthancode, Colachel, Ethavilai and Kannanoor were the Churches built by the effort of I.H. Hacker. Due to his hard work about 1,11,819 people embraced Christianity. In 1900 when the number of churches increased. Rev. Hacker as a single man found it very difficult to manage them. Hence for the effective supervision of the churches, it was divided into circles like Kallankuzhi circle, Attoor circle, Kodyyoor circle, Kulasekharan circle etc. He arranged for special training classes to pastors. It helped the pastors to spread the gospel effectively [15].

The contribution of Rev. I.H. Hacker to the people of South Travancore was great. He was a good thinker and prolific writer and voracious reader. "Kerala, the Land of Palms", "Memories of Thompson", "A Hundred Years in Travancore" were his publications.

#### **Last Days of Rev. I.H. Hacker**

Mrs. Winifred Hacker died on 23 June 1934 at Kodaikkanal bungalow, Rev. I.H. Hacker breathed his last in 1933 at the age of 85. The legacy of Rev. I.H. Hacker is hard to inherit. It demands from each one of us an inner sense of dedication to purpose and a selfless commitment to serve and share God's generous gift with our fellow men and women [16]. Unlike the other missionaries Rev. I.H. Hacker did years of socio-religious service in South Travancore. During his period the missionary works reached its highest peak. Rev. I.H. Hacker got his retirement in the month of January 1919. After his retirement Rev. I.H. Hacker and his beloved wife settled in Kodaikanal. Rev. Hacker's period of service in South Travancore was a "Golden age in the history of the South Travancore Churches". His great eagerness in the construction of new Churches and to modify the old Churches were unlimited. Even today one can see the English letters, "I.H.H." incised on the stones of the Churches which he built [17].

#### **Conclusion**

The services of Rev. I.H. Hacker in South Travancore was one of a turning points in the missionary history of South Travancore. He is the one who put bedrock to the Church where now the people worship God. He retired and took rest in Kodaikanal. And in May 6, 1933 he had rest in peace and departed from this world (completed his worldly life successfully). He was very pious and devoted his entire life for the upheaval of the downtrodden community in South Travancore. Those who were not having sufficient earnings were helped by Rev. Hacker. He did not even hesitate to educate the poor children. Those children who were unable to continue their studies were provided hostel accommodation and free education in addition to missionary services which were carried out by him. The unexpected demise of Rev. Hacker was an irrecoverable loss to the entire poverty stricken multitude of South Travancore.

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