

Role of Diocesan Missionary Prayer Band to the Development of Women Tribals of Kalrayan Hills

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Abstract: *“Role of Diocesan Missionary Prayer Band to the Development of Women Tribals of Kalrayan Hills” is extended to highlight the work of Diocesan Missionary Prayer Band to uplift the tribal women of Kalrayan Hills. It consists of the life of the people of Kalrayan Hills and contribution of Diocesan Missionary Prayer Band to their economic progress. The present study traces the social change among tribal women of Kalrayan Hills, their economic progress and political participation.*

Key Words: *Kanyakumari, Missionaries, Empowerment.*

Introduction:

The Church of South India was formed on 27th September 1947. During this period Kanyakumari was a part of Travancore Diocese. In June 1, 1959 Kanyakumari Diocese was formed with the Rt. Rev. I.R.H. Gnanadhason as its first Bishop. Kanyakumari Diocese was developed by the London Missionary Society from 1806, with the hard work of the Rev. William Tobias Ringletaube and Maharasan Vedamonickam who was the first convert. The LMS liberated the oppressed especially Nadar community. The Nadar community developed in all walks of life. LMS established schools, hospitals, and technical institutions during this period. It was in such a situation, CSI Diocese of Kanyakumari district thought of launching its mission towards the tribals of Tamil Nadu. A group of indigenous pastors came together in 1959 at Kariavilai CSI Church and started to find ways and means of mission work among the tribals. The pioneers are Rev. D. Elias and Rev. M. Rajaian. Subsequently meeting was held in the mission house of the Kariavilai Church on 31st July 1962, under the leadership of Rev. D. Elias. They discussed for the uncared tribals who lived in misery in the hills of Tamil Nadu. They planned to form a mission known as “Malai Nattu Suvisesa Jebakuzhu” which means “Hill Tribes Missionary Prayer Band”. The Missionary Prayer Band decided on June 6, 1977 to select Kalrayan Hills area as its missionary field and depute Rev. D. Elias as the Missionary. He was duly appointed as missionary on June 20, 1977. From 20th September 1979, it was renamed as “Diocesan Missionary Prayer Band” of Kanyakumari Diocese. A constitution was framed and approved by the Church Board of Kanyakumari Diocese Vide K.K.No.7396. And it was a turning point in the growth of the prayer band towards the women tribals of Kalrayan Hills.

Situation of Kalrayan Hills and its surroundings:

The Kalrayan Hills are a major range of hills situated in the Eastern Ghats of the Southern Indian States of Tamilnadu. The Kalrayan Hills are divided in to two sections- The northern section is referred to Chinna Kalrayans, and the southern section is referred to Periya Kalrayans. The Chinna Kalrayans average height is 2700 feet while the Periya Kalrayans average height is 4000 feet height and extend over an area of 1095 square kilometres. The hills straddle a number of Tamilnadu districts, extending northeast from the Salem district. The range serves as a boundary between the Salem, Villupuram, Thiruvannamalai and Dharmapuri districts. The general slope of the ranges is towards the east in which direction flow the main streams namely the Manimuktharu, Gomugi, and Mayura, and Vasitar. In addition to these a perennial jungle stream called pappakkal also flows into Alathur of Kallakurichi taluk from Kalrayan Hill. The Kalrayan Hills area is richly endowed with forest resources such as sandalwood, jackfruit, lemon, tamarind and gallnut, adding to the forest. It is also called as “Poor man’s hill station” of Tamil Nadu. Every year, the District Administration is conducting the summer festival to attract tourists and create development awareness among the tribes. The traditional people of these areas call themselves as “Goundas”. But the Government has recognized them as “Malaiyali” which means inhabitants of the hills. They are Tamil speaking people. The term “Malayali” is the combination of two Tamil words Malai (hills), Yalees (rulers). As they were nick named as Malayalis, which means, those having the capacity to rule the hills. The tribal of Kalrayan Hill have dark skin and above average height. They were uncombed hair. They used minimum dress material some of them use loincloth and many use lungi also. Typical tribal women had no blouse over their bodies. Some women tie “Thobbai” rope around their hips. The walls of the house were constructed by mud and stone. The height of the wall is very low when compared with other houses. The walls have no windows. The doors of the house were made of bamboo stripes, or by wooden stripes. In front of the house they have grain godown. This godown is called as Kudir. Agriculture is the main occupation of the tribal women. The tribal people of Kalrayan Hills use corn, ragi, maize, millets, and hill rice as their food. They are also engaged in arrack, distillation as well as cultivation and preparation of poppy. They give arrack to small children and the new born babies as we give them milk to drink. The people of Kalrayan Hills take drinks as bed coffee. Mothers who go out to work have the habit of giving arrack to their new born babies and place the babies in the cradle and leave for work. The women are hardworking and they mostly energy in the agricultural work. The hill tribe believes that the spirit of the dead lives in the native village. The tribes are proud of their own customs and traditions. The tribals have many superstitions of their own, which are apparently from those of the plains. Generally the tribal people believe that the diseases are caused due to the wrath of Gods. Very often they get diseases like headache, fever, diarrhea, cholera and small pox in earlier. But if they get disease they heat an iron rod and put the rod on the stomach. If they get one side headache, they cut a blood vessel in the forehead by a glass piece. If they have fever, they cover their whole body with a scale and lie in the hot sun and in that process if they sweat, they bath in the hot water. The above methods are followed to cure the diseases. They worship different kinds of spirits. They believe good spirits discard the bad ones. They believe that evil spirits give troubles and hurt women at times of attaining puberty. To them most of the spirits are bloods thirsty and seek animal sacrifices. To cast off the evil spirits they approach the diviners and the soothsayers. They strongly believe that outbreak of epidemics like

cholera is because of the wrath of some spirits and do animal sacrifices to purify them. Tonsuring and ear boring is a very important function in the tribal community. The story of Ramayana and Mahabharata plays an important role. The tribal people consider education as a novelty and learning as a shame. To eradicate the plight of the tribal women of Kalrayan Hills the Christian missionaries began to adopt the Kalrayan Hill. The moral support given to the Diocesan Missionary Prayer Band those by the Bishop I.R.H. Gnanadhason gave zeal and enthusiasm to involve themselves in missionary activities and thus they began to send missionaries to preach the traditional people. The aim of the prayer band develops the condition of the tribal people of Kalrayan Hills.

Involvements of the Missionaries:

When the missionaries arrived in the Kalrayan Hills for evangelistic work, the condition of women was miserable. Her birth right to education and progress was restricted by certain evil customs and practices which prevailed in the society. Since then they did not have any contact with the people of the plain, and were found enslaved by liquor and uncivilized practices. The people from the plain went there for cutting wood. Nobody cared about them. Women did not receive any education at all. At that time even though there were few primary schools for elementary education their period of learning was five to seven years and there was no possibility for formal higher education. As the learning attained by this small number of girls was confined only to the mastery of alphabet, they could be presumed to have lapsed into illiteracy very soon. Therefore at the advent of the missionaries, female education was very poor in Kalrayan Hills. DMPB established Residential schools after 1983 and facilitated tribal women's education. DMPB workers were motivated to serve the women for their liberation. At present there are eight Good Shepherd Nursery and Primary School, Two high schools and one Higher Secondary School established by DMPB. Totally there are eleven schools in which 1729 girls are doing their school education in Kalrayan Hills. A tremendous change has resulted due to the DMPB schools. It created a good reputation in teaching. So the Government sanctioned aid to the school. The Government now provides grant and scholarship for the students. Many tribal women got educated and posted in high positions in different parts of the country. A good number of doctors, nurses and teachers were created through these institutions. Some of them are politicians. The tribal girls get better facilities and help for education. The missionaries introduced English education through crept in to the society. The aspects of social life began to change. One of the social evils which enslaved the women of Kalrayan Hills was child marriage. Now a day's child marriage became rare among the tribals. Women during their menstruation were kept away from the house for five days and put in separate place near their house. They were treated as untouchables. In the same way, the women who conceived and was about to bear a child was kept away from house. To their benefit, the missionaries slowly educated the women to understand that menstruation as natural and not an evil or abnormal and they need not be kept out their houses for this biological occurrence. Another impact of education was the desire for employment. Women believe only through education they can improve the social and economic status of their families. Girl's education brought about tremendous far reaching consequences in the society of Kalrayan Hills. The DMPB missionaries introduced western culture in Kalrayan Hills. In food habits, dress, games, names and other aspects of social life people began to imitate the west. Now a days girls wear modern dress like frock, midi, chudithar, gowns, tops and jeans, pants in the daily life. Women's behaviour also changed. In the early period women were very fond of tattooing on various parts of their bodies because tattooing will drive away evil spirits and that "tattoo marks alone goes with you even after death". Now a days educational changes and continuous contact with immigrants a kind of awareness is being created among the youth. Girl's appear mehendi designs on their hands. Women have control over their body. They decide on the number of children they should have. They have a say in family planning.

The economic life of the tribal women helps us to understand an important feature of their culture. Poor women have no job and no way of life. Missionaries started Thorkal tailoring training centers help them from 1999. There are five training centers in Kalrayan Hills organised by the missionaries. In the training centers there are more than 1300 women who get their practice in modern tailoring. They send all kinds of fashionable dress to other places. After completing the training course women go to other districts to work in esteemed institutions. This enhanced their income. Candles are the oldest means of supplying light. The women by making candles can utilize their leisure time fruitfully and become economically independent by supplementing income to the family. The missionaries intended through this action to increase the income of women. The production of candle making a home based income for the tribal women. The missionaries wanted to uplift the status of tribal women. They also training them Agarbatti-making. The product holds the base of Bamboo and the top coating over the stick is a blend of aromatic herbs derived from the pure and the fresh nature. Then a computer center was established to get scientific technological improvement for women. Women get very much interest to undergo computer training. Hence girls who know the importance of the computer come to the training centers and get the training. This is a very great achievement of the missionaries. Self Help Groups were started in Kalrayan Hills in 2003. Through SHG women get loan in simple rate of interest. By this amount women run shops, hotels and show their capacity in the work. SHG not only develop the economy of women but also raise the saving habits. It engages in manufacturing activities like producing pickle, candle, masala items, food items and tailoring.

Political empowerment of women is only a part of the overall main-streaming of women. At the political level only microscopic minority of women at the helm of affairs, can effect the change in the life of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendment of the Indian constitution gave right to permit the tribe to participate at the grass root level governance involving Panchayat Raj Institution and women were given one-third seats. In the 2006 local Panchayat election, out of 15 Panchayat constitutions in Kalrayan Hills 7 tribal women Panchayat Presidents were elected from seven constituencies. As Panchayat Presidents, these women are responsible for the infrastructural development of their villages in laying access to road, water supply, street lights, removal of the waste etc. Many of the houses do not have toilets facilities. They use the backyard of their houses to be a convenient toilet. Women find it very difficult in the night and during day time to go to toilets. As a whole Kalrayan Hills is surrounded by dense forests, dangerous animals, poisonous species, it is very difficult and life risking for women to go to toilets, especially during the nights. The women Panchayat president of Kalrayan Hills have already taken steps to attach toilet facilities in every home. As a result of their step 40% of the houses have toilet facilities in public places. Toilet centers have been provided. Sewage has been completely set aside. The tribal women Presidents of the Panchayats in Kalrayan Hills guide the illiterate tribals in carrying out their general activities. They are devoted in helping the poor women to get them married. As hospitals are available in the Kalrayan Hill area the leading women personalities take the poor affected children and women under the guidance of the missionaries to these hospitals. Thus the women empowerment has been gradually creeping in to the routine life of the people of Kalrayan tribal women through the work of the missionaries. This led to the poor tribal women of Kalrayan Hills to lead a civilized life.

Significance of the Study

The DMPB missionaries were directly involved with the empowerment of women tribals in Kalrayan Hills. The study intends to focus the yeomen services rendered by the DMPB missionaries and to examine how their mission and ministry helped to attain the liberation of women tribals of the hills. The proximity of the native women with the missionaries enabled them emulate feelings of self-respect and equality which were alien to a highly male dominated society. The endeavours of the missionaries in educating and organizing the masses were highly appreciated by the different sections of tribals.

Sources of Information

The sources consulted for writing this Research Paper “Role of Diocesan Missionary Prayer Band to the Development of the Women Tribals of Kalrayan Hills” are two categories, namely, primary and secondary. They are principally in English and Tamil languages. In addition to the primary and secondary sources the main concentration was on having direct contact with the inhabitants of the Kalrayan Hills. In the Kalrayan Hill areas, the women lived in a very backward condition. The government recognized 267 villages in Kalrayan Hills. Since most of the villages are inaccessible the research scholar contacts the tribal women of 50 primary villages and had direct contact with the tribal women. Interviews were held with the occupants directly by the research scholar. So the primary sources mainly depend on the direct discussion with the elderly tribal women of these areas.

The research scholar met the first missionary of Kalrayan Hills Rev. D. Elias and obtained detailed information about the DMPB involvement of Kalrayan Hills. The personal interview with the Government officials like the Rural Welfare Officer Mrs. Rajalekshmi, the Accountant of Village Poverty Removing Committee, Mrs. Jeyalekshmi, Panchayat President of Serapattu Mrs. Lekshi Kuppuswamy, and Mrs. Jeeva Nesam supplied more information about the tribal women of Kalrayan Hills. Personal interviews with the prominent persons of the hill tribes helped the reconstruction of the social and economic history of the places. These interviews provided extensive information about the social life of the hill tribes. They are highly useful to make comprehensive analysis of various developments of the tribal women of Kalrayan Hills. Primary sources are extensively used in this study. Primary sources used in this study are Minutes of the Kanyakumari Diocese, Annual Reports and Reports of the Diocesan Missionary Prayer Band, Minutes of the Diocesan Missionary Prayer Band, Committees, Churches, DMPB Schools, DMPB Hospitals, DMPB Hostels, and the letters exchanged between the Diocesan Missionary Prayer Band and Kalrayan Hill missionaries also from primary sources for the study. In addition to the secondary sources many publications issued by the Church of South India, Kanyakumari District also stand as secondary sources for the study. Every month the Church of South India Diocese under the patronage of Diocesan Missionary Prayer Band publishes the bulletin “Arutpanimalar” which also gives the day-to-day events of Kalrayan Hills and about the special events in Kalrayan Hills. These sources consulted provide sufficient information for the study. “Desopakari” a monthly bulletin issued by the Kanyakumari Diocese also gives information regarding the existing condition of the tribal women in the area.

To supplement the primary sources, the secondary sources were found available at Scott Christian College Library at Nagercoil, Nesamony Memorial Christian College Library at Marthandam, Concordia Theological Seminary Library at Nagercoil, Connemara Public Library at Chennai, Tamil Nadu State Archives at Chennai, Madras University Library at Chennai, DMPB Library at Nagercoil, Diocesan Library at Nagercoil, CAATS Library at Nagercoil, Ramachandra University College Library in Erachakulam, Holy Cross College Library at Nagercoil, and District Library at Nagercoil, are the repositories of published books mainly in English and Tamil. These sources range from published books to souvenirs. All these furnish good deal of information about the origin, development, life style and cultural changes of the tribal women of Kalrayan Hills.

Research Methodology

The researcher has stayed among Kalrayan Hills for thirty days and that has motivated to carry out this research on the tribal women. Survey methodology too has also been followed through discussion and survey methodology. Personal interviews were conducted with those closely associated with the DMPB. They were none other than the ones who worked in the institutions of the DMPB or the ones who closely observed the development of the DMPB, there by taking interest in the day-to-day affairs of the same. The presentation has been brought in through Direct Observation and Focus Group Discussion, the qualitative data were generated.

Hypothesis

The research paper “Role of Diocesan Missionary Prayer Band to the Development of Women Tribals of Kalrayan Hills” is based on hypothesis that enabled the research scholar to explore relevant data and organize the study. The author of the present paper had the chance of visiting a number of villages along with them in Kalrayan Hills. The villagers explained how the tribal women living in some of these places have undergone tremendous changes and how a good number of these tribal women have been benefited by the missionary prayer band, which has its branches in several places in Tamil Nadu. Quite a good number of students who were under the care of the missionary prayer band have gone abroad to the Gulf countries and to various states in India to find very good jobs.

This experience had a great impact on the author and this impelled to formulate the hypothesis that the missionaries might have done lot of work for shaping the life of a number of tribal women who came under their protection. Working with this hypothesis in mind, the author soon found out that the missionary band once very vigorous is now in a state of total obscurity and much more work has to be done to excavate it and reveal its glories to the academic and religious circles. The present livelihood of the women tribal of this area has been considerably changed. The attitude of the missionaries towards the hill tribes of the Kalrayan Hills is the hypothesis of the dissertation.

The last but not least, fulfilling the development needs of DMPB in particular and the Women tribals of Kalrayan Hills in general by the Diocese must be possible to a great extent. Hence, an attempt has been made to find the extent of the DMPB development, which constitutes the findings of this research work.

Scope of Study

The study of Tribal women in Kalrayan Hills has been neglected for a considerable period. The deplorable condition of the tribal women in Kalrayan Hills motivated the researcher to study about their conditions. The personal experience with the Tribal women of Kalrayan Hills made it possible to bring to light the empowerment of the tribal women through the DMPB missionaries. The studies brought about by it would form a milestone in the further study of the tribal women. This could be the scope for the future study.

Findings

The position of the tribal women being treated as slaves or treated as bonded labourers has come to end due to the yeoman services under the DMPB missionaries. The missionaries are continuing their strenuous work in still developing the position of the tribal women of Kalrayan Hills. The days are not far off for the complete uplift of the tribal women of Kalrayan Hills. The empowerment of women was a herculean task for the missionaries.

Conclusion

The tribal women of Kalrayan hills were considered as unwanted sects. They were ill-treated, neglected and forced to suffer. The denial of education kept them in darkness. Only after 1962 progress began to dawn in the lives of the tribal women because only in 1962 the Diocesan Missionary Prayer Band stepped on the soil of Kalrayan hills.

Thus the women's empowerment has been gradually creeping into the routine life of the people of Kalrayan tribals through the guidance of the missionaries. The work of the missionaries helped the poor tribal women of Kalrayan hills to lead a civilized life.

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