



Rev.Rhenius and cholera epidemic(Plague)

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Introduction:

Though birth and death are seen as unchanging in the life of human beings, only a few people's birth and death are remembered. We remember them only if their well being is beneficial to us and to society .Even today, Rev.Rhenius, who is fondly called 'Nellai apostle', has a special place in the hearts of Tamil people. Rev.Rhenius came to Tamilnadu in the 19th century and played a major role in its religious, social and linguistic development. In this article we will see Rev.Rhenius' efforts made against the cholera plague and the strategies he took to protect the people and his participation in social service.

Rev.Rhenius:

Charles Theophilus Ewald Rhenius who was a gift to Chennai and Nellai, was born on November 5th, 1790 in Prussian Welter, Germany. Rev. Rhenius, who wished to do religious service, received his Theological degree in 1812. Then, in 1814, Rev.Rhenius who came to Chennai got ministerial training and Tamil language training. Rev.Rhenius came to Chennai in 1814 and stayed in a rental house in George town and began his ministry. He worked in Chennai for six years and in 1819 he was sent to Nellai for Evangelical work. Rev.Rhenius worked for 19 years in Nellai. He started many congregations and schools and laid the foundation for the social and religious development of the people of Tamil Nadu. Rev.Rhenius excelled in religious work as well as social and language development work. He wrote a Tamil grammar book, the first Tamil geography book, Bible translation and a Tamil prose book. Rev.Rhenius was a forerunner of G.U.Pope and Caldwell who worked for Tamil language development. He dedicated most of his life to the Nellai area and died at the age of 48.

Cholera plague:

Cholera, which appeared and spread in October 1818 in Chennai, was notable among the tragic events. According to the words of Bishop Caldwell, this deadly disease appeared in Tamilnadu for the first time. Many people in town died. Deadly fear gripped the people. This disease originated in Bengal and spread south along the east coast.Though this news had already spread in Chennai, no one knew how to prevent it or cure it if they were affected by it. The disease that reached the city started killing many people. People who thought that it was the goddess Mariamman who sent this disease, celebrated many festivals to the goddess. Cholera also affected the people who gathered for the festival. Then the disease spread vigourously. Many people ran away from the city. They also carried the disease with them and imported it into villages.

Cholera and first aid:

To the left and to the right of the area where Rev.Rhenius lived, people were dying of the cholera plague. But Rev.Rhenius thought "To whom shall we go, Lord? There is no one else who gives hope in death and victorious health except you Lord." He believed that it was his duty to help the people as much as he could in the way that God had shown him. Rev.Rhenius gave medicine to people and saved lives by giving first aid to Cholera

patients. Rev.Rhenius and other Christian workers showed their Christian love by not leaving the city in the days of need and by helping the sick

Removal of superstition:

In Rev.Rhenius' diary (page no.362) he mentioned the following.“The local people try to strengthen their superstition. A Brahmin has stated this. Once upon a time, the demon Goddess Mariamman wanted to drink the blood of human beings and went to Shiva and asked him to help. Shiva asked her, "What do you want?" The Demon Goddess said that she wanted the power to kill human beings. From that day, she has been creating such diseases among humans in this world. This is the story of Cholera that the local people say. Sometimes, the demon Goddess repents of her deeds and cruel desires and goes to the mountains for 10 to 12 years. Then she will come back more ferociously than before. This is the reason for the interval in the spread of infectious diseases. Rishis also appealed to Shiva to get rid of it. They also asked why he gave such a power to the demon Goddess. He said, "She bowed down to me very humbly. So I could not avoid her. I will teach you a mantra that opposes her power. Anyone who recites this will be cured. Along with this, they should make an offering of rice. Thus, these people hardened their minds. It was believed that she would not come where there were leaves of a certain tree. Therefore, they tied these leaves to thread ropes and hung them across the streets and on the doorposts and doors.”

Although cholera decreased in the city, it was still high in other places. People at a place K wanted to make a certain ritual for Mariamman. They needed money to do it. They had great faith in their European officials, who would support this worship as they would give them medicine. Accordingly, after finishing the Sunday service, they asked Rev.Rhenius for money. After two days, all the elders came and made the same request. Rhenius did not give them money. He sternly warned them not to commit such sins while they were under the control of God. A manual on cholera was read to them. It also pointed out that what they wanted to do was foolish.

In 1832, the devastation caused by cholera was great in Kommadikottai, Thoothukudi District. Then some of those villagers and a few villagers of Anugrahapuram were affected. So others said that as they betrayed their God, the Christian God got angry and started destroying their village. However, the priests and exorcists continued to celebrate festivals, saying that the more they celebrated, the more the people would be healed because their god would succeed. People of that time did not know that cholera could spread due to crowding in the summer season. Alas, sickness prevailed because of gatherings. More and more people died. Even the priests were affected by cholera.

Rhenius and cholera plague:

Some entire families were wiped out by cholera. People living in cities and villages fled to forests. Rhenius wrote and distributed a pamphlet at that time and encouraged and taught the people physical and spiritual blessings. The Christian congregations followed the advice given by him and escaped from the disease. In the city of Tirunelveli, fifty to seventy people were dying every day. However, not a single person in the city Christian congregation was affected by the disease. Seeing this, whenever Rhenius came to preach in the church, the people of the city gathered in large numbers to listen to his teachings and advice.

When the people of Pragasapuram were affected by cholera, catechist Thomas received tablets and medicines from Rhenius and gave them to the patients. All of them survived. Samathanapuram congregation also survived. The catechist of Samathanapuram helped his congregation without any discrimination and other religions people who persecuted them.

Cholera Epidemic and Awareness:

Rev.Rhenius wrote a pamphlet about cholera prevention and printed it and distributed it to the people. He also sent the readers to read it.

Cholera epidemic in the Rhenius period and today's Corona

During the time of Rhenius, people thought that the cholera plague was caused by the wrath of the gods and to please god, they conducted temple festivals and people gathered. Due to this, the cholera epidemic increased and many people died due to large gatherings. Even today, it is said that corona plague is spreading at

weddings and festivals. To prevent the cholera epidemic, leaves of trees were tied to ropes and hung in the streets and door posts at home. To prevent the spread of the corona plague, they plucked neem leaves, tied them to ropes and hung them on streets and door posts at home. Neem and turmeric were ground and mixed with water and sprinkled in the yard. Awareness was given to save people from cholera plague. Even today, government gives awareness to protect people from corona disease.

Conclusion:

Plague comes and goes at every period. During the time of Rev.Rhenius, his tireless efforts to remove superstition and create awareness by providing medical aid and advice protected the people. Even today, by creating awareness and providing medical help, we can drive away any epidemic from the world and protect us too.

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