

GENSIS OF THE TIRUNELVELI DIOCESE TRUST

A. STELLA MARY

Full Time Ph.D Research Scholar

Rani Anna Govt. college for women,

*Affiliated to: Manonmaniam Sundaranar University,
Tirunelveli -8.*

ABSTRACT

After nearly 67 years of independence and despite advancements in various fields, India stands today with a dismal record in several social development sectors. Of the 1.2 billion people in India, most of them live in extreme poverty and the majority of them are women and girls. Some believe this estimate to be around 70% of the female population. Recent estimates of poverty of Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and female-headed households show that caste and poverty status seem to go hand in hand. Virtually one third of the world's child labourers live in India. If you consider the female labour force, then Indian women contribute a much larger share of their earnings than men to a family maintenance. The 60 million Indian households are still below the poverty line. Women form the largest body of unskilled workers being 90% of rural and 70% of urban unskilled workers. Women's issues are now being analyzed by planners through the paradigm of empowerment. The welfare approach which considered women as targets and beneficiaries was replaced by the development approach which raised questions about access to resources, yet disregarded the fundamental issue of unequal gender relations. Welfare was the first approach used in women's development programmes but by the 1980s it became clear that the idea of welfare perpetuated gender biases.

Keywords: Tinnevely, Christianity, Palamcottah, Church, Missionary

Introduction

The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (S P C.K.) was responsible for the establishment of Christianity in Tinnevely area. It was founded in England in 1698. After the S.P.C.K. Mission, the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.) played vital roles for the growth and strengthening of the congregation of Tinnevely district. The C.M.S. and the S.P.G. Missions were founded in England in 1696 and in 1799 respectively. The C.M.S. Mission started its evangelistic work in Tinnevely area in 1820. The S.P.C.K. Mission handed over its mission work to the S.P.G. Mission in 18251.

ROLE OF THE C.M.S. AND THE S.P.G. MISSIONS

The Rev. Rhenius, a German Missionary, came to Palamcottah on 7th July 1820 as the first C.M.S. Missionary in Tinnevely. He was accompanied by Bernard Schmid. In the beginning, the C.M.S. had three churches and eleven schools. The first C.M.S. Church was erected at Palamcottah in March 1822. The Rev. Rhenius converted a school which was closed into a chapel at Courtallam Rasta. On 3rd, of January 1826, he laid the foundation church at Palamcottah, later known as the Holy Trinity Cathedral. As a result of his effort, new congregations emerged at Sattankulam, Neduvillai, Megnanapuram, Idaiyankulam, Asirvathapuram, Nallur and Surandai. In 1827, he formed a new village and named it as Dohnavur. In 1836, he built a church at Tinnevely Towne.

The Rev. Rhenius used to gather his catechists once a month at his headquarters to equip them in their parish work and Gospel work. Moreover, he induced the native people to support their own churches by initiating the 'Native Philanthropic Society' in 1830 for raising funds for the purchase of property for the Mission, construction and maintenance of the buildings. He also started the 'Poor Fund' in 1832 to feed the poor people. In 1835, he established the C.M.S. Gospel Mission to enhance evangelistic work in new areas. Thus the congregations were taught to support churches. In January 1836, the first Bishop of Madras, Daniel Corrie, visited Palamcottan and ordained the Rev. John Devasagayam as the first clergyman of Tinnevely. After rendering seventeen years of committed service, Rhenius died on 5th June 1838.

From 1837 to 1868, the Rev. John Thomas did Gospel work at Megnanapuram, Vellalanvilai and Nalumavadi. The Rev. Pettitt, the successor of Rhenius, was responsible for the construction of new churches at Alwaneri, Dohnavur and Pannaivilai from 1846 to 1849. From 1854 to 1858 Thomas Ragland, one of the notable missionaries, came to north Tinnevely in 1845 and did Gospel work in Virudupatti (modern Virudunagar) and Sivakasi. As a result of his consecrated service, Satchiapuram came into being. Thus the C.M.S. managed to propagate Christianity all over Tinnevely districts.

In 1837, the S.P.G. Mission appointed the Rev. Charles as the first S.P.G. Missionary of Tinnevely. He was transferred to Madurai in 1838. The Rev. A.F. Camera succeeded him in May 1838. Mudalur was ministered unto by the Rev. Christian Samuel from 1839, Meanwhile, the second Bishop of the Diocese of Madras, the Rt. Rev. G.J.T. Spencer visited Tinnevely in January, 1841. In that year, the congregation of Tinnevely had about 30,000 members. In 1859, the Rev. Thomas Brotherton, started the mission work at Nazareth. In 1870, the Rev. Dr. Strachan succeeded him. From 1876 to 1908 the Rev. Arthur Margoschis did Gospel work at Nazareth. The S.P.G. Mission ministered at Pillayanmanai, Agapaikulam, Valayadi, Mukuperi, Pragasapuram, Oyyangudi, Mudalur, Nazareth, Pudukottai, Puthiamputtur, Nagalapuram and Idaiyangudi⁶. In 1851, there were 34,928 Christians in Tinnevely (The C.M.S. Mission: 24,613 and the S.P.G. Mission: 10,315)⁷.

SEPARATE DIOCESE FOR TINNEVELLY

All the churches in Tinnevelly area functioned under the control of the Diocese of Madras. In 1861, the fourth Bishop of the Madras Diocese, Rt. Rev. Frederick Cell, felt that the congregations in Tinnevelly had attained saturated position to function as a separate Dioceses. Moreover, he found some difficulties in visiting Tinnevelly frequently. So he wanted to separate Tinnevelly from the Diocese of Madras. At that time, there were three Dioceses in India, namely Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. They were part of the Church of England Only the British Parliament had the power to form new Dioceses in their Colonies. This regulation delayed the eager effort of the Bishop. In 1874, the English Parliament passed an Act and gave the right to the Bishops in India to appoint Assistant Bishops. This enabled him to take further steps.

In Tinnevelly area, the C.M.S. Mission and the S.P.G. Mission were doing evangelistic work. So Bishop Cell decided to select one member each from the C.M.S. and the S.P.G. Missions. He selected the Rev. Edward Sargent and the Rev. Robert Caldwell to look after the C.M.S. and the S.P.G. churches, respectively. The Rt. Rev. Sargent served in the C.M.S. for 42 years and the 'Rt. Rev. Caldwell served in the S.P.G. for 36 years. On 11th March 1877 at Calcutta, the Bishop Rt. Rev. Johnson ordained them as Bishops of Tinnevelly. They functioned as Assistant Bishops of the Bishop, the Rt. Rev. Gell. The congregation of Tinnevelly became the offshoot of the Madras Diocese:). According to the statistics of 1879, the C.M.S. had about 34,484 Christians in 875 villages and the S.P.G. had about 24,719 Christians in 631 villages". The Rt. Rev. Sargent administered all the S.P.G. Churches till 1889 and the Rt. Rev. Caldwell administered all the C.M.S. Churches till 1891. During that time, North, South, Mid and West Church councils were formed in Tinnevelly.

In October 1896, the Bishop of Madras separated Tinnevelly from the Diocese of Madras and named it as the 'Diocese of Tinnevellyl. On 28th October 1896, the Rev. Samuel Morley was ordained in Madras as the first Bishop of the newly formed Diocese of Tinnevelly. But it was officially called as the 'Bishopric of Tinnevelly'. In 1896, all the four Church Councils came under the Central Church Council and the Bishop, the Rt.Rev.Morley became the head of the Church Councils. In 1898, there were 60,000 Christians in the Diocese of Tinnevelly. In 10, April 1918, the properties of the C.M.S. and the S.P.G. Missio ere brought under the supervision of the Tinnevelly Diocesan Trust Associate on 1924, Diocesan Church Councils were rearranged as North, South and Mid Church Councils. In 1925, the S.P.G. and the C.M.S. Missions were amalgamated and they accepted the authority of the Diocese. The Tinnevelly Book Society of the C.M.S. Mission started publishing Narpothagam (Friendly Instructor) from the month of February 1849. After the amalgamation of the two Missions. It became the monthly magazine of the Diocese of Tinnevelly.

In December 1927, Indian Anglican churches got Independence from the Church of England. It led to the birth of the church of India, Burma and Ceylon. They came under the control of the Metropolitan Bishop of Calcutta. The doctrine and ecclesiastical organization were mostly on the model of the church of England. In March 1930, the General Council of the Church of India, Burma and Ceylon met at Calcutta and drafted a

Constitution for the church, and the Bishopric ' of Tinnevely was recognized as a self-governing body. The official name of the Diocese was "The Diocese of Tinnevely" with a new Episcopal .

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