



CONTRIBUTIONS OF BISHOP PETER BERNARD PEREIRA FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF THE DIOCESE OF TRIVANDRUM- AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The present paper throws light on the courageous effort and ardent activities of Bishop Peter Bernard Pereira for the empowerment of the Diocese of Trivandrum. Bishop Pereira played a significant role for uplifting the down-trodden and marginalized people to the main stream of the life. He worked relentlessly to make a revolution in the fields especially education, social work, hospital management etc. Because of the stringent implementation of bold and time bound activities of Bishop Pereira, He is rightly known in the name of 'spotting Bishop'.

Keywords:

Auxiliary, Episcopal, Bishopric, TSSS, Msgr, Papal Bull, MCDP, Antigonish, Vimochana, Samram, Christopher Movement, '*Grow with Faith*', '*Age cum Fide*'.

Introduction

Bishop Peter Bernard Periera was the first native Bishop of the Diocese of Trivandrum. Bishop was born at Murrukkumpuzha, near Trivandrum om 27June, 1917. After his Primary education at St. Augustine School, Murrukkumpuzha, he joined St. Rapheal Seminary at

Kollam in 1933. He was ordained as Priest on 25 March,1944.He was appointed Parish Priest of Sacred Heart Church, Chullimanoor on 29 June,1944. He was nominated Auxiliary to the Latin Bishop of Trivandrum by Pope Pius XI on 5.5.1955¹

The concentration ceremony of Bishop Peter Bernard Pereira was held at Trivandrum on 24 August,1955, the day of the feast of St. Bartholomew. The day will ever remain a red-letter day in the history of the Latin Diocese of Trivandrum, because for the first time in the history of the Diocese, a son of the soil was raised to the Episcopal dignity in the person of bishop Peter Bernard Pereira. At the time of Luis appointment, Bishop Pereira was only thirty eight². Bishop Vincent Dereere appointed Msgr. Peter Bernard Pereira as the vicar General of the Diocese on 7 September,1955. Msgr. Paul OCD, the former Vicar General was appointed the second General. By the same Circular, Msgr. Peter Bernard Pereira was also given the change of the Administrator of the Diocese from September ,1955, till the return of Bishop Vincent decree from the foreign tour³.

Bishop Vincent Decree retired on 24, October,1966 and Bishop Peter Bernard Pereira took over the reigns of the Diocese on 1 October ,1966. *Age Cum fide* was the motto of the new Bishop. He served the Diocese of Trivandrum for twenty three years-twelve years as Auxiliary Bishop and eleven years as Bishop⁵. The taking over of the administration of the Diocese of Trivandrum by Bishop Pereira assumed special significance in the light of favorable as well as challenging situation As a son of soil, Bishop Pereira was very much conscious of the hard realities of the living conditions of his flock and socio-economic and political set up of Kerala. Organizing the youth for social work and self help and by initiating reconstruction programs for the parishioners, the new parish Priest earned the appreciation and co-operation of the parishioners.

Missionary Activities of Bishop Pereira.

Fr. J. Koilparambil records that apart from other activities, Fr. Peter Bernard Periera took special interest in the conversion of pagans to the Christian faith in the new mission fields of Nedumangad and thus become a model and inspiration to his fellow priests⁶. His long journey of missionary activities could be analyzed as a positive step towards fulfilment of his bishopric motto '*Grow with faith*'. His missionary experience at Chullimanoor in the Pluralistic, socio-ethnic situation has also helped him very much in the administration of the Diocese of Trivandrum, which was one of the largest Dioceses in India.

The most important factor that influenced Bishop Pereira in the administration of the Diocese was the realization of the fact that removal of poverty is indispensable to spiritual progress⁷. Bishop Pereira realized that people living in poverty and misery, who have not enough to eat and place to live cannot lead admirable spiritual lives. As the father and shepherd of his flocks, he identified himself with the poor and chalked out programs for their liberation from oppression, and exploitation⁸. Bishop Pereira spearheaded two movements for liberalization-one against the organized onslaught of political miscreants on the freedom of the Church and religious beliefs of the people and the other movement was against the exploitation of the poor and the marginalized. The first movement culminated in the *Vimochana Samaram* and the second manifested itself in the form of social liberating programs such as the Marianad Community Development Project(MCDP).

The Community ministry of E.M.S. Namboothiripad and the Catholic Church had confrontations in several fields. The Catholic Church mainly opposed the educational policy of the communist Government as it felt that The educational bill was directly aimed to through generations of their hard work⁹. Apart from the Christian Church, the Nair Service Society (NSS) under Sri. Mannath Padmanbhan also opposed the communists. A section of the Ezhava

elites also joined the NSS-Christian combine and Muslim League also supported the anti-government campaigns. This movement against the Government was also seen as an extension of the impact of the cold war into Kerala. The leaders of Liberation Struggle were accused of accepting all types of aid including monetary support to uproot the communist Government¹¹.

The Liberation struggle against the communist ministry popularly known in Malayalam as *Vimochana samaram* begun in June 1959, was fought on a religious platform invoking religious sentiments and mobilizing the people on religious –communal grounds, supported the political parties like Indian National Congress, the Praja Socialist Party, Revolutionary Socialist party, Kerala Socialist Party and Muslim League. Sri. Mannathu Padmanabhan was the leader of the Vimochana Samaram and the Liberalization struggle started with the Catholic Church in the EMS Ministry. Changanassery, Palai, Ankamali and Trivandrum were the main centre of Vimochana Samaram. In Trivandrum, the leadership of the Liberalization Struggle was taken up by Bishop Pereira. The Catholic Church was mainly concerned with the problems in education sector¹².

Diocesan Activities.

In the Diocese of Trivandrum, a Diocesan Action committee, a volunteer and propaganda committee and parish defense committee and Parish Defense Committee were formed for defending the Churches and School buildings. In a letter to the priest of the Diocese, Bishop Pereira termed the impending struggle and exhorted the priest and the people to prepare for the worst sacrifices and heavy crosses¹³. To defend the Churches, Schools and other Catholic institutions, a Defense Committee consisting of Volunteers from the parishes were constituted. They were known as *Christophers*¹⁴. Christophers were drawn from the poorest sections of the Christian community and ‘they constituted they backbone of the Vimochana Samaram. Only

Roman Catholics are allowed to be enlisted as Christophers¹⁵. Deepika, the Catholic newspaper, in an editorial commented thus: The Chief Minister may not understand the real strength of the *Christophers*. Five good *Christophers* might be more than sufficient to face even five thousand communists since.... For a true Christian, life in this earth is immaterial¹⁶. The Christopher movement originated with certain clearly defined objectives¹⁷. The main purpose of this movement was to organize an

promote social welfare activities on the parish basis. Young Catholics who have completed sixteen years and above were used as training centers, where they even received training in the use of arms¹⁸. When Church dignitaries visited training camps, they were given guard of honour in military style¹⁹.

Bishop Pereira played a dominant role in the events that took place in Pulluvila, Vettucaud and Cheriyaathura. He adopted a stringent attitude towards the police atrocities of these Diocesan parishes. Bishop Pereira met the Governor of Kerala and submitted a memorandum 'demanding special investigation' and to ensure the Christian community the protection to which they are entitled under constitution²⁰. Bishop Pereira termed the firing incident at Cheriyaathura as the last nail struck on the coffin of the Communist Government in Kerala²¹. and that the blood of the martyrs proved to be the death of the Communist Government²².

Socio-Economic Activities of Bishop Pereira

The church understood the necessity of socio-economic reconstruction movements to alleviate poverty and to rehabilitate people which later led to the launching of comprehensive development programs aiming at the empowerment of the people. Learning lessons from the Vimochana Samaram Bishop Pereira realized the need for political empowerment of the people and he went one of his way even to the extent of appearing in an election platform of the

Congress party in a bid to canvas support for a candidate from Parasala, who belonged to the Trivandrum Diocese²³.

The second movement for liberation spearheaded by bishop Pereira was the liberation of the poor and the marginalized people from oppression and exploitation to the path of empowerment. He bravely made a venture on his part to adapt development models of national spheres into the Diocese. The main instrument of the Trivandrum²⁴.

Trivandrum Social Service Society (TSSS)

Second Liberation Movement' aiming at social changed and empowerment of the people was the Trivandrum Social Service Society (TSSS), established by Bishop Pereira. His vision was deeply rooted in the Problems of his people. He believed in economic self-reliance and improvement of temporal aspects together with progress of pastoral activities. Bishop Pereira was one of the pioneers of social work in the Catholic Church of Kerala²⁵. The Trivandrum Social Service Society (TSS), a charitable organization registered on 7th June, 1960 under the Travancore Cochin Literary, Scientific and Charitable Societies Act XII, of 1955, was the brain child of Bishop Pereira²⁶. The main objectives of TSSS are the social-economic uplift of the poor and oppressed Sections of the Society, irrespective of caste, creed and community²⁷. Bishop Pereira was an ardent advocate of Co-operative movements. Marianad Community Development Project (MCDP).

The most important development Programme started in the Diocese, two years after the Liberation struggle was the Marianad Community development projects. It was launched in 1961. Which was modelled in the Antigonish Movement²⁸, a social and economic movement sponsored by the Extension Department of St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia. During the 1920's following several decades of adversity in fishing, mining and agriculture in eastern Nova Scotia, St. Francis Xavier University became involved in a series

of social and economic programmes, and in 1928 it economic programmes, and in 1928 it established the Extension Movement²⁹.

Marianad is a little fishing village twenty five kilometers north of Thiruvananthapuram city. Originally this area is called 'Alillathura' literally meaning 'shore' without people'. This uninhabited coastal Village became the center for a bold initiative by Bishop Peter Bernard Pereira to launch the famous Marianad Community Development Project in 1961. It was probably the first experience with the percept of helping people to help themselves, which fruits in the form of many community buildings and organizations based on people's Participation³⁰. The Community Development Project at Marianad was started under the aegis of TSSS; a charitable organization registered on 7th June, under the Travancore Cochin Literary, Scientific and charitable Societies Act XII of 1955³¹. All the activities of the society are directed towards the socio- economic upliftment of the poor and the oppressed section of the society, irrespective of caste, creed and community³².

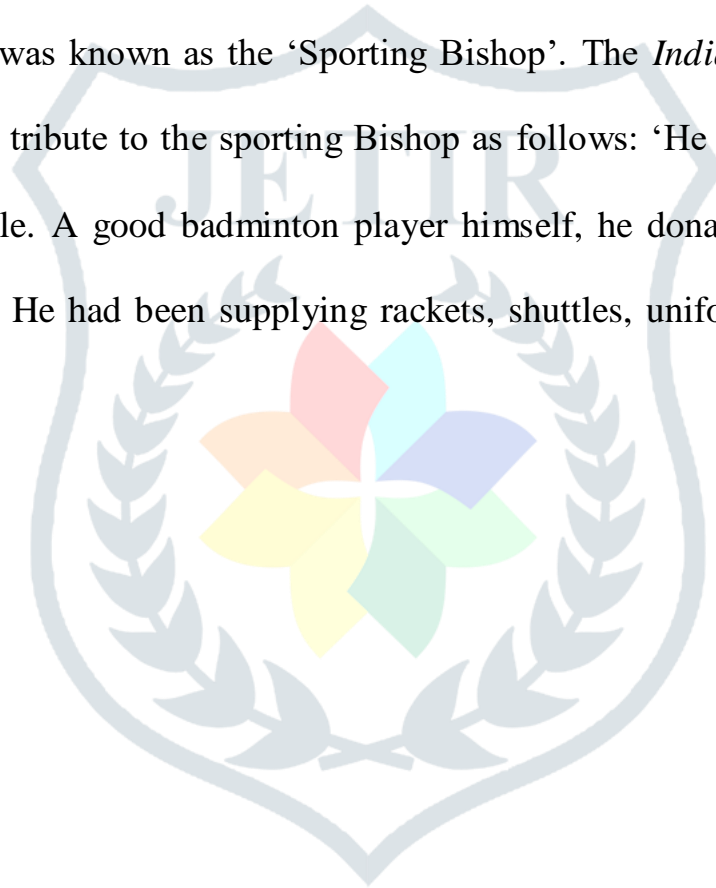
Educational & Scientific Contributions

Bishop Pereira took initiatives for starting higher education institutions in the Diocese. There were sixty four schools including High Schools, Upper and Lower Primary Schools in the Diocese in 1959³³. Because of the constant efforts of Bishop Pereira three Colleges were sanctioned. The All saints College, Chakkai, Trivandrum. ST. Xavier's College, Thumba, Loyola College, Sreekaryam. However the running of these colleges was entrusted with the Jesuits and the congregation of the Carmelite Religious.

Bishop Pereira gave special emphasis to the temporal administration of the Diocese. He purchased landed properties and estates at different parts of the Diocese and laid a solid foundation for the economic self sufficiency of the Diocese. His administration of the mission

field more than hundred churches for the Christian communities formed during his period of administration³⁴. His interest in the overall development of the nation is reflected in the magnanimous surrendering of a Parish Church and the surrounding premises for the noble cause of establishing the site for Indian, Space Research Organization³⁵. This sacrificial act wastime and again acclaimed by Dr.A.P.J Abdulkalam, the former President of India in his talks in India and abroad³⁶.

Bishop Pereira was known as the ‘Sporting Bishop’. The *Indian Express* ina leading article paid a glowing tribute to the sporting Bishop as follows: ‘He saw Kerala badminton brick and left it marble. A good badminton player himself, he donated generously for the progress of the game. He had been supplying rackets, shuttles, uniforms, refreshments and



pocket money for the needy players. He made contributions for constructing the indoor stadium at the Sree Moolam Club, Trivandrum. The club as reciprocal gesture, left the court at his disposal for three hours in the morning and the Bishop in his turn would leave it at the disposal of the poor and needy players who could not afford to pay the subscription. As a mark of respect to him, the VSSC Recreation Club has named the All Kerala Badminton Tournament conducted by them after his name and instituted the *'Bishop Peter Bernard Pereira Memorial Trophy'*.

Bishop Pereira attended the Second Vatican Council meeting held at Rome in the year 1962 and he was very much influenced by the deliberations and decisions of the Council. The young Bishop got an opportunity to meet the world leaders of the Catholic Church and exchange his views at the Second Vatican Council at Rome. After this Bishop Pereira started renewal Programmes in the Diocese of Trivandrum and it was the renewal spirit of the Second Vatican Council³⁵, which was the main influence which made him start an orientation centre at Trivandrum in 1968³⁹. It was started to train members of various associations, catechists and nuns Engaged in various mission activities.

Conclusion

Bishop Pereira, the first native Bishop, laid the foundation for the actual growth of the Diocese. He was a visionary who introduced new development programmes for the welfare of his people. His Marianad Development Programme is worth mention. He always stood for protecting the faith at any cost and his participation and leadership in the Vimochana Samaram was meant to protect the faith from the onslaught of Political miscreants as well as to ensure the basic rights of the faithful in the educational field.

As the originator of the TSSS, Bishop Pereira was able to start hundreds of Development Projects with the sole aim of empowering the people of the Diocese. Bishop Pereira was hospitalized for special treatment on 19th May, 1977. He passed away on June 1978 at Christian College, Vellore following Cerebral Hemorrhage.

End Notes

1. *Paper Bull, nominating Fr.Peter Bernard Pereira, as the Auxiliary Bishop of Trivandrum.*
2. *Bishop Vincent Dereere's Circular dated 7th September, 1955, ADT.*
3. *Ibid*
4. *Every Catholic bishop is expected to select a motto on the commencement of hisEpiscopal administration. Usually the selected motto reflects the personality of the Bishop and the circumstances and conditions of the Diocese. Age cum fide meant Grow with faith.*
5. *Bishop Pereira died at vellore on 13rd June 1978. His mortal remains are laid to rest before the, main altar of St Joseph's Cathedral Palayam, Trivandrum.*
6. *J. Kiloparambil, Viswasathode Varthikkuka', Mal), in S.T John, Op. cit. 111-113.*
7. *John Desrochers, The Social Teaching of the Church in India,P.39*
8. *Pancratius Arulappan, 'Concept of the Kingdom of God in the Fishermen's struggle',in selvister Ponnumuthan and Shaji Jerman,(eds), Mission and conversion Towards a New Ecclesiology, P.430.*
9. *Sixteen months of Communist Rule in Kerala: A General Review(n.d)published by Amala Printing works,Calicut, P.29.*
10. *George Mathew, Op.cit., P.150.*
11. *T.M Thomas Isac, Vimochana Samarathinte Kanappurangal(Mal).PP. 248-259.*
12. *Letter dated 27th February,1959 from Archbishops, banglore to Bishop Periera. ADT.*
13. *Bishop Periera's letter no.76/59 dated may 13th, 1959 is addressed to the ParishPriests. ADT.*
14. *Georges Kristofel Lienten, The First Communist Ministry in Kerala,1957-59,P.150.*
15. *George Mathew, Op. Cit., P.150*
16. *Deepika, 18th August 1958.*
17. *T. Mettelda, 'The Christopher Movement in Kerala' in Journal of Kerala Studies.,Vol.16, December, 1989.*
18. *Proceedings of the Kerala Legislative Assembly, Third Session, 27th December,1958,Vol.VI, No 4, Trivandrum,1960, PP. 354-355.*
19. *K.C John, The Melting Pot: Kerala 1950's-1970's , P.61.*
20. *Memorandum dated 4th July 1959,submitted by bishop Pereira to the Governor ofKerala. ADT.*
21. *Bishop Pereira's letter datted 8.8.59 addressed to bishops, ADT.*

22. Mark Netto, 'The Diocese of Trivandrum', in K.J John; *Op.cit*' p.380.
23. Cyriac Thomas, *the Church and Politics in Kerala,(1947-1972)*, P.44. Mr. GamalielNadar was the Congress candidate for whom Bishop Pereira canvassed.
24. *Ibid.* P.45
25. *Selvister Ponnunmuthan, Op.cit., .70.*
26. *Government of Kerala, Registration certificate of TSSS dated 07.06.1960.*
27. J Albaris, *The Trivandrum Latin Diocese and Social Service Society 1937-1985.*
28. M. Moses coady, *masters of their own destiny. The story of the of the AntigonishMovement of Adult Education Through Economic Cooperation, New York,1939.*
29. Alexander Laidlaw (ed.), *The man from Margaree: writings and speeches of M.Mcoady, Toranto,1971.*
30. *Programme for Community Organization (PCO), Ripples andRepercussions(monograph), P.I.*
31. *Govt. of Kerala, Registration Certificate No. dated: 07.06.1960.*
32. *Bye –Law of the TSSS, TSSA, ADT.*
33. *Statistics collected from Bishop House Archives, ADT.*
34. *Mark Netto,OP. cit., P.380.*
35. *The Parish church building Thumba Parish and the Priests Residence were handedover to ISRO.*
36. A.P.J Abdulkalam, 'Collaboration for nation Building' I *Silvester Ponnunmuthan (ed), (2004) Christian Contribution to nation Building A third Millenium Enquiry PP.23-27.*
37. *Indian Express, dated 17.06.1978, 05.07.1978.*
38. *Reynolds R.Ekstrom, The New Concise Catholic Dictionary, P.265.*
39. *The minutes of Orientation Centre, 1968, ADT.*