



ROLE OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES IN TRAVANCORE HISTORY

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Abstract

The Christian missionaries started modern education in Travancore. Due to the existence of the caste system, education was confined only to the higher caste minority of the society. In the 19 th century, with the encouragement of local kings, protestant missionaries established many schools in Travancore. Tobias Ringletaube was the first European Missionary of the London Missionary Society who came to Travancore. He was surprised to find out that the Travancore society was filled with caste, colour, and superstitious beliefs. He also realized that popular education was elaborately necessary to remove these social evils. After Ringletaube, Rev. Charles Mead from England came to Travancore and continued the works left by Ringletaube. He established several educational institutions including schools for girls. He is regarded as the pioneer of female education in Travancore.

Introduction

From the first part of the 19 th Century, the work of protestant missionaries became active in Travancore. The mission of the missionaries was not social conversion. But the consequences of their activities at the social level were transformations. The two areas of activity that led to revivalism in the missionary activities were education and pastoral ministry. Colour-based education was erminated and the public education system was started. There were conflicts in many places in the 1850s when low-caste people became teachers who proved that all could get an education regardless of color and made the opportunity available to the community. It can be generally said that the foundation of modern education was laid by the Christian missionaries.

Owing to the concerted efforts of CMS missionaries such as Charles Meed, Ringeltaube, John Cox, Buley, Charles Molt, Dr.J.C.Thomson, Dr.John Lowe, White House, Mrs. Dothy, Vedamanican and Maharajan, schools, seminaries, boarding schools, theatres, printing press, hospitals, dispensaries and libraries started functioning in Travancore. The English also started developing plantations for growing tea, coffee, cocoa, spices and rubber. They cleared forests and laid railway lines, roads, and bridges. Undoubtedly they played a pivotal role in the development of Travancore.

The British Empire had a great influence in Travancore during the 19 th century. The caste system prevailed in Travancore during that time. The superiority of high caste people over the educational institution paved obstruction for establishing the Western educational system. Rani Gouri Parvathi Bai offered a settlement to various Christian missionaries like Catholics, Protestants, and similar other denominations from early times. But, it was the missionaries who were responsible for fighting for the social identity of the Travancore people during the 19 th century. To obtain the objectives, they laid a strong foundation for social awakening among the people through imparting knowledge-oriented education. Consequently, numerous educational institutions were formed thanks to the efforts of Christian missionaries on the one side, and government agencies and private individuals on the other side. While LMS focused its attention in South Travancore, Salvation Army, Lutheran mission, and Seventh Day Adventists in various parts of

Travancore strived hard to popularize education and this resulted in many social reform movements, besides engaged in uplifting the suppressed communities erasing the social and economic taboos. The dawn of the 20th century heralded the venture of Roman Catholics and Syro-Malankara towards social and economic upliftment. All these missionaries envied one with the other and were keen on providing education to all sections of society irrespective of caste or creed.

Caste-based forced labor called “Oozhiyam existed in Travancore during the medieval period. Oozhiyam was a bonded labour system in Travancore during the medieval period. The low-caste Hindus such as Pulayas, Parayas, Kuravas, and Nadars or Channar communities were the major sections used for the oozhiyam services. They were forcibly worked for the temples by the higher caste Hindus like Brahmins. The caste rules are also against the low castes. Therefore nobody can question it. However, after the introduction of Christianity in Travancore, several challenges faced this evil system. The Christian missionaries strongly fought against the bonded services and finally, they created a consciousness among the people. The rulers of Travancore were compelled to introduce certain ameliorative steps to improve the condition of the depressed classes in Travancore.

In Travancore, slavery was a recognized institution and an integral part of the existing social order. However after the arrival of the Christian missionaries, the process of the emancipation of slaves was started. The missionaries performed an admirable task in educating the slaves and creating a new consciousness among the slave castes about their rights and privileges. The crusading spirit of the missionaries for the eradication of slavery and forced labor or oozhiyam gave a green signal to the authorities to introduce certain measures for the betterment of slaves. Frequent demand of the missionaries finally compelled the government of Travancore to issue a Proclamation in April 1855, which abolished slavery in Travancore. The Proclamation also abolished agrestic slavery and several feudal levies imposed upon the low castes.

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