



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**HISTORY**

**THE L.M.S. MISSIONARIES AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION FOR THE UPLIFT OF THE LOWER CLASS**

**KEY WORDS:** LMS missionaries, Varnas, Pallans, Parays

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**ABSTRACT**

A study of the social reformers of Kanyakumari District with special reference to L.M.S. Missionaries from the middle of the nineteenth century till twentieth century has not been dealt within a comprehensive manner by scholars either Indian or foreign, while a number of scholars have attempted to study in general the social changes that were brought about in this part of the country. Missionaries in Kanyakumari district. Hence, in this work an attempt is made to focus about the contribution of LMS missionaries in Kanyakumari district. Christianity in South India was founded by one of the twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ. Folklore, place names, traditions, social customs, monuments, copper plates, ancient songs and liturgical texts tantamount to truth of the Apostle's mission. Amidst the controversies and array of different Pandit Nehru, on the basis of historical antiquity wrote "Christianity came to India as early as the first century after Christ, long before Europe turned to it and established a firm hold in South India". Traditionally it is believed that St. Thomas first planted Christianity in Arabia and in the island of Socotra, sailed eastward and landed at Malankara near Cranganore in the west coast of South India in 52 A.D. Churches and relics associated with the apostle are seen in South India.

**INTRODUCTION**

The system of society based on caste was unknown to the Pre-Aryan society. It is supposed to have been introduced by the Aryan invaders and it began to spread all over India as the process of Sanskritization extended. According to the Aryan ideal of society there are only four castes or Varnas namely, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vysias and Sudras,

Varma and Jati are two terms which would explain the nature of the institution of caste. Varma literally means "colour" and 'Jati' comes from the Sanskrit word 'jan' which means 'birth'. Varna denotes the four castes of the Aryan ideal. At the time of the Rig Vedic invasion the four Varnas represented a four-fold division of their society into classes. Jati denotes endogamous groups, which are the practical units in the structure of caste outside the four Varnas.

There are only four Varnas but there are thousands of Jatis the Varna model of caste is seen all over India with its distinctive and immutable hierarchy while the Jati model of caste is regional with variations. According to traditional understanding those who are outside the pale of the Varma system are Avarnas or untouchables. The Varna model of caste system is supposed to have evolved during the Vedic period of Indian History. The Brahmin writers propounded the structure of society placed them at the top and gave them the privilege of declaring the suited of the other castes, including the kings, the Savarna castes were regarded as pure and the Avarna castes as polluting. Each caste is characterized by a number of attributes insignificant to its position in the ritual ranking. Thus the distinction of purity and pollution set one section of the people above the other section and thus the polluting castes began to be suppressed by the so called pure castes.

To comment the distinction, the religious sanction was brought in. It was taught that the Brahmins were born from the mouth the Purusha, the creator the Kshatriyas from the limbs the Vaishyas from the waist and the Sudras from the feet.

Below this society yet economically tied to it, were a number of excluded castes, whose contact shadow, or even sight polluted. They performed impure work and had to live outside Aryan communities.

During the pre - Aryan period social stratifications were not based on birth but on function where mobility between functional groups was possible. There was not stigma attached to any other castes. The Brahmins who reached Travancore from the Deccan were to subjugate the land and during the period between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. Travancore was enclosed in the strait jacket of caste system. since then caste has been the dominant factor in the economic and cultural life of Travancore. In course of time the distinctions between castes increased. The harmony of the society

rested on the disunity within it.

Implementation of the new social laws which followed the introduction of the caste system, was exclusively from the comfort of the Savarnas, especially the Brahmins, The rules of pollution made it necessary that the Avarna people should not even approach the Savarnas.

At the same time, there was also a growth of caste segregation among the lower castes. Thus every caste became a strong unity in itself where the upper caste dominated the lower. All the social relationships such as marriage were limited within the caste, and the only exemption granted was for the Brahmin men to have concubinage with any woman from the Savarna castes.

It is true that the caste system served some economic functions but it segregated the society and was one of the strong forecast kept one major section of the population in a state of stagnation. Many sections of the Avana population continue to live in a state of social and economic backwardness even today.

For a further study of the untouchables, the Parayas of South Travancore need to be examined. They are spread all over South Travancore. Though the caste - Hindus take Paraya to mean 'outcaste' there are other meanings too. Parai in Tamil means a kind of drum and therefore Parayan means a traditional drum beater. Parayas beat drums during village festivals, marriage and funerals of the high caste people. Parayas were also drum-beaters in the battle-fields. One the earning given in the Tamil dictionary for the word 'Paraya' is 'Prohita' or 'Priest'.

Pallans are next to the Parays, the largest community of untouchables in South Travancore. They form a segment of agricultural labourers. They are mostly employed in the cultivation of paddy. The word 'Pallan' means a pit or low lying land and Pallan engaged themselves in ploughing and agricultural work in those low - lying areas. So it is assumed their caste name originated from the name of the place where they worked. In the Tamil dictionary, Pallans are classified as out -caste. After the defeat of the Pallava dynasty, the remaining Pallavas are taken as prisoners and treated as slaves by the Imperial Cholas. It is probable that the slaves were treated as unclean and untouchable human beings. They were also ill-treated by Vellala nobles and landlords. It is said that the low class Pallavas were called as Pallans according to Tamil Literature. Pallans were an ancient community of Tamilnadu, owners of lands great cultivators especially of wet land. Therefore it is obvious that they have been suppressed into slavery by the subsequent conquerors who came down to South.

The Pulayas constituted one of the lowest sections of the society. The term 'Pulaya' is derived from 'pula' which means ceremonial pollution taint or defilement. Caldwell is of the opinion that they

were the earliest of the inhabitants of Kerala. It is also believed that at one time the Pulayas had a king of their own who resided in a fort not far off from Trivandrum. The place is even now called "Pulayanarkotta" which means the fort of the Pulayas.

Whatever the glory of their past and their ancestry, during the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were made slaves to the higher castes and were bought and sold like cattle and not valued any higher. The people of the slave caste were obliged to give the road to and to keep at a specific distance from free men, more especially persons of high caste in order to avoid pollution of the latter.

The Nadars had been claiming their rightful place in society for more than a hundred years. Even after they became Christians many privileges were denied to them. Even the elite Nadars were not allowed to use tiles for roofing their houses, while the other caste Hindus were allowed to do so, an elderly educated adir Christian lady personally wrote a letter to Queen Elizabeth, Empress of India requesting her to permit her to make use of tiles for roofing her house. Soon the Maharaja of Travancore was ordered to give permission to all to tile the roofs of their houses. The women of Nadar community were not allowed to wear clothes above their waists. So the Nadars had to launch agitations against the Government and in the end they succeeded. The women were allowed to dress as they liked.

**CONCLUSION**

The analysis of the social reforms of Kanyakumari District with special reference to the L.M.S. Missionaries presented in the preceding pages, reveals that the society did not lag behind in adopting the reform measures. Such reforms were on a par with the reform introduced at all India level. The activities of the British administration supported by the local reforms and institutions in this regard were applicable to the entire Indian Sub-Continent including Kanyakumari District. The social upheaval in the district as such was instrumental in suppressing the traditional practices like Slavery (1855), Upper-Cloth Movement, Temple Entry Movement, (1936) and Prohibition Movement (1957) spearheaded by the L.M.S. Missionaries in the second half of the nineteenth century reached its successful culmination during the forties of the twentieth century. The social reform activities which began with the dawn of the nineteenth century got itself integrated into a movement.

It was the missionaries who first raised their voice against slavery and drew the attention of the public as well as the authorities to this evil. The tendency gathered momentum during the Residency of Col. Munro who had the rare privilege of holding the Dewanship of Travancore as well. The influence of the missionaries and personal interest of Col. Munro enabled Rani Lakshmi Bai to introduce social reforms by which the suppressed classes secured many privileges which had been denied to them till then. But, by the Proclamation of 1812 Rani Lakshmi Bai abolished slavery. Even after the Proclamation of the Rani, slavery existed in different parts of the State.

Though this social evil seemed to have existed from time immemorial, none found it an injustice done to a particular sect and continued unnoticed till the 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D. When Col. Munro, became the Dewan of Travancore, he issued an order in 1812 that the Christian women have the right to cover their bosoms like the Christians in other countries. In May 1814, the Government of Travancore issued a circular order permitting the women of the inferior classes of the population, who were converted to Christianity, to cover their bodies with a short bodice or jacket as was worn by the women of Syrian Christians, Mappilas and such others. They were not permitted to wear the upper-cloth in the manner of the caste Hindus. Vaikunda Swamikal created an awareness among the oppressed people and claimed that his followers not only to cover their body, but also to wear a turban on their heads as a mark of their superiority.

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