



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Education

REV.T.G. RAGLAND'S CONTRIBUTION IN SIVAKASI CHURCH

KEY WORDS: Christian Missionary, Christian Missionary Society, Rev. T.G. Regland and Sivakasi church.

Mrs. A. Stella Mary

Full Time Ph.d Research Scholar, Rani Anna Govt. College for women, Tiruneveli – 8.

ABSTRACT

The missionary activities were confined only to South Tinnevely. The villages of North Tinnevely were neglected by early missionaries. Rhenius visited North Tinnevely and his evangelistic work. He sent his missionaries to Tenkasi, Karuvanallur, Sankarankovil, Rajapalayam, Srivilliputtur and Sivakasi which came under North Tinnevely. He tried in vain in bringing the people of Sivakasi to Christian faith. After his death the churches in North Tinnevely were not given any attention, and Sivakasi was also forgotten. The arrival of Rev. Thomas Gajetan Ragland changed the entire situation in North Tinnevely. Ragland argued that the missionary must go to them, and in person press again and again the gospel upon them. The first Christian in Sivakasi due to the evangelistic work of Taylor for more than a year, one person by name Punniyanadar became the first Christian in Sivakasi.

INTRODUCTION

The most important missionary development – between 1850 to 1860 was undoubtedly the extension in North Tinnevely, planned and carried out by Thomas Gajetan Ragland. Before accepting office as secretary of the Madras Corresponding Committee, he had spent six months in Tinnevely in the year 1845, visiting ten of the mission districts, inspecting different branches of activity that were being carried on and discussing the situation with the missionaries.

After having visited the entire district, he appraised the situation as it really was and devised measure for a further extension work. He said that it was no longer sufficient to wait for adherents to come in of their own accord, but the missionaries must take the "offensive"; and that as the southern Taluks of the Tinnevely district were now more or less completely evangelized, a definite effort should be made to reach the people in North Tinnevely, who had no opportunities of hearing the word comparable to those enjoyed but the people of the south. He made plans and devised machinery which, though looked at first by his contemporaries, proved to be eminently fitted not only to secure as good results in the way of fresh accessions as could be expected, considering the changed times, but also to bring out the elements in the Christians who had already been gathered into the fold.

ASSESSMENT OF NORTH TINNEVELLY BY RAGLAND

That the pastoral plan, which worked satisfactorily in south Tinnevely should not be sufficient for the North was, he thought, largely to be accounted for by the different character and circumstances of the population in the two districts. On this point Ragland remarks.

"The people in the North are a very different class from those of the south, with respect to their preparedness or openness for the gospel. In the south nearly all the villagers are of one caste, shanars, and a fair proportion of these are already Christians; and of those who are not, several have, at one time or another, been under instruction. All which, when we remember how much family ties influence in matters of religion, in India, at least, and that many of the agents in the south are shanars, may satisfy us, or make us less dissatisfied, to leave the southern heathen, without at present any direct efforts being made for their conversion.

"We may reasonably hope, that if the missionary pastor keeps his eye upon them, and stirs up his agents and people from time to time to do what they can for them, many will continually be brought over without the missionary himself going much amongst them; though this course, if he could find time, would be clearly advisable".

"Now it would be clearly inadvisable that the arrangement, by which Tinnevely is left to the two Church of England societies, should be infringed. For, as we have already congregations in the extreme north, the infraction would lead to a mixture of congregations, here episcopal and there Presbyterian, as soon as

on. And this shows that we must make haste otherwise, not shall we be unable to keep out others, but it would be uncertain and sinful to place the least obstacle in their way; indeed we ought almost to invite them.

NORTH TINNEVELLY PASTORAL PLAN

Influenced by these considerations, Mr. Ragland devised his scheme for itinerate. That scheme was ultimately elaborated by him. It was one of no common kind. It bore the stamp of originality. It was the product of a great mind. Its details were worked out with remarkable precision, what it was in theory, that, with very alterations, it remained in practice.

JOURNEY TO HOME

In the meantime the health of Ragland was deteriorated. So Ragland was ordered home by the Cape, in the hope that the sea voyage would prove beneficial to his health. Cheer and comforted by the prayers and kind offices of his friends at Madras, which he hailed as "Marks of Love, and of love shown for Christ's sake", he embarked on 24th Feb, 1852. In the following June he reached England after an absence of nearly seven years.

SECOND ARRIVAL OF RAGLAND

After the restoration of his health, Ragland expressed his willingness to the C.M.S. Committee, to go to India again to continue his evangelistic work in North Tinnevely. Accordingly he was given permission and he started his journey to India in the Trafalgar, on 14th September, 1853.

Ragland reached Madras the second time on 31st of December 1853, in excellent health, by his own account, and looking better, as his friends told him, than when he arrived there eight years before. His coadjutors in the itinerating scheme, Mr. Fenn and Mr. Meadows, were waiting his arrival, and sent off to the ship to welcome him, so changed in appearance by climate that he scarcely recognized them, but so well suited in every respect to be his companions, that after a few days, of constant intercourse with them at the mission – house he wrote", I do thank God for giving me such men to labour with. I have of course, known them now only nine days; but all I have seen, and all I have heard, leads me to think I could scarcely have chosen two such men to my mind, I had whole church to choose from.

ITINERATING LIFE

Their captain having arrived, no time was lost by the little missionary band in entering upon the campaign before them. They were all in high spirits at the prospect of starting; perhaps", Mr. Ragland characteristically adds, in far too high spirits.

A few days were necessary spent at Madras in making preparations. The tents in which they were to lodge while itinerating were procured, and pitched in Colonel Browne's compound, were dedicated to the Lord by prayer in one of them. A native catechist, by name Joseph Cornelius, was found to accompany them, in whom Ragland placed the fullest confidence

and from whom he professed to have learned many things.

COMMENCEMENT OF JOURNEY

The preliminaries being arranged, the tents and bull lock carts were sent to overnight to a village about six miles from madras, where a couple of trial days were to be passed under canvas, in order to discover wants and omissions while supplies were still with in reach. The missionaries started on their journey on 18th January, 1854.

ARUNACHALA NADAR OF SIVAKASI

Arunachala Nadar was the son of Saravana Nadar. He was born on 20th July, 1816. When he visited Madurai to attend a car festival, he was able to get Gospel of St. Luca from a missionary worker. After having read the Gospel Arunachala Nadar hated Hinduism. On seeing his faith in Christianity, his relatives hated him

In Sivakasi there was a group of traders. Among them several traders had faith in Christianity. They used to assemble in a 'Pettai' during night and read Bible words. They wanted to be baptized.

When Ragland, Meadows and fenn visited Sivakasi, they met opposition from the natives of Sivakasi. In spite of the opposition, they preached the Gospel early in the morning and in the evening. Stones were thrown on them. So Ragland got dejected. He wanted to make Srivilliputtur as a centre for North Tinnevely evangelistic work. But soon he changed his mind and decided to make sivakasi as a station centre.

In the late part of the year 1855, Ragland purchased a piece of land in south of Sivakasi, and built a small house. The full missionary staff consisted of five persons lived in the same house and continued their missionary work.

NEW CONGREGATIONS AROUND SIVAKASI

Ragland and his missionary staff continued their work in the villages around sivakasi. They baptized sixteen persons in "Kalpothu". Joseph was the leader of that small congregations. Regland appointed Masilamani as a permanent catechist for that church. Then he formed another congregation at Mathangovilpatti. Joseph cornelius was put in charge of Matheangovilpatti church. After that several churches were formed in North Tinnevely.

Among the newly formed churches, chippiparai, kattunagurettipatti, ondipillainayakkanoor, Rettipatti, Govindanallur, Mettupatti, Viruthupatti, Kasthuriengappuram, Mummalaipatti, Kalingapatti, Sattur, Vallanpatti, Sevalkulam, Vagaikulan and kuruvikulam are to be mentioned. Thus around forty congregations had been formed in the villages around sivakasi and the total number Christians raised to one thousand and two hundred.

CONCLUSION:

Mr. Ragland's missionary scheme, as carried out in practice by himself and his companiens. It was an attempt to obey in tis most direct and literal sense the common to "preach the Gospel to every creature".

Mr. Ragland's life as an itinerator was a laborious life. Like his divine Master, be combined constant communion with god with active benevolence towards man. It was quite in keeping, in conscientious endeavors to redeem the time, with his humble confessions and earnest prayers on the same subject. Unwearied diligence and sustained exertion were the law of his life. To that always, and to something more that hat when occation required, the love of Christ constrained him. He cheerfully gave away the three silvers, awarded to him by his university for extraordinary academic proficiency, to the needy churches. They can still be seen among the Holy Communion vessels used in the churches in Sankaranayanarkoil, Vagaikulam, and in Ragland Memorial church, Sivakasi.

REFERENCES:

1. D.A Christadoss, Thomas Gajetan Ragland, apostle of North Tinnevely, Bethel Publicaitons, 1979, P.28.
2. Paul Appasamy, The Centenary History of the C.M.S. in Tinnevely, The Palayamkottai Printing Press, 1923, P.114.

3. Thomas Thomason perowne, A memoir of the Rev. Thomas Gajeta Ragland, Seeley, Jackson, and Illaliday, Fleet, Street, London M.DCCC LX 1, PP.186-188.
4. T.T.Perowne, op.cit; P.211.
5. Paul Appasamy, op.cit; P.135.
6. T.T.Perowne, op.cit; P.222.
7. Issac Devapriam, "Origin of Christianity in Sivakasi", Thavasa Urchava Centenary celebration Malar, Sivakasi, 1990, P.43.