

# THE LONDON MISSIONARY SOCIETY AND ABOLITION OF SLAVERY IN SOUTH TRAVANCORE

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## ABSTRACT

The London Missionary Society was the first Protestant organization to attempt Proselytization in South Travancore. It was formed on Monday, September 21, 1795 at the castle and falcon in Aldergate Street as an inter denominational body for spreading the Gospel. It sent out Missionaries to India, Rev. Ringeltaube, a German Lutheran young man, was one among them. They sailed in Kings packet, a Danish vessel and arrived at the flourishing Danish trading port Tharangampadi in the South East coast of India on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1804. The society left the choice of the 'Station' to the individual Missionaries. Most of his friends were aware of their Mission-fields; but Ringeltaube had no idea about it. After spending sometime in the study of languages, his friends who were more definite about their 'stations' left. But, Ringeltaube stayed at Tharangampadi studying Tamil to serve in the Tamil country. At this juncture, Vethamonickam, a convert from south Travancore approached Rev. Kolhoff, a Missionary of Tanjore and requested him to sent a Missionary to Travancore. Kolhoff directed him to Tharangampadi informing him to meet a German Missionary who was studying Tamil to work in the Tamil country.

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### ***Key words:***

Ringeltaube, German Missionary, London Missionary Society, Tharangampadi, South Travancore

## INTRODUCTION:

Slavery was a social evil. The institution of slavery existed in Travancore even from the early period of her history. Its import was felt throughout Travancore. The origin of the institution of slavery is closely associated with the beginning of the caste

system in Travancore. The people of Travancore were divided into Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Sudras. Of these, the Sudras might have been reduced to the status of slaves. From this slavery began to grow in Travancore .

### **SOURCES:**

Primary source materials and secondary sources have been consulted for the writing of this article. Reports of the Administration of Travancore as Primary source of information help a lot. The Annual Reports of the London Missionary Society from 1815-1858 and the reports of the Travancore District Committee(LMS) from 1815-1858 are another important primary source material. The Regulations and Proclamations of Travancore are yet another valuable primary source materials. The land Revenue Manuals and the Travancore Government Gazettee are also very useful. The secondary source material which I have consulted to write this work are mainly published books. Books like *The Church History of Travancore* by C.M. Agur

### **THE ROOT CAUSE OF SLAVERY:**

There were many responsible factors for the origin and growth of slavery in Travancore. The early period of history of Travancore was fluctuating. The social set up too was unsteady. It was during the fluid situation, the foreign incursion took place from the North. These invaders subjugated the original inhabitants and settled down in Travancore. But, these slave communities assumed importance and then formed their own class of ruling dynasty and established a form of government that suited to them. During the Second Chera Empire (800-1102), the Pulayas enjoyed rights equal to that of the high class people. Pulayanar Kottai, now a suburb of Trivandrum, was the centre of Pulaya rules who established his sway over the surrounding parts. It is evident from inscriptions that enjoyed all privileges of high-class people

### **FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR SLAVERY**

Many factors contributed for the growth of slavery in Travancore. Most of the costes below the Nadars and Ezhavas, such as pulayas, parayas, paravas, Kuravas and Vettuvans were generally regarded as slaves. Wars and conquests between petty chieftains and princes were always followed by the capture of the vanquished. These vanquished were afterwards made slaves. During the times of famine, parents used to

sell their children for petty sums of money to work in the house or in the fields of the rich. Later, they were converted as slaves by rich people. Women of higher-castes, in case of association with men of low-caste, were invariably reduced to slavery and were removed from their parental community. This was well depicted by Francis Day in his book, "The Land of Perumals".

## **FEUDAL RULES**

The feudal lords of south Travancore were selfish and they exercised untold cruelties upon their peasants. The peasants did not have right to worship in the temple of the high-castes. In temples there were regular scales of distance beyond which certain castes must remain at a prescribed distance. The caste polluting distances varied, so also the distance to be kept to avoid temple pollution also varied from caste to caste. No Ezhava must come within 325 ft, of the curtain wall of the temple of Guruvayar. The road to the Temple at vaikkom was forbidden to the untouchables and the same was applied to the road leading to the Suchindram Temple. But, they had to supply paddy, rice, vegetables, milk products, coconuts and jiggery to the temple festivals.

## **SOCIAL DISCRIMINATIONS AND TABOOS:**

The slaves had to observe certain approved distance in their dealings with higher-caste people. They were strictly forbidden from entering the market for buying or selling their goods. The agrestic slaves belong to the lowest strata in the social hierarchy. They were not only untouchables but were unapproachable too. Most of them were non-caste Hindus. Barbosa says that if a Nayar women was touched by a Pulaya, she was made an outcast for life. The system of unapproachability was also very severe in South Travancore.

## **THE EFFORTS OF THE MISSIONARIES**

The Christian Missionaries while preaching the love of God, came in touch with the slaves and knew the social, political and economic disabilities of the slaves and their sufferings. They felt that the slaves should be liberated at the outset. To make them to understand the predicament of the slaves, the Missionaries started to educate the people first. The responsibility of educating the people and their attempt to fight

for the liberation goes to Rev. Mead, Mrs. Mead, Rev. Mault and Mrs. Mault and a group of other Christian Missionaries who sacrificed many of their comforts to liberate the people of the slave community. Rev. Mead also felt that education should not be the monopoly of the high-caste. So he concentrated on establishing schools attached to the churches. Mrs. Mead only worked on this line to open Boarding School for girls.

### **THE PROCLAMATION OF 1823**

By the treaties of 1795 and 1805, that were concluded between the English East India Company and Travancore, the company became a decisive political power. It empowered the British with the right to interfere in the administrative and political affairs of state. The administrators could very well understand the existence of the obnoxious institution of slavery. They could do nothing to abolish it. When col. Munro became the Resident Dewan of Travancore, he learnt that the whole of Travancore was infested with slavery, which was an unfortunate institution. However, the Government also felt that the earlier proclamations could neither be abolished nor contained, hence, a fresh legislation was issued in 1843.

### **ACT OF 1843**

The Government of India felt that all the effort of the Missionaries and laws enacted became ineffective. Hence, the Viceroy and council decided to enact an Act for the emancipation of slaves throughout India in 1843. By this Act, Slave owners were severely punished if they retain slaves. This Act was not applicable in Travancore because the Kingdom of Travancore was under the sway of the Rajas of Travancore. Hence, it induced the Missionaries to send more petitions to Raja, for emancipation of the slaves.

### **REACTION OF THE RESIDENT**

It was General Cullen, the Resident of Travancore who forwarded the memorandum to the Maharaja for necessary action. On behalf of the Maharaja, the Dewab replied to the Resident that "His highness would never fail to give his attention to the unfortunate class of people referred to in the Missionaries petition". The Resident was not satisfied with reply sent by the Dewan. The continuous efforts of

the Missionaries compelled the Resident, to address a memorandum in the early part of 1849 to the Dewan of Travancore, "Recommending certain measures for improving the condition of slaves and for the gradual abolition of slavery in the state."

## **THE PROCLAMATION OF 1857**

The main features of the discussion between the different parties were (a) abolition of slavery was not to attempt after a full understanding of its origin, nature and extent and the institution's impact on the slaves, (b) all those who come forward with the idea of abolition of slavery or amelioration of the condition of the slaves were eager not to stir the socio-economic system which had backed slavery.

## **THE LAST BLOW**

A final blow to slavery in India was struck by section 370,371 of the India Penal Code, which came into force in January 1862. Following this, any person found to possess slaves became punishable. The history of the abolition of slavery in Travancore, is closely associated with the untiring and persistent efforts of English. The British Residents of Travancore like colonel Munro and General Cullen openly interfered in the administration. Their pressure and persuasion virtually persuaded the concerned authorities into action. The Gossip that these benevolent measures owed their origin to the enlighten of the then rulers-and not to the political power exercised by these Residents-is far from true. At the same time, the initial reluctance displayed by Utram Thirunal, the Raja of Travancore on this important social reform should not be interpreted as a reactionary attitude. He being a symbol of the period in which he lived, wanted to preserve the status as far as possible.

## **CONCLUSION**

The work of the lady Missionaries like Mrs. Mead and Mrs. Mault among the slaves, made a turning point in the history of South Travancore. The slaves progressed rapidly because of their dealings. They started a Boarding School at Nagercoil in 1820, for admitting slave girls. Their idea was to secure freedom for the slaves. They paid the cost of the slave to their masters for freeing them from bondage. But, some masters refused to receive the amount from the Missionaries, and their only aim was to retain their slaves.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT:**

This article entitled “London Missionary Society and Abolition of Slavery in South Travancore” is the outcome of the research carried out by me and it aims at making a critical study of a social reform movement created by the veteran political leaders of South Travancore. When the people were chained by the social customs, convention and practices they were not relieved from the social evils. The peoples were oppressed under feudal levies and even basic human rights were denied to them. It was in these circumstances the Missionaries of London Missionary Society and the native Missionaries came and created a sense of awakening among the people. The London Missionaries played a vital role on the abolition of slavery in South Travancore.

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