

Contribution of Swedish Missionaries for Women's Development in the Field of Social Recognition in Tamilnadu (India)

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Abstract

The Indian Society has been in a condition of backwardness for many centuries. Women lived in a backward condition even within such a down trodden society. Though we hear about women's rights during the Tamil Sangam Age, we cannot be absolutely sure that women enjoyed a high place in society. Sense of slavery was not even felt by the local Indians and so the fact that the society was reeling under heavy depression was not even realized. The condition of the women was pathetic¹. The agony of the situation of slavery of women was not self imposed. It was not thrust upon them just by the family members alone. It was a result of the 'age old practice of religious values' which on the one hand hailed women as goddesses - and on the other hand, did not allow their women even to touch or worship or enter the sanctum sanctorum of the temples, exactly where the idols of highly respectable 'Women Goddesses' were kept and worshipped. It was strange for the CSM Missionaries when they observed that the Indians worshipped women in the stone form but they were not willing to treat them with minimum respect and dignity in the real form.

Key word

- C. S. M** - Church of Swedish mission
L. E. L. M - Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission
T. E. L. C. - Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church
Child Marriage - A girl get marriage within 6 and 7 years.
Widows Fund - A amount of money given to widows

Introduction

Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg and Henrich Pluchau arrived at Tranquebar on 9 July 1706 AD. This is the day of the birth day of the Protestant Mission in India. From this day many protestant missionaries came and served in Tamilnadu. And started many orphanage and Widow Rehabilitations centre in Tamil nadu. Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission took the charge of the Danish Mission in 1848 in Tamil nadu. Church of Swedish Mission also joined with LELM packet. This Article deals about the contribution of the Swedish Missionaries For Women's Development in the field of social Recognition.

Background

All through the ages the status of women has always been low in some way or other in almost every society in India. Foeticide, infanticide, child marriage, sati, dowry system and denial of rights are the evils that affect women.² Tamil women were not an exception to these social abuses. They suffered these superstitious and inhuman practices as their counterparts did in other parts of the country. A woman, as a child is controlled by her father, as a wife by her husband, and as an old lady by her son. Womanhood itself was considered to be a curse in the society. The social structure and its values did not accept the possibility that women also can think by themselves and take reasonable decisions. Not only in Tamil Nadu but in the whole of India this situation was the same.³

Many Europeans visited the British India. Welfare schemes were not found in the agenda of the British rule. They were business oriented and profit motive but, the Christian missionaries observed the society deeply and wanted to bring up the women from their wretched state of being and redeem them in to a civilized society where they can be the root cause for establishing strong and permanent social institutional changes. accepted as creation of God. The strategy they believed in became the root cause for establishing strong and permanent social institutional changes.⁴ They were not just dreaming or planning but were attempting to do things in a pragmatic way in the field.⁵

² V. Ramachandran, Gender and Women Development Issue, Delhi: Abhijeet publication 2009, p115.

³ A) Alka Srivastava, Associate Editors, Sandali, Women's Link, Delhi: Mahila Kalyan Samiti, 2007, p24.

(B) Rajprathi & B.R. Sharma, Encyclopaedia of Women, Society and Culture, Vol.3 New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1995, pp 57, 117.

⁴ John Murdoch, Indian Missionary Manual, Hints to young Missionaries in India, Archives, 275. 4M97, p69, 70.

⁵ (A) S.V. Venkateswara, Indian Culture through the Ages, Madras: M.S. Printing Works 1994, p.1302

The Catholic missionaries like Robert De Nobile, Francis Xavier,¹ ' Veera Ma Munivar ' who came long after Apostle Thomas, not only preached the Word of God, but also practised social welfare values which resulted in genuine social transformation. The early Catholic missionaries from Portugal established schools for girls in Southern India. After the Reformation Movement of Martin Luther, in Europe Protestant missionaries also started coming to India. On the 9th Day of July in the year 1706 AD, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg landed in Tranquebar. Lutheran Missionaries served under the The Tranquebar Mission.² Leipzig Mission accepted responsibility for the whole of the Danish Mission in the year 1849. The Church of Swedish Mission (CSM) collaborated with the Danish Mission and together they looked after the activities of the mission field all over Tamil Nadu, which continued effortlessly and efficiently even during the times of the two major world wars in the early and middle of Twentieth Century³ Missionaries were kept under the British government custody and all their works were looked after only by the CSM.⁴

Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (TELC) was established in 1919. Under CSM guidance the administration of the church was run. The Bishopric system was introduced and Swedish Bishops themselves were governing and leading the institutional and pastoral activities of the church in Tamil Nadu.⁵

The humble beginning of the missionary work by Protestant Missionary, Ziegenbalg in Tranquebar spread quickly all over Tamil Nadu.⁶ Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), Society for Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), and Church Missionary Society sent their missionaries to work with the Danish Halle Mission (DHM). The DHM was then taken over by the Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission (LELM) in the year 1849 and thus the LELM spread its work all over Tamil Nadu. Elementary schools, High schools, Teacher Training Schools, Hostels, Home for Widows and Hospitals were established by the mission in many places.⁷ CSM started its activities officially in Cuddalore in 1740. But it joined the Leipzig Mission in 1848.

During the First World War between 1914 and 1918 and also during the Second World War between 1939 and 1945, the Leipzig Mission and its German Missionaries were kept under the British government custody and all their works were looked after only by the CSM.⁸ Under CSM guidance the Administration of the Church was run. The Bishopric system was introduced and Swedish Bishops themselves were governing and leading the institutional and pastoral activities of the church in Tamil Nadu.⁹

Even though the Leipzig Mission and the CSM were sincerely working together, there were differences of opinion between these two mission boards. Because of this problem a new area called the 'Swedish Circle, field' was carved out by the CSM Missionaries.¹⁰ They were asked to work among the women in Tamil Nadu by the Mission Board in Sweden.

CONDITION OF WOMEN

When the CSM missionaries came to India the prevailing situation was really shocking. The country was governed by the British Queen. Sense of slavery was not even felt by the local Indians and so the fact that the society was reeling under heavy depression was not even realized. The pathological condition found expressions

(B)S.Manickam,Slavery in the Tamil Country,(A Historical overview,)Madras: Christian Literature Society,1998p43.

¹ (A) J. Brodrick,Saint Francis Xavier,London:Burns Oates,1952,p67.Geroge Menachery,The St.Thome Christian Encyclopaedia of India(Vols-3),India:Ebenezar press,2010p207.

(B)George Menachery,The St.Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India(Vols3)India:Ebenezar Press,2010p207.

² (A) S Manickam,Studies in Missionary History Reflections on a Culture-Contact,Madras: The Christian Literature Society,1988.p65.

(B) General ,A scoot ,Moreau Ass,Ed.Harold Netland ,Charles Van Engen ,Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions, U.S.A: Published Baker Books,2000.pp,1043,1044.

⁸(A)Samuel Iyer ,History of the Tranquebar Mission in Tamil A.D.1706-1953,Madras:The Tranquebar printing&publishing House,1955,pp187-189.

(B) Proceeding of the Northern Swedish Field Meeting No.10. Gurukul1914,p7.

(C) Proceeding of the Northern Swedish Field Meeting No.10. Gurukul1914,p7.

⁴ Proceeding of the Northern Swedish Field Meeting No.10. Gurukul1914,p7.

⁵ Proceeding of the Northern Swedish Field Meeting No.11Periakuppan, 1914.p9.

⁶ Annual Reports of Mission Stations,1926-1935,Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran, Mission, 1935,p13.

⁷ (A)Proceeding of the Northern Field committee Meeting no.10 1914, p.7

(B)Triennial Report 1935-38 (Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church), p.15

(C) Proceedings of the Northern Field committee no 11. 1914, p.5

⁹ J.N.Lenker,Lutheran in All Lands(The Wonderful Work of God,Vols,1,2.)Newyork:J.A.Hill&Co,Easteran House,1894.p

¹⁰ Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission Records 1890,P9.

in the absence of the traditional values of the culture. People had no self dignity or self respect. Survival of the fittest was the norm of the day. Equality among people was not believed to be a necessity at all. Because then the crown government was only a Police State (and not a welfare State) to work for the welfare of the people was not felt to be a necessity.¹

The Tamil culture which had been influenced by the strong Hindu religious values treated people based on the origin of their birth. The birth of an individual decided the caste to which he/she belonged.² The caste was based on hereditary lineage. Untouchability was practised among people because of the caste system.

Among these painful realities the women were treated as a curse in a family. Women born in socially low class and those who were born to social outcast were twice alienated. First, because they belonged to the low caste, and then – within the low castes, the women were considered to be the lowest of the lowly.³ The men from the lowest classes treated their women lower to them. Thus the condition of the women was unbelievably low.

The condition of the women was pathetic⁴. The agony of the situation of slavery of women was not self imposed. It was not thrust upon them just by the family members alone. It was a result of the ‘age old practice of religious values’ which on the one hand hailed women as goddesses - and on the other hand, did not allow their women even to touch or worship or enter the sanctum sanctorum of the temples, exactly where the idols of highly respectable ‘Women Goddesses’ were kept and worshipped. It was strange for the CSM Missionaries when they observed that the Indians worshipped women in the stone form but they were not willing to treat them with minimum respect and dignity in the real living form.

All these factors found reflections in the everyday life of the women whom the CSM missionaries met in the villages. While history could show eminent personalities like Velu Nachiar who led wars and the Rani Mangammal who ruled the country, the contextual reality was that women’s living conditions were so bad to the extent that many people preferred to kill the ‘female foeti’ and the ‘just born female babies’. This female infanticide was a direct result of the dowry system that prevailed in the society, especially among certain caste based communities in the Usilampatti Area in Madurai district. It was also prevalent in Salem, Dharmapuri districts also. Specifically what was called the CSM Pioneer Board Area, the Usilampatti Taluk, this practice was high among the Piramalai Kallar Community.⁵

EARLY MISSIONARIES OF THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN MISSION JOHN ZACHARIAS KIERNANDAR

John Zacharias Kiernandar was the first Swedish missionary to come to the Tamil speaking areas of the then Madras Presidency. He came to Tranquebar, learnt Tamil and carried out his missionary work in Cuddalore.⁶ Following him, Fjellstedt also came to Tranquebar, learnt Tamil and went to Tirunelveli to do the missionary work. Since his health condition deteriorated, he had to go back to his country. Because of the efforts of Fjellstedt and Glasell, Sweden Mission came forward to work in league with Leipzig Mission in 1849. Notable among the Swedish Missionaries were Lundgren and Ouchterlony. Blomstrand also came with them to Tranquebar and worked with the Leipzig mission.⁷ Sweden’s missionary Anskar 8did his ministry from 830 A.D. One Thousand years after his birth, the Swedish Government organized millennium celebration to commemorate his birth a decision was taken on this occasion. As per this decision, it was decreed that all the missionaries from Sweden should call themselves “Church of Sweden Missionaries” irrespective of their working place. Carol Jacob Sandegren, a missionary from Sweden came to Tamil Nadu and started his work in Coimbatore Area. He saw the social injustice done to women in the practice of child marriage, female infanticide, forced covering of women’s head in public, dowry for marriage, refusal for widow remarriage, high rate of death during child birth etc., and wrote to his head quarters in Sweden that the most important work to be taken up in India was that of working among women. The Church of Sweden Mission Board accepted Sandegren’s recommendations to send women missionaries to India, but the Leipzig Mission Board did not accept the idea of sending women out of their country. But upon the instance of the CSM Board, the Leipzig Mission accepted to send women missionaries to India. Only after that Esther Peterson came to Tamil Nadu,

¹ M.M. Srinivas, Social change in Modern India, Bombay: Allied publishers, 1966, p.75 S.B. Chaudhuri, Civil Disturbances during the British Rule in India, Calcutta: Calcutta Press 1955, p.55

² Lakshmi Narasu, A study of caste, Madras, university press 1922, p.8

³ Rajkumar, Violence against women NewDelhi: Anmol publishing P Ltd, 2000 ch 13, pp 139-140.

⁴ R. Muthulakshmi, Female Infanticide its causes and solution, New Delhi: Discovery publishing House, 2003, p.7

⁵ (A) A.Sundra pandian Dowry – The reason for female infanticide, Junior vikatan (a Tamil Weekly)

(B) Geraldine Forbes, The New Cambridge History of India, New York: Cambridge university Press, 1996, p.13.

⁶ Missionaries Magazine, Sweden June 1896, p.3(Swedish)

⁷ Esther Peterson, Letter, Madurai dated December 29, 1890 p.1

⁸ FL Cross E.A. Living stone, The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian church, London: Oxford university press 1957, p.1562

hundreds of women missionaries started coming to India after her.¹

ESTHER PETERSON

Esther Peterson was born in the year 1866 in Sweden. She came to Tamil Nadu in 1890 and carried out her mission work in Madurai. Her service among women was a remarkable one. During her period, female infants were thrown on the streets to be run over by the wheels of the chariots. She took up nearly hundred abandoned children and brought them up. There were also separate dresses for curtain women in the society. Esther Peterson designed distinctly upper [blouse] dresses for women and thereby introduced new dressing habits to women. Women had the practice of growing their ears to wear ear drops. Esther Peterson changed this practice. The credit of bringing about revolutionary changes in this society went to Esther Peterson. Dowry refusal for widow remarriage and high rate of death during child birth disturbed the minds of the C.S.M. missionary Sandegren very much. So he wrote to the headquarters of the C.S.M. pleading to support his projects which could give a great relief to the suffering women in India. He also requested for women missionaries from Sweden to work among women. The CSM Board accepted Sandegren recommendations to send women missionaries to India, but the Leipzig Mission Board did not accept the idea of sending women out of their country. But upon the insistence of the CSM Board, the Leipzig Mission accepted to send women missionaries to India. Only after that Esther Peterson came to Tamil Nadu and hundreds of women missionaries followed her to work among women in the mission field. Her work was mainly concentrating on women and girls and she served in many places in Tamil Nadu. She worked with and assisted C.J. Sandegren's wife, Theodora, in establishing the Girl's School in Ponnagaram, Madurai. After retirement she bought the Frieda Cottage in Kodaikanal and also another bungalow in Thirupathur, where she lived and served the Tamil women until her death in 1960.²

Generally, at the time of a girl's birth, at the time of attaining puberty, at the time of getting married and even at the time of her death there were several stringent social rituals and customs to be followed according to the caste status. This had been there for ages together. Particularly this system was followed very strictly in the Usilampatti Area. It was forced vigorously. If there any deficiency found in any of these ceremonies or formalities the self dignity of the families concerned became questionable.³ The woman was pushed into a pathetic situation to be ill treated by her husband and in laws.

When a girl gets married the bride's family was forced to part with considerable amounts of money, as marriage gifts (either cash or kind) which is different from what her maternal uncles should give, whether he is capable or not. When she becomes pregnant, there are formalities to be followed – all expenses even after delivery should be met by the bride's family. On the seventh month, during pregnancy there will be a function called '**valaikappu**' the expenses to be borne by the bride's family. When a child is born to her then the young mother's parents and brothers are expected to spend money and give gifts to the child. If the child happens to be a girl child, then the same vicious life cycle continues to govern her till her death. The formalities called "MURAI" are very strictly enforced upon women by men.⁴ In the case of a woman who gives birth to girl children consequently, the woman will be ill treated and her husband will marry another woman. A belief became prevalent that the mother loved her girl child very much and so she did not want her to undergo all the sufferings in this unjust world, and allowed her to die soon after the child was born. It was under these strange circumstances that the girl child was considered as unnecessary, unwanted and a curse.⁴

Arranging marriage for children was a horrible practice which has its roots in the early years of history. As we have seen earlier, girl children were not accepted at homes since they were considered to be curse on the family. So they wanted to get the girls out of their families as early as by giving these girls in marriage. Child marriage was an accepted practice of the society in those days.⁵

So, for the reforming minded missionaries, it became a necessity to start girls schools in this area. These young girls found it very difficult to travel alone from the villages to the school and back. There was a question of safety for the girls while they walk back and forth. So it became imperative for girls hostels to be established along with the schools. Esther Peterson's role in this regard is important

Even though reports did appear in many news papers about the prevalence of female infanticide in Usilampatti, Madurai District, it was the missionaries who took initiative in creating awareness in the minds of women by personally visiting all villages and interacting with women. In fact the actions of these missionaries were far ahead of the social reform movements during 19th and 20th centuries in India. Their one to one dialogue regarding the female infanticide and girl's education became very significant attempts as it bore fruits for the

¹ Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission Records 1893, p.11.

² Amy Lagerquist, 'Swedish Women's Mission in India 1890-1940, Sweden: Church of Sweden Mission, 1940, pp.6,7.

³ Ibid p, 19.

⁴ O. P. Ralhan, India Women Through Ages, Vol.2, New Delhi, Anmol Publication, 1995, p.29

⁵ Pushpa Joshi, Gandhi on Women, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1988, p.298.

Giri Raj Shash, The Encyclopaedia of Women's Studies, Vol.2, New Delhi, 1995, p.382.

missionaries' labour¹

There were so many young widows in the society as the result of child marriage. Among the Kallar community in the Madurai Usilampatti Area, it was customary to remarry the young child widows. So the Swedish missionaries did not find it necessary to start any home for the widows in this area. But in other parts of Tamil Nadu the Swedish missionaries started homes for the child widows and industrial schools to train them in various occupations.

THE ROOT CAUSE FOR C.S.M. MOTIVATION

Power and Profit were the only motives of the British government. The British Govt did not have the intention to address the social evils of the day.² The fact that 'Female Infanticide was an act of Sinful Nature' was not at all realized by the people. But for the CSM Missionaries, it was seen as an act of 'Violence Against God and His Creation'. They felt the need to protect humanity by protecting the sex ratio of the population and also to wipe out the ignorance of the people which they believed to be one of the root causes of these evil practices.³

The missionaries believed that they heard the 'Call of God' to proclaim the Gospel. They had the prophetic vision to the building of the Kingdom of God on earth. They sacrificed their luxurious living and suffered in the hot climate of rural India. They also believed that the mission of the church was not only the preaching of the Word of God but also practicing the values found in the Christian life. The CSM missionaries could see the self imposed ignorance and forcibly practiced traditional values were also the causes for these sufferings. Since they practised the values of true Christian Faith, they were automatically forced to practice the same when it came to the matter of people around them.⁴ The missionaries felt that it was their responsibility to see that the ignorance was wiped out and that the new knowledge was spread among the women of the Tamil community where they worked. God's love for the women of Tamil Nadu was communicated to them and that they received this most important message from CSM. The centrality of Christian theology was the liberation of mankind. And this definitely included the liberation of women from the clutches of the unchallenged Indian tradition which resulted in the inhuman treatment of women. This was against the will of God. Hence working for the welfare of women became the foremost key activity for the CSM missionaries.

THE STRATEGIES ADOPTED

Significant contributions were made by the CSM missionaries among whom C.J Sandegren, Miss Esther Peterson, Mrs Rev Himmelstrand, Rev Ouchterlony, Rev Blomstrand, Rev Tillander, Rt Rev J Sandegren, Rev Paul Sandegren, Rev Nordmark were very important. These people personally visited the poor mothers having girl children in their homes. When the local women saw the educated, affluent western women entering their humble homes and interacting with them with affection. They were thrilled and expressed reciprocation of the affection and respect.⁵ This human bond - this rapport built on a personal one to one basis, became the foundation for the success of the missionary work done by the CSM not only in Usilampatti area but also in places wherever they worked. Since the human touch and bond was strong, teaching and learning became an easy process.⁶ The CSM missionaries first learnt the local language, the local culture and the local values from the people and slowly, over a period of time, taught the women and men to question those harmful practices. These included the ill treatment of women and the unequal treatment of men. They taught that God created men and women equal. This resulted in the positive response of the local people. The CSM Missionaries were accepted by the locals because the sincerity of the missionaries was found to be genuine. When what was discussed was found to be relevant, the people accepted them and followed them. The significant difference in the approach of the CSM missionaries was that, instead of telling the local people that they were wrong in any aspect - or straight away telling them what they should do, these missionaries helped the local people see, know, analyze and understand their own practices and their values. And then they encouraged them to change for the better, by their own decisions. In doing so the CSM missionaries maintained the individual liberty and independence of the local people, in their choice and decision making process. Because of this nuance of the approach, the CSM missionaries were very successful in imbibing true Christian values in the life of the new Christians and converts in the village. The people were happy about the conversion not only on the religious field but also on the social realm. They were really made new.

Because the health of the pregnant women was very weak, the missionaries arranged to get nutritious

¹ 30th Triennial Synod Reportsof the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church 1938-1941,p13.

² Sabu George Rajaratnam Abel and B.D. Miller, Female Infanticide in Rural South India, EPW, Vol 2 7 No22 , May 30, 1992, pp 153-156

³ Amy Logerquis, Swedish Women Mission in India 1890-1940, pp 13,14,15

⁴ Ibid, pp 78

⁵ Report to the synod (The Tranquebar Tamil Bible Society and the Literary committees) 1932-1935, p.3

⁶ Proceeding of the Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission, No 15. pp 23,24

food supplements from their home country and also from other nearest Christian missions representing other churches and other countries.¹ The medicines and nutritious food supplements obtained from the American missionaries living in Madurai were distributed² among pregnant women and thus helped the female foetus itself which otherwise would have been allowed to die either on being born - or left to die of hunger and thirst. Milk, bread, biscuits, eggs supplied in the morning were supplemented with wheat flour, rice, Corn etc in the food that was given to pregnant women. It was important, things were done at the time when the India suffered under heavy shortage of food and other supplies due to epidemics and economic depression as a result of world wars.

The women in the Usilampatti Area saw a significant change in their life because of the relevant and timely intervention of the CSM missionaries. These missionaries made a significant attempt to change the Traditional view that girl children were a burden to that of viewing girls as a blessing.

It was a kind of revolution because the people believed that “it is right to have girl children, it is possible to educate them, it is acceptable to send them for jobs, it is right to treat them as equals etc”, all because of the prudent approach and contribution made by the missionaries belonging to the CSM.³

Some of those who opposed female infanticide on the influence of the CSM missionaries were finding it very difficult to bring up their female children.⁴ In such cases the missionaries took responsibility to stand by them, by adopting those girls and bringing them up in a way more than the parents themselves would have done. Hundreds of girls were thus helped with food, cloths, residence, education, employment, marriage and family guidance which resulted in the development of great personalities among Tamil women. The role played by people like Rev Himmelstrand, Rev Nordmark in Usilampatti, Ouchterlony in Thanjavur, C. J. Sandegren, Rev. Tilliander in Madurai, Rev Blomstrand in Ramanathapuram, Rev Paul Sandegren in Anaikadu and Rev. Kugelberg in Pattukottai are very significant.

Some of these women beneficiaries were also sent to foreign countries for higher education and for international exposure among the countries which supported their education. These people grew in wisdom and knowledge of the love of God. When they returned they could be described as personifications of knowledge, discipline and faith in God. These people still remember the CSM missionaries, praise them and are thankful to them for their unforgettable contributions in their lives.

THE SOCIAL CHANGES

In later years the government of Tamil Nadu enacted laws against female infanticide and Government Cradle scheme for female children to protect the girls. But it will not be wrong if we say that some of the social welfare programs of the CSM missionaries were the eye openers for others and the government to work towards social emancipation

Parents preferred boys to girls though both of them have their own children. In the matter of providing food, cloths bedding and education to children, In the matter of providing food cloths, bedding and education to children, the boys got everything and the girls got something. Even in family functions boys were pampered and adored. During the menstrual period the girls were not allowed to be inside their own houses because they were considered impure. This was a social stigma. It was necessary to ensure dignity of creation through fostering a sense of equality. So the CSM missionaries started removing this stigma of discrimination against girls from their schools, boardings, orphanages and in the public places where ever they came in contact with.⁵

They led an exemplary life in front of the people whom they taught these values. Because of this, they could see the change in social behaviour among women in areas like Karunakarapuri, Mudukulathur, Kamudhi, Peraiyur, Tanjavur, Pudukotai, Anaikkadu, Pattukkottai, Usilampatti, and Thiruppattur,. . . Because of education, knowledge and ability to achieve, the suppressing attitude against women started to be challenged if not fully eradicated. Employment and economic freedom through education provided a new and refreshing status to women in the areas where the missionaries of the CSM worked tirelessly.⁶

ADVOCATE AGAINST CHILD MARRIAGE

Girls were given in marriage at the age of 13 or 14 years old. Sometimes the bride - grooms could be 16 years old and at other times he could even be above 30 years. In some of the cases, the girls were engaged to the

¹ Anders Bjornberg, Teaching and Growth (Christian Religions Education in a local and international missionary context 1900 till the early 1930's Lund: Lund university press 1991, p150,155,157

² Nordic Mission Magazine 1905-1994 pp 6,7(Swedish Language) Swedish church Mission News paper 1907-1950 pp 3,7(Swedish Language)

³ Swedish church Mission Journal in 1890, No 2, p.2 (Swedish language)

⁴ (A) Proceeding of the CSM Missionarie's Conference 1930,1931.p10.

(B)Alm AnnualReport 1927,P24.

⁵ (A) Proceeding of the church council meeting No. 117, Madars, 1929 p.5

(B)Alm Annual Report 1928 p14.

⁶ Index to the Proceeding of the Government of Fort Saint George in the Ecclesiastical Records 1886-1887 p15.

grooms even before they could complete the age of 5 or 6 years. This prevented them from going to schools. Child marriage and early teenage pregnancy led to physical and psychological trauma. Many young mothers died during delivery times.

The then British government was not concerned about all these evils. Legal intervention was far beyond a possibility. But the CSM missionaries took a bold decision to get involved in bringing awareness in the minds of the people about the destructive aspects of child marriages in society.¹

POOR FUND AND WIDOW ASSISTANCE FUND

To address these issues the CMS Missionaries created Poor Fund and Widow Assistance Fund apart from education and other supporting efforts. Such financial assistance included even funds for burying the dead in the family.² This was called the Death Fund. Such pecuniary helps were offered not on a random haphazard basis but on a systematically planned long term basis. These were like a chain of events and programme.

Female infanticide

Though female infanticide was prevalent all over Tamil Nadu, it was more so in Madurai Usilampatti area. Esther Peterson who came to India during the later part of the 18th century has worked to eradicate this practice. Her visits to the villages yielded fruits. Her forward thinking way of approach and personal one to one dialogue were the best approach for the seeding of a slow but steady social thinking for a social change. It was very difficult to make³ the most backward minded men and women to start thinking in ways and means which were totally unimaginable from their values and way of life. She used to bring women folk from the villages in vehicles to Usilampatti, give them food and snacks and train them in handicrafts, embroidery, sewing, basket making and gardening etc., and also take the responsibility of dropping them back in their respective villages in the same vehicles.

Since they found it difficult to travel back and forth every day, they started staying in Usilampatti itself over a period of time. Hence a place of residence was arranged and made available for them.

In Usilampatti taluk, the literacy rate among males was higher when compared with that of the female. Most of the girl children were not sent to school. Land-holding population was very small in this region though most people were engaged in cultivation. The standard of living was average. Piramalai Kallar constituted nearly 43.26% of the total population of this area.⁴ The practice of infanticide was common in the community. The arrival of the girl child in the family was not generally welcomed by any members of the family.

What the missionaries developed as a strategy to prevent female infanticide became a very significant one in latter days. It was Esther Peterson who should be given the credit for all these good things because after her period, the CSM missionaries continued her programmes to eradicate the social evils that cankeved the Tamil society.

Rev. Himmelstrand, Mrs. Himmelstrand, Sr Rev.Nordmark, Sr. Larsen Vasti, Sr. Holmason Peterson, Rev. Gill, Sr. Wicklander, Sr. Peterson Snja, Sr. Will Helmsen Ingrid, Sr. Segarstad Erick, Sr. Segarstad Sigrig, Sr. Thumblad, Sr. Edstrom, Sr. Ulla Sandegren, Ouchterlong (1855-1856) Blomstrand (1860-1863) Osterlind (1915-1918) Holm Anny (1920) Lagerquist Army (1921-1922) Evavan Gernet (1922-1923) Halm Anny (1923-1928)KronsellEster(1928) JonssonMaria (1928-1930) LogrenNaemi (1928-1931) Wimmereranz Elna (1930-1931) Halm Anny (1930-1931) Paul Gabler (1935) Kronsell Ester (1931-1946) Enggvist Carlsson (1935-1937) John Greta (1937) Halm Anny (1937-1945) KronsellEster (1946) LarsonVusti (1946) John Greta (1947-1948) and Halmborg Tage (1949) worked very hard in promoting awareness about the sinful nature of female infanticide.⁵

During the early period of the 18th century some people stopped the practice of female infanticide at least within their own families and their immediate family circles. Even though they had many girls in their homes, these parents reared them up without showing any kind of inhibition but gave them education.⁶ Because of their education these girls later on grew up into good and responsible women in society, got married and got settled in life with great respect. These missionaries adopted the children of poor parents and helped them in all possible ways to bring them up and get them settled down in their lives. As if they were their own children the

¹ (A) Proceedings of the church council Meeting No. 115, Trichy1929,P10.

(B) J.Sandegren AnnualReport toCSM1927,P11.

² (A) Proceeding of the church council Meeting no 97 Trichinopoly, on Tuesday 20th March 1927, p.5

(B)Annual Report to theTELC1931,P86.

³ J.Himmelstrand Letter with Alm to the CSM Board 1929.P5.

⁴ Manual of the Administration of the Madras presidency Records of Government 7 the yearly Administration Reports, vol 3, Madras: Government Press, 1885, p 95.

⁵ (A) Proceedings of the Mission Council Meeting No. 92 Madura , 1928, p.5

(B) Paul Sandegren Letter to the CSM Home Board,1929.P9.

⁶ (A) Anna Irbe Annual Report 1929,P7

(B) Annual Report of TELC1931,p16.

missionaries did everything according to the social expectations. They guided them into value based lives. In this Usilampatti Area most of the adopted children happened to be girls.

Women seminary by C.S.M

To appreciate the service done by Bible women, C.S.M. started seminaries for women in Palladam and Nadukottai and gave training to more than 30 women. They were given responsible positions in the church. This was the first time missionary service was done by women in the Indian church history.

Sick fund

Those who were sick were given financial assistance to treat themselves. In those days there were not big hospitals¹ or nursing homes to treat the diseases fully and completely.² Total remedy was very rare. Sudden epidemics like cholera, malaria, typhoid, took away the lives in large numbers. The Sick Fund aimed to help these poor helpless victims. Such help was offered to men, women, children, young and old in all places where ever the missionaries worked. Such an useful Sick Fund was the idea of the missionaries of CSM.³

Poor fund

Those who were suffering to meet their every day need for food, clothing and shelter, received help from this Poor Fund. Many people were benefitted by this Poor Fund. Specifically, old women benefitted the most. During festival seasons the missionaries gave them not only financial help but also dress materials, and food material.⁴

Death fund

This fund was used for burying the dead. Money from Death Fund was sanctioned to bury the dead if they happened to be poor or without parents or without any relatives. The Swedish missionaries utilized the money from the Death Fund for anyone who was staying in the rehabilitation centres as widows, poor, sick, deaf or blind at the time of their death.

The Swedish mission home board in Sweden received all kinds of requests with compassion and sent great amounts of money whole heartedly.⁵ So the missionary activities of the Church of Swedish Mission were continuing without any distraction or delay in TamilNadu. With utmost sincerity the missionaries in India spent all the money they received from abroad exclusively for the work and the mission of the church.

Conclusion

Women in the down trodden most backward Kallar communities and the untouchable Dalit communities were twice alienated. They suffered from the outside society and they also suffered from within their own families. Illiteracy, ill health, poverty and civic inertia could be cited as the basic reasons for this condition of women in society. This means that they were not educated, they did not have health and medical facilities, they did not have any income generation and economic development activities and they did not know how to fight for these things and get what is their right for themselves. There was no organized service provider to guide and help them in all these things. But a dedicated research into the events of history, related to the life and works of the Missionaries from the Church of Sweden Mission reveals an unimaginable abundance of dedication and sacrifice on the part of the missionaries which has become the root cause for the fantastic social change and social mobility on the part of the women of Tamil Nadu.

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¹ Proceedings of the church of Sweden mission council, 28th oct 1947, p 35

² Proceedings of the church of Sweden mission council, 1946, p. 31

³ Proceedings of the CSM India Missionaries conference 1934, p 130

⁴ Church of Sweden Mission Home Board Proceeding 1934, p 150

⁵ Proceeding of the Church of Sweden Mission Tranquebar No11, 1945P,7.

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