

London Mission Society: Social Activities in the Erode Region

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Abstract

This research paper delves into the profound influence of the London Mission Society (LMS) on education and healthcare in the Erode region of Tamil Nadu during the late 19th and 20th century particularly in uplifting the underprivileged communities, the study highlights the transformative efforts aimed at addressing the lack of educational opportunities for lower caste groups, notably the Dalit population. Through the establishment of boarding schools, vocational training programs, and teacher training institutes, the LMS played a pivotal role in promoting literacy and skill development among marginalized individuals, ultimately leading to improved social and economic status. Furthermore, the paper explores the healthcare interventions introduced by the LMS, emphasizing the establishment of hospitals and nurse training programs that not only enhanced healthcare access but also empowered Dalit girls to pursue careers in nursing, thereby contributing to their social upliftment. The inclusive approach adopted by the LMS in providing quality healthcare services to the local community, particularly the underprivileged, underscores the organization's commitment to holistic development and social welfare.

Keywords: london mission society, education, medical work, nursing, literature

Introduction

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the London Mission Society (LMS) had a significant influence in the Erode region of India. The LMS was particularly drawn to this area due to the presence of underprivileged communities that were devoid of educational opportunities and means to improve their quality of life. The lower caste groups, often referred to as the depressed class, were marginalized and denied the right to education. The missionaries set out to transform these conditions. While the primary objective of the LMS was the propagation of their faith, their efforts went beyond religious evangelism to play a pivotal role in uplifting the lives of the disadvantaged communities. This article aims to explore how the LMS brought about change in the lives of the unorganized sector in Erode, liberating them from the oppressive social customs that kept them in ignorance. The LMS commenced its work in Erode around 1830, with several missionaries settling in the region to dedicate themselves to this cause.

Objectives

1. To explore the social welfare activities undertaken by London Mission society missionaries in Erode

2. To analyze the efforts to enhance Education, healthcare and social empowerment within the communities
3. To Examine the Mission contribution to the Literature Development

Methodology

Information will be based on the Primary and Secondary sources, which were approached in both narrative and analytical aspects. The study focus on the London Mission Society missionaries embarked on journey across the world to propagate the teaching of Christianity.

Review of Literature

A comprehensive review of academic Journals, Books, Papers and credible online sources was conducted to gather relevant information on the changing landscape of social welfare in Erode region and the role of London Mission Society

History of London Mission Society

The London Mission Society (LMS) was a Protestant missionary society formed in England in 1795 by a group of people from various denominational backgrounds,

united by a common commitment to evangelical Protestantism. It formally emerged from the Evangelical Revival and the Missionary Society, largely Congregationalist in its polity and ethos, but it was ecumenical and non-denominational in terms of its mission. The society aimed to spread the Christian gospel to the "heathen" peoples of the world who had never heard of Christianity. The LMS was known for sending missionaries to various parts of the world, including the Pacific Islands, Africa, and Asia. In particular, they established several missions in India, with a notable presence in the southern part of the country, including Tamil Nadu, where Erode is located. They focused on educational and medical work and were instrumental in the development of a number of schools and hospitals. Missionaries of the London Missionary Society contributed to society not just through evangelism, but also by engaging in social issues. They advocated for the abolition of slavery, and worked on improving society condition.

Landing of the Mission

Among the most notable missionaries in Erode during the late 19th and early 20th centuries was Anthony Watson Brough, a representative of the London Missionary Society. Brough arrived in the Coimbatore district in 1894, where he served for four years before being transferred to the Erode region. Accompanied by his family, his wife Mrs. Rosetta Jen Brough and their son Herbert Brough, he established a deep connection with the local community and championed many reforms for public welfare. In 1892, he constructed a small church in the railway colony to meet the growing needs of worshippers. However, as attendance increased and space became insufficient, Brough acquired land in the heart of the Erode district to build a larger church. The construction of the new church commenced in 1927 and was completed in 1930, providing ample space for congregants.

The Condition of the Erode Region

The Erode, Coimbatore, and Tirupur regions were dominated by the Vellalar community, who were landowners, leaving the unorganized sector comprising landless individuals reliant on these upper-community landholders. The low caste people were made to do certain works and they were not permitted to get any kind of

education. The society was growing in such a way that, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting ever more poor. When this was the actual situation in Erode. The arrival of the London Mission Society marked a turning point for the lives of these unorganized sector workers. The mission primarily focused on the upliftment of the Dalit population. Upon their arrival in Erode, the missionaries began to propagate Christianity, initiating changes that would have lasting effects on the region.

Promoting Educations

During the period of Thomas Munro, an order was issued to conduct an educational census to assess literacy levels in every district. At that time, Erode was under the Coimbatore district. The results of the census reported a low level of educational growth in the Erode region. A.W. Brough sought to increase educational opportunities by starting schools. Initially, 14 schools were started in rural areas, followed by 80 more schools in other local areas, totaling 94 schools started by the LMS. Missionary H.A. Popley also worked with A.W. Brough. In Erode, the first teacher sent to Perundurai by Mr. Addis, the missionary. The missionary J.W. Inglis from New Zealand came to Erode from Bentinck's High School in Madras and worked on women's development. She started a boarding school for girls in 1906 and boys' boarding homes in 1909. Many girls and boys traveled long distances to access education. Due to the difficulty of traveling long distances, some people had to forgo educational opportunities. To address this, missionaries started boarding schools for those from distant areas, providing three meals a day and accommodation to ensure students could learn without barriers.



Fig.1. Rev. Anthony Watson Brough

Both boys' and girls' boarding homes began offering industrial training to promote self-employment. The missionaries aimed to improve the conditions of Dalit people and reduce illiteracy. In 1926, A.W. Brough started

a community school offering vocational training in weaving, agriculture, and carpentry. He also sent selected boys to St. Joseph Industrial School in Coimbatore and Methodist Mission Industrial School in Karur for special training. Brough and Popley decided to focus on developing and increasing student enrollment in existing schools rather than starting new ones. Rev. Clews, a missionary from LMS, came to Erode in 1923 and promoted efficient education, significantly contributing to the region's educational development. Today, the CSI Higher Secondary School has a "Clews Block" as evidence of his work in the Erode region. In 1933, Popley took responsibility for the community school and started a teacher training institute in 1926. Refresher courses were conducted for teachers during summer holidays. The mission's education program had a significant impact on society, as untouchable people, after completing their education, attained high positions and were treated with respect. This education system greatly improved the lifestyle of many Dalit people.

Literature Work

The missionaries who came to Tamil Nadu initially did not understand Tamil, so they learned the language properly at respective institutions. Later, the missionaries developed a zeal for Tamil literature. Herbert Arthur Popley, a Christian missionary from the London Mission Society, was particularly interested in Tamil and became a Tamil researcher. Popley translated many Tamil books into English and wrote numerous commentaries. In 1898, Popley came to India, and after 1900, he entered Tamil Nadu and stayed at the Kanjikoil London Mission Bungalow in Erode, conducting mission work. Popley and Rev. Anthony Watson Brough purchased land from the British government for the London Mission Society. Popley learned Tamil methodically from his teachers and also studied Carnatic music. He translated the Tirukkural into English verses and published the book titled "The Sacred Kural" or "The Tamil Veda of Tiruvalluvar" in 1931, releasing a revised second edition in 1958. Popley also released another book about music titled "The Music of India." He composed Tamil Christian songs in Carnatic music. Additionally, Popley, along with J.T. Rajanayam, published the monthly magazine "Naveena Kalvi." Popley and A.W. Brough started the "Erode Literary Society," conducted many meetings, and delivered speeches in

Tamil. Sometimes, Popley served as the translator for guest speeches.



Fig.2. Rev. Herbert Arthur Popley

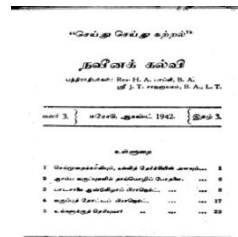


Fig.3. Monthly Magazine "Naveena Kalvi"

Medical Missions at Erode

In the early 20th century, the Erode region was plagued by diseases such as tuberculosis, leprosy, cholera, and malaria. Cultural norms of the time prevented many women from seeking treatment from male doctors, leading to a significant gap in healthcare access. In response to this, A.W. Brough invited a medical mission in 1909 to address the healthcare needs of women in the region. Miss Dr. Rees was the first female medical missionary to arrive in Erode. She provided medical treatment to patients in her bungalow, ensuring that women could receive care in a more comfortable and culturally acceptable environment. Dr. Rees worked in Erode for three years before transferring to China. Following Dr. Rees, Dr. Hilda M. Pollard arrived in Erode in 1919. Recognizing the need for a proper medical facility, Brough constructed a hospital where Dr. Pollard could effectively treat patients. The hospital was a significant development, and in 1933, it was equipped with electricity, improving its operational capacity. Dr. Pollard managed the medical work alone until 1923, when Miss Edna Baker was appointed as the Nursing Superintendent to assist her. This addition marked the beginning of a more structured approach to healthcare in the region.

In 1933, the hospital introduced a nurse training course to bolster its staff and ensure a steady supply of trained medical professionals. In initial days, the medium of education was English. Through Nurses and Midwives

were trained in Vernacular Language since 1933, the first batch of students for General Nursing Course were admitted in July 1956.



Fig.4. CSI Hospital (Gosha Hospital)

Miss. Irene Kriby joined as the third nursing superintendent in the year 1933. She introduced the 12 months nursing and midwifery course. She also contributed for the construction of the joint staff and student nurse in the year 1957. She worked in Erode for a total of 33 years. Kriby was affectionately called by everyone as "Beloved sister Amma". Dr. Pollard also took proactive measures by visiting villages to provide medical care and distribute medicines, making healthcare more accessible to those unable to travel to the hospital. Initially, many Muslims in the region were hesitant to visit the hospital due to the presence of male doctors. However, the appointment of female doctors encouraged many Muslim women, who adhered to purdah, to seek medical treatment. This inclusive approach earned the hospital the nickname "Gosha Hospital," a name it retains to this day. Dr. Pollard was dedicated to developing the hospital and improving its equipment. The medical mission focused on training Indian nurses, particularly from the Dalit community, to work within the hospital. This initiative provided many Dalit girls with an opportunity to pursue a nursing career, thereby improving their social and economic status. In 1931, A.W. Brough established a new hospital in Chennimalai in memory of his son, Herbert Brough, who died in the First World War. This hospital further expanded the region's healthcare infrastructure. By 1939, the hospital had treated 1,433 inpatients and 10,454 outpatients. The nurse training program had successfully trained 196 nurses, most of whom were from the Dalit community. This significant achievement highlighted the impact of the medical mission on improving healthcare access and outcomes in the Erode region.

Conclusion

Missionaries made a tremendous contribution in the development of Erode region. The development we see today in Erode were the results of the works done by missionaries. The educational and medical institution started by the missionaries still stands good and provide the necessities to the people. Missionaries of the London Missionary Society contributed to society not just through evangelism, but also by engaging in social issues. They advocated for the abolition of slavery, and worked on improving society condition. The society merged with the Commonwealth Missionary Society in 1966 to form the Congregational Council for World Mission, and later it became part of the Council for World Mission, continuing its legacy under new structures and a modern context.

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