CHAPTER I

STATUS OF WOMEN IN TAMIL NADU TILL 1917

Tamil Nadu has a great tradition of heritage and culture that has developed over 2,000 years and still continues to flourish. This great cultural heritage of the state of Tamil Nadu evolved through the rule of dynastics that ruled the state during various phases of history. Many of the ruling dynastics gave patronage to Art and Culture that resulted into the development and evolution of a unique Dravidian culture which Tamil Nadu today symbolizes. Under the rule of the Pallavas, Cholas and the Pandya kings, there were tremendous growth and development in the field of Art, Architecture and Literature. The history of Tamil language can be traced back to the Age of the Tolkapiyam, the Tamil Grammar text, ascribed to around 500 B.C. Similarly, the Sangam literature dates back to 500 B.C. 1

1.1 Classification of People in Tamil Nadu

The people of Tamil Nadu are mainly Dravidians. The Dravidians were the original inhabitants of the subcontinent in the Indus Valley region. 80% of the population now is Dravidian but there are communities of indigenous tribes. The Toda people who live in the Nilgiri Hills are accomplished silversmiths. Other communities are those of the Irula, Badaga, Kota and Kurumba. Tamil Nadu is one of the most urbanized states of India but most of the people still live in villages. 2

1 V.V.K. Suppurasu, Tamil Nadu Year Book 2010, Chennai, 2010, p.3.
1.2 Language in Tamil Nadu

Tamil is spoken all over the state and Tamilians are in fact very proud of their language. Tamil is the official language of Tamil Nadu and one of the 18 languages mentioned in the eighth schedule of the Indian constitution. Tamil is one of the classical languages of the world, with a rich heritage of literature. It is the most widely spoken language in Tamil Nadu. Besides Tamil Nadu, Tamil is also spoken by a number of people in Sri Lanka, Singapore, Mauritius and Malaysia. The antiquity of Tamil is comparable to Sanskrit. Tamil is written in a derivative of the southern 'Brahmi' script. The letters in the alphabet of Tamil are unique. That is, in Tamil language letters represent sounds, rather than ideas, as is the case in the 'Mandarin' language of China.³

1.3 Status of Women in Ancient Period

The status of women during the pre-Aryan, Dravidian civilization was higher and the excavation at Mohanjadaro and Harappa reveals the fact that mother goddess was given more importance during this period. The women also allowed listening to the epics and puranas.⁴

1.3.1 Status of Women in Vedic Period

Women were given a very high position in Vedic society. They enjoyed more freedom in this period. No religious rites could be performed without women. Girls had considerable freedom in selecting their life partners and there was no system of child marriage. Women freely moved out from their houses and attended public functions. Females were always under the care of males both before and after

marriage. Polygamy prevailed only among the kings and the nobles. Widow remarriage was common. The Vedic women did not use purdah.\(^5\)

### 1.3.2 Status of Women in Rig Vedic Period

The Rig Vedic society was a male dominated society. The elder son took up the responsibilities of the family after the father. The Rig Vedic husband was called ‘Grahapathi’ and wife was called ‘Illatharasi’. The wife was always to participate in festivals and religious ceremonies. The Rig Vedic people liked the birth of male child. Because they believed that the male child only was their Guardian and the right to do the funeral duties. The Rig Vedic society also hated the female child because after the marriage, the girl would go to her husband’s house, and also they had to give lots of dowry for her marriage.\(^6\)

Rig Vedic people followed Monogamy but the rich men and kings followed polygamy. The Rig Vedic women had the right to decide their marriage. There was no infanticide, child marriage and caste based discrimination. Sati was not popular in that time. Monogamy was the general rule. Polyanders were unknown. Widow remarriage was also very common at that time. The widows could remarry their brother in-law to get children. This marriage was called ‘Neoga’.\(^7\)

Education was given at homes itself to the Rig Vedic women. They specialized in Arts, Literature, Music and dance. Vis Varva, Ghosha, Apala, Lopamudra, Surya, Yami, Indirani, Sarparajini, Oorvasi were some of the poetess of Rig Vedic period. Vishpala, Mudkalani were the brave women of this period. Rig


Veda mentioned that female scholars and philosophers were known as ‘Brahma Vardhinis’ (women who had attained knowledge of Brahman).  

Arundhati, wife of sage Vasishta shined as a devoted spouse, a model for newly weds, Kowsalya, mother of Shri Rama and Tara, wife of Bali were described in Ramayana and Draupathi in Maha-bharatha as Pandita. Goddess worship was very common in the Rig Vedic period. They worshipped ‘Saratha’ for faith and ‘Manya’ for anger. They also worshipped the Goddesses like Thaya, Vithra, Varna and Ashwini.

1.3.3 Status of Women during Later Vedic Period

In later Vedic period, the position of women declined. The female child’s birth was considered as a sin. Woman was considered as the cause for sorrows and also she was considered as a burden to the family. ‘Ramayana’ and ‘Mahabharatha’ also reflect the same opinion about women. In this period women were given a lower position in the society. They were considered as inferior and subordinate to men. Birth of a girl child was not welcomed.

Atharva Veda says that the later Vedic people did so many poojas to get male child. In this period women are not allowed to participate in the political assemblies. Still some women were respected in the society, for instance, ‘Kundhi’ and ‘Lobamudra’. They saved their parents from a great destruction and also got the lands

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8 Shantharam, Profiles of Women Problems and Challenges, Thiruvanthapuram, 1993, p.5.
9 Ibid.
10 Rosapoo and Kalyana Sundari, op.cit., p.3.
11 J.K. Chopra, UGC History Exam Study Material, New Delhi, 2008, p.44.
as their wedding gifts and gave it to their parents. So they were respected very highly in the society.¹²

Women had the right to choose their husbands. Normally monogamy and polygamy prevailed. Child marriage was absent and widows could remarry. Sati and purdah systems had not started yet.¹³ In this period, the people believed that goddess Lakshmi was the God of virgin. In “Ramayana” also when Rama returned from the forest, the virgins anointed Rama as king.¹⁴

The caste based education was denied to the girls but they were taught by the educated old women in their houses. Religion, philosophy and medicine were taught to 5-16 year old girls. Some girls committed their whole life to learn the Vedas and lived the life of celibacy. As equal to men, women also learnt ‘Bhurva Memamsa’ (it is a kind of Mathematics). ‘Karki and ‘Maitheraye’ were some of the important women philosophers in the later vedic period.¹⁵

In Later Vedic period, women were spoken highly off. But they were not allowed to participate in king’s affairs equally like men. According to ‘Ithraya Brahmanam’ the one who is not questioning and accepts every thing was called a good girl. ‘Sada Patha Brahmanam’ says that the wife has to eat the food after her husband.¹⁶

¹² Rosapoo and Kalyana Sundari, op.cit., p.3.
¹³ J.K. Chopra, op.cit., p.44.
¹⁴ Rosapoo and Kalyana Sundari, op.cit., p.4.
¹⁵ Ibid., p.5.
¹⁶ N.K. Mangala Murugesan, op.cit., p.76.
During this period, they followed a special form of marriage, called ‘Swayamvara’. Swayamvara was the institute of marriage especially among the higher castes. Sita of “Ramayana” and Draupati of “Mahabharata” got married by way of Swayamvara. Swayamvara does not give the freedom of choice to the bride in the modern sense, because often her freedom to choose her husband is limited. In the institution of Swayamvara she was compelled to marry the winner of a competition, conducted to prove the martial excellence of her prospective bridegrooms.\(^{17}\)

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata present a galaxy of women called ‘Great Indian Women’. Sita, Kausalya, Draupathi, Savitri and Kunti are some of the noblest figures who are perfect embodiments of Indian womanhood. Sita proves by her life that woman’s spiritual guide is her husband. Gandhari is the noblest of the women characters in Mahabharata. She set an example of true sahadharmini who dared to bandage her own eyes for the sake of her blind husband Dhratarashtra. Another character, Kunti is the embodiment of patience, perseverance and self-sacrifice. Draupati, the central figure of the great epic, was a woman who possessed courage, sense of dignity and justice.\(^{18}\)

Because of the increasing of Sakthi worship, the women got somehow high status in the society. So the high status women were mentioned in some of the Hindu literature. The main duty of man was praising his mother. Concept of mother as the best teacher also came in this period. If a son was a monk, when he met his father the father should bow down before the son. But the son used to bow down before his mother to get blessings. This is mentioned in Mahabharatha.\(^{19}\)


1.3.4 Status of Women in the Period of Manu

The Hindu social Law was given by ‘Manu’. It is called ‘Manusmirithi’ or ‘Manu Sasthra’. Many rules were given in Manusmirithi on the basis of caste system. Child marriage was legally accepted. The marital age of a girl was seven. Widow remarriage was opposed. According to Manu, the wife has to worship her husband as God. If he is not a good man also, she has to worship him as God. If she goes to the temple also, she has to worship her husband alone. Then only she could attain heaven. Without husband the religious rights were denied to the women. Men were allowed to marry more than a wife and they only had the right to divorce. But the women did not have the right to divorce. Women did not get any benefits or rights from this law. Manu had encouraged the male domination in the society.\(^\text{20}\)

Manu also says that day and night women must be kept in dependence by the males and their families. Father protects her in childhood, husband protects her in youth and son protects her in old age. A woman is never fit for independence.\(^\text{21}\)

In Daksa it is expressed that women are like the leech. But, while the poor leech draws blood, the woman draws your riches, your prosperity, your flesh, your vitality and your strength. During adolescence, she is in fear of the man, during youth demands excessive pleasure and when her husband becomes old, she does not care a straw for him. Manu gives the circumstances under which a woman is likely to go astray. Drinking, associating wish immoral people, separating from her husband, roaming around, sleeping late, and dwelling with other man - these are the six causes of her ruin.\(^\text{22}\)

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p.5.


\(^{22}\) Ibid., p.15.
1.3.5 Status of Women in Sangam Age

From B.C.3 to A.D.3, 600 years, is called Sangam age in Tamil History. Tholkappiam, Aganaanuru, Kurunthogai, Pura-Nanuru, Madurai Kanji, Nartrinai, Nedunelvadai, Tirukural, Nakadiyar and Silapathikaram are some of the pieces of Sangam literature. They have shown a clear picture about Sangam women and their status. There was no equality between men and women legally as well as socially. Women of the Sangam age had much responsibility. Though husband earned money, it was her duty to preserve it for the maintenance of her family.

Patriarchal society was there in Sangam age. The Sangam literature says that women had the status not equal to men. They had to follow lots of rules, which were not meant to men. There was no evidence for punishing a man who left his wife and went to prostitute. There were evidences, which show that the Sangam age women were treated worst. For example, in Nakadiyar, a Tamil king named Nannan imprisoned his enemy’s wives in a war. He shaved their hair and made it as a rope to tie the elephant.

Sangam age was an age of war. Even though they needed more men to fight in the war, they did not hate the birth of the female child. They expected eagerly for the birth of male child. Sangam age did not determine the marital age for the women.

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The parents arranged their girl’s marriage with brave men. A history says that bridegroom paid for the bride’s price of which half of the amount would go to the bride and another half would go to her father. The bride had the right to keep that money for her own purposes.  

According to Tholkapiam, frightening, understanding, bashfulness and learning are good characteristics of a woman and also humility, peace, truthfulness, speaking good words also included in this list.  

In Sangam age women played an important role but there was no evidence that women were the ministers in king’s court. The Sangam literature said that queens were with kings and supported them to rule the country wisely. Loyalty and virtuousness were considered as good virtues of women and they were praised. ‘Kalithogai’ says that loyal women could bring rain through their virtuousness. They were spiritual too. Virgins worshipped Lord Muruga to get a good husband. Married women worshipped Lord Siva for their husband’s good health and long life. They worshipped Lakshmi for wealth. They also worshipped ‘Kotravai’ the goddess of war to get victory in the war. So there was goddess worship in the Sangam age.  

‘Aganaanuru’ says that Sangam age women somewhat had the right to choose their husbands. They enjoyed the freedom. Women were good in education. For an example, Sangam literature says that there were 26 poetesses in that period. ‘Avvaiyar’ was the famous poetess of this age. There were 58 poems written by

29 R. Vijaya Lakshmi, _op.cit._, p.47.  
30 Rosapoo and Kalyana Sundari, _op.cit._, p.12.  
Avvaiyar in the Sangam literature. She also wrote many ethical works, chief of them being Atti Chudi, Konrai Ventam, Ulaka-Niti, Muturai Nalvazhi, Nanneri, Niti-Neri-Vilakkam, Niti-Venba and Aranericharam. Sangam women were good at singing, dancing and music. Those who were good at music were called ‘paanini’.

In Sangam age, female beauty was described as something that kindled the fire of love in the heart of the lover. Her arms were like the round bamboos, she wore fragrant hair in different style, she had the gait of a peacock, the ankles that twinkled with pebbles, the brilliant jewels that swayed like a creeper lightening and shining like golden valley, the beauty of waist that kept one mesmerized. Her flowers like eyes and forehead shined like a bright curved moon. Tholhappiyar laid down ten dispositions among the young lovers. They are aptnesses in birth, status, virtues, conduct, knowledge, age, physical charm, manifestation of love, attainment of knowledge and wealth.

The Kurinji girls lived amidst cereals and grain fields. They protected these fields from birds. They were talented in stringing different floral garlands. Kapilar mentions 99 varieties of flowers in Kurinji Pattu. They used to be mostly with their companions cheerful, inspiring lively and have a love, for plunging in beautiful streams. In Ain-Kurunooru, poet Kapilar mentions that the chieftain of the hill, prayed to God for a daughter. This shows that during the Sangam period a female child was welcomed.

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35 Selvi Thiruchandran, op.cit., p.6.
36 Shantharam, op.cit., p.19.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., p.20.
1.3.5.1 Sangam Education

In Sangam period, the king gave first place to the learned men. When the mother heard that her son was a great learned man, she would be happier than the day on which she gave birth to him. It is said that it was the duty of the father to give education to his son.\(^{39}\)

In the matter of education women were given equal importance. Women were taught Iyal (literature) Isai (music) and Natakam (Drama) and men were given training for developing their physical stamina. Women who were proficient in Iyal, Isai and Natakam were known as ‘Mudukkuravai’. Ilango Adigal in his famous Tamil epic, Chillapathikaram characterizes Kannaki as Mudukkuravai.\(^{40}\)

Some of the educated women counseled the kings in the battlefield. They were brave and equal to men in many other aspects. Some of the famous sangam poetesses were Avvaiyar, Kakkai Pattiniyar, Okkur Masathiyar, Natchellaiyar, Nappasalaiyar, Nannagaiyar, Anjil Anjiyar, Adi Manthi, Paari Mahalir, Kopperum Pendu, Pon Mudiyar, Mudanthama Kanniyar, Vennikuyathiyar and Velliveedhiyar.\(^{41}\)

Sangam age mothers were brave enough to send their sons happily to the battlefield. ‘Purananuru’ mentions the brave woman as ‘Mudin Magalir’ or ‘Maraikudi Magalir’. Sangam mothers wanted their sons to be brave enough to die as soldiers with a great name. In Purananuru, Okkur Masathiyar a poetess of Sangam age mentioned that a woman was ready to cut off her breasts, if her son ran away from the

\(^{39}\) A. Swaminathan, History of Tamil Nadu, *op.cit.*, p.79.

\(^{40}\) Shantharam, *op.cit.*, p.19.

\(^{41}\) Rosapoo and Kalyana Sundari, *op.cit.*, p.15.
Tholkapiyar says that a brave mother was happy and proud when she saw her dead son in the battle field with a wound on his chest. Sangam literature says that a Tamil king, ‘Athiyaman’ gifted a rare precious goosbery (which could give long life) to Avvayar, who was a well educated poetess. This is an evidence for the respect the educated women had from the society.  

The Sangam temple dancers were variously called Manikatar and Gopitai. They were proficient in music and dance. On account of their special attainments they were accommodated in special residences near the temples. During the Pallava, and the Chola ages, the temple dancers of the Tamil land occupied an honored place in society for their skill in dancing and their liberal endowments to the temples. Even princesses were proficient in this art. Rajasimha’s favorite queen was Rangapataka, a name which suggested that she was an expert dancer.

The Kuktesvara temple at Kanchi and the Tiruvorviyur temple maintained a large number of women for the performance of singing and dancing at the time of divine services and festivals. According to the Kuktesvara temple inscription, a number of women, as many as 44 were attached to the temple as dancers. Those who were attached to the Siva temples were called Rudra Kanikaiyar.

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42 Ibid.

43 Samy and Sivam, Indian History upto 1707 (Tamil), Madurai, 1994, p. 159.

44 Raj Kumar, Woman and Leadership, New Delhi, 2000, p.30.
1.3.5.2 Marriage

Sangam literature divides the life of women into seven stages. They are Paedai (first 5 years), Pedumai (5-10 years), Mangai (10-16 years), Madanthai (16-25 years), Arivai (25-45 years), Therivai (45-60 years), Perilam pen (above 60 years). The marriage was conducted after the girl’s puberty.\textsuperscript{45}

The wedding day was to be fixed on the basis of horoscope. There would be worship on the previous day of the wedding function. The bride would wear a garland of ‘Sirissa leaves’ and ‘Arugam Pul tuber’ (a kind of grass). There was no evidence for ‘Thali’ in the Sangam literature as well as in Chilapathigaram. There was no evidence of fire or appraiser to conduct the wedding ceremony.\textsuperscript{46} In Sangam age, there prevailed a custom that the bridegroom had to offer price to the bride. It was called ‘Mulai Viali’.\textsuperscript{47}

Love marriages were very common in Sangam age. The rich men gave their daughters in marriage to the winner of the Bullfight.\textsuperscript{48} There were child marriages too. Kannagi and Kovalan marriage was an example for this. Chilapadigaram says that sixteen year old Kovalan married twelve year old Kannagi. This marriage was arranged by their parents. Megasthanis, author of the book ‘Indica’, mentioned a marriage held in the country of Pandyas. It was a marriage conducted to a six or seven year old girl by her parents.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{45} Rosapoo and Kalyana Sundari, \textit{op.cit.}, p.13.

\textsuperscript{46} N.K. Mangala Murugesan, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.173-174.


\textsuperscript{48} Shantharam, \textit{op.cit.}, p.20.

\textsuperscript{49} A. Devanesan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.67.
The terms ‘Manaivi’ and ‘Manai Mutal’ also denote a wife. Thiruvalluvar explains the married woman as a woman of unserving chastity and “life’s companion”. His wife Vasuki was admired for her chastity and fidelity.\textsuperscript{50}

The Brahmins of the Pallava period were polygamous and married more than one wife. They did not confine themselves to their own caste for the purpose of marriage. The Brahmin girls married kshatriya, vaisya and sudra men too. This was called ‘pratiloma marriage’, while the marriage of Brahmin boys with non Brahmin girls was called ‘Anuloma marriage’. The children born out of these weddings were accepted by the society and assigned certain professions.\textsuperscript{51}

\subsection*{1.3.5.3 Chastity}

It is termed ‘Karpu’ in Tamil. It is the rocky strength of the Moral purpose. ‘Nanam’ (Reserved ness) is more to life and in value chastity is more than Nanam says Tolkappiyar. In Chillapathikaram, Ilango Adigal emphasizes that is inner taboo for woman. Love is defined as the undying affection existing between lovers. Their relationship is like body and soul and a symbol of unification and inseparable.\textsuperscript{52}

The Tamil classical work Chilapathikaram in which Kovalan, the husband of Kannaki was living with Madhavi fascinated by the latter’s charm and grace though she was a devadasi. At one stage Kovalan regretted for his injustice to his wife and returned to his wife, Kannaki and sought her pardon. Kannaki expressed “you had been leading a life of moral turpitude condemned by men of wisdom. But I am a woman of inimitable fidelity. However when you announced your wish to go to Madurai, to eke out a living I agreed to accompany you to that city”. Her love for her

\textsuperscript{50} Shantharam, \textit{op.cit.}, p.20.

\textsuperscript{51} Raj Kumar, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.24-25.

\textsuperscript{52} Shantharam, \textit{op.cit.}, p.20.
husband was larger than the world, loftier than skies and deeper than the sea. Due to the intense love for her husband, the wife joined him even in death. Kopperumdevi the queen of Pandian died at the moment she saw her husband’s death.53

The loyal women were respected highly in the society. The loyal women worship was started in this period. ‘Chilapathikaram’ says that the king ‘Sengootuvan’ prepared a statue for Kanaki and built a temple. This type of loyal women’s worship derived into ‘Mariyamma’ and ‘Bhgavathi’ worship in the later ages.54

1.4 Status of Women in Medieval Period

Medieval Indian History spreads over 500 years (A.D.1200 to A.D.1700). It is predominantly the history of Muslim rulers. A new religion also appeared in India during this period. It was Sikh religion which appeared as a synthesis of good elements of both Hinduism and Islam. Bhakti movement became very popular during this period.55

As far as the position of women in Tamil Nadu in the medieval period is concerned, women were not disqualified from the enjoyment of rights. They were under no restraints in their political, social, cultural, religious and economic activities though modesty was considered the highest among their graces. This high ideal of womanhood and feminine virtues could be seen in some of the hymns of the Alvars, such as Tirumangai Alvar, a contemporary of Nandivarman. The women of

53 Ibid., p.21.

54 A. Devanesan, op.cit., p.43.

55 Hajira Kumar, op.cit., p.42.
Tiruvallikeni, in Madras were reflected as the peerless of earth, presumably noted for their beauty and virtues.\textsuperscript{56}

Before the arrival of the Muslims to Tamil Nadu, the women were educated and brave in Hindu society. After the arrival of Muslims, many changes occurred in the Hindu society. A lot of restrictions were given to the women. The women were not respected equally with men.\textsuperscript{57}

1.4.1 Status of Women in Islam

According to Quran, men and women are equal. They can participate in the religious rituals, but they do not have the right to be a priest or, conducting prayer.\textsuperscript{58} Quran says loyalty and moral life are the good qualities of women. The women do not have right to see or speak with any other men. They were forced to wear ‘Purdah’ to cover them from other’s sight. Without the permission of their husbands they were not even allowed to welcome their guests. Even when the royal women went out, they had to go in palankeen to hide themselves from outside men.\textsuperscript{59}

According to Islam Shariath Law, widow remarriage and divorce were denied. But men had the right to say ‘Talak’ for divorce. When men divorced their wives there was a custom of giving maintenance allowances to women (mehar). But this also was not mandatory, if the husband liked, he could give. The women did not have the right to ask for Mehar. According to Islam law women had the equal property

\textsuperscript{56} Raj Kumar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.24.

\textsuperscript{57} Rosapoo and Kalyana Sundari, \textit{op.cit.}, p.23.


\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.23-24.
right, but they were not aware of these things because of their ignorance.\textsuperscript{60} During the later part of medieval period, the system of purdah became strict. The participation of ordinary women in social, economic and political life was rare. Only an elite group of royal women had access to educations and political life.\textsuperscript{61}

1.4.2 Status of Women in Hindu Religion

Hindu religion is an ancient and orthodox religion. The status of women in Hindu religion was very high in the Vedic period. But the status of women was very low in Hindu religion of medieval period. This Hindu religion of medieval period said that women were faithless, cruel, fools, greedy, liars, highly emotional and cause for all the sufferings in the world. It also said that born as a woman itself was a great sin. So the women were compared with the low caste sutras. According to Hinduism, women should depend on men and should be always under men’s control.\textsuperscript{62}

Hindu literature says that women should be faithful to husbands and should not complain, ready to sacrifice and accept any kind of suffering in the life. They worshipped husbands as God. They co-operated with their husbands in all things. Because of this, there is a concept in Hindu dharma that husband is the best God. So the women should co-operate with husbands in their plans, words and actions, and it was considered as good thing. As a result of this there arouse the custom that when the husband was not at home, his wife should not decorate herself.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{60} Cover File No. 2115, F. Baylis to Cullen, Neyyoor, January 1859, English Records, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum, 1859.

\textsuperscript{61} Hajira Kumar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.43.

\textsuperscript{62} Rosapoo and Kalyana Sundari, \textit{op.cit.}, p.25.

\textsuperscript{63} Cover File No. 2115, F. Baylis to Cullen, Neyyoor, January 1859, English Records, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum, 1859.
However the women were obedient to their husbands. Men never underwent fast or did anything for the wellbeing of their wives. Those who had male child, the society glorified the mother of male child. But this right was denied to the mothers who had a female child.64

There was a separate code of conduct given to the widows. They should wear white sarees only, they should not participate in any auspicious functions and they were not allowed in wearing colourful dresses, glass bangles, flower and other decorative ornaments. In the time of menses and maternity, the women were considered as ritually defiled. So they could not participate in religious rituals. But the women priests were not appointed in the Hindu temples to conduct worship for the female deities like Kali and Durga.65

1.4.3 Social Evils

Because of the Muslim’s invasions in the medieval period, lots of restrictions were given to Indian women. As such they faced distresses like female infanticide, child marriage, sati, devadasi system etc.

1.4.3.1 Female Infanticide

The birth of female child was considered as a grief in the medieval period. Because the parents had to pay dowry for the child’s marriage and also they had to search bridegroom in their same caste. There was a custom that the girl children should get married before 10 years. So the female infanticide happened. When the female baby was born, they murdered the child by giving liquor or spurge milk, paddy with milk, dumpling cow dunk in the child’s mouth and burying them alive. However

64 Rosapoo and Kalyana Sundari, op.cit., p.27.
65 Ibid., p.28.
they tried to control this evil in the medieval period but failed. After independence also this social evil was very common in certain places like Usilam Patti in Madurai District, Dharmapuri, Namakal and Salem of Tamil Nadu.

1.4.3.2 Child Marriage

One of the factors that explains the custom of child-marriage seemed to be foreign invasions that took place after 300 B.C. Under the social condition, it was more convenient for parents to get their daughters married soon even in childhood so that the question of chastity did not arise.

This custom was very common in the 18th century among the Hindus and Muslims. The marital age for girls was fixed as 7 to 10. The family which could not marry off their female child before 10 years was considered as disgrace to that family. So this evil practice became a recognized custom to determine their social status and save the virginity of the girls.

History has witnessed several movements against child marriage, but none of them succeeded in its total abolition. The Mughal King ‘Akbar’ took some actions against this evil but child marriage was uncanny in the medieval period. Agarwala has pointed out that had all Indian women got married after the age of 19, there would have been a 36 per cent reduction in the birth rate.

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66 File No. 997/1915, Devasvam Department, Letter Dated 12 December 1915.


69 C. Paramarthalingam, Social Reform Movements in Tamil Nadu in the 19 Century with Special Reference to St. Ramalinga, Madurai, 1995, p.100.

70 S.N. Agarwala, Effects of a Rise in Female Marriage Age on Birth Rate in India, World Population Conference, Belgrada, 1965, p.11.
In the Madras Presidency, child marriage was common among the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Chettis. The Brahmins had their children married between the ages of six and seven. It increased the percentage of widows. One of the worst consequences of such marriages was early widowhood, due to the sudden demise of the ‘boy-husband’. In the nineteenth century there were many child-widows in Tamil Nadu.\textsuperscript{71} In 1881, the total number of Hindu girls married in the Madras Presidency was 157,466 and the number of widows in the same year was 5621. Similarly, an estimated number of 434 girls who were below 10 year of age got married, out of whom 16 became widows.\textsuperscript{72}

The severity and intensity of the problem of child marriage was for the first time realized in India in 1884 when Behramji Malabari a Parsee reformist wrote two notes entitled ‘Infant marriage’ and ‘enforced Widowhood’. He circulated these two notes among the intellectual administrators, reformers, senior most physicians and many others on August 15, 1884.\textsuperscript{73}

\textbf{1.4.3.3 Sati}

The general meaning of the word Sati is wife. The name of Parvathi, the wife of Siva, is Sati Devi. She became angry with her father Daksha, when he failed to invite Siva for the ceremonial sacrifice. So, she jumped into the sacrificial fire in the presence of the assembled celestials, thereby proving herself a faithful wife. Subsequently, the term was applied to those women who ended their lives in flames along with the dead bodies of their husbands.\textsuperscript{74}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} S.P. Sen (Ed), Social and Religious Reform Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Calcutta, 1970, p. 351.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Census of India, Vol.XIII, Madras Presidency, Madras, 1893, p.128.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Census of India, Vol. I, Part. I, 1901, p.431.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Saxena, Social Reforms Infanticide and Sati, New Delhi, 1975, p.57.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
The wife burning alive with her husband’s dead body is called Sati. Some people had the opinion to burn their wives with their dead bodies to prevent their wives from others. There was misbelieving that instead of suffering after the death of their husbands, her death with him would take her to heaven. This foolishness was one of the reasons for spreading out this evil custom.  

In Ancient period, Vasudeva’s four wives Devaki, Padrai, Rohini, Madirai were dead with him. Likewise Krishna’s five wives Rukmani, Gandhari, Sahayai, Hemavathi, Jampavathi were dead in Sati on the death of Krishna. In Sangam Chola period, when Sundara Chola died in 973 A.D, his wife, Vanavan Madevi ended her life in flames. Marco Polo who visited Tamil Nadu towards the end of the thirteenth century, states that sati did exist in Tamil Nadu and the victims were held in high esteem. When Tirumalai Nayak was the ruler of Madurai died in 1659, out of his 200 wives, a few practised sati. When Kilavan Sethupati, the Raja of Ramnad died in 1710, his 47 wives practised sati.

Those who did not die with their husbands, should not beautify themselves, they should remove their Jewels. They should shave their head and should wear only white dress. If a woman who lost her husband, was not allowed to do remarry. In this evil custom, when they pushed down the widow into the fire, they would be

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decorated nicely. They pushed her down with, chanting the Vedas and mantras. The Mughal king Akbar tried to abolish this evil custom but he could not succeed.\textsuperscript{80}

1.4.3.4 Polygamy

A man marrying many wives is called polygamy. In the medieval period, this custom was very common among the wealthy men and king’s family. The reason for marrying many women was that they did not have child at all; did not have male child or the wife is ill not suitable for family life and also misunderstanding with wife. But high caste people and kings marry many women, because of their wealthyness. In the same way Islam allowed a man to marry five wives. But generally the kings had more than hundred wives. In the medieval period, polygamy was uncontrollable.\textsuperscript{81}

1.4.3.5 The Custom of Wearing Purdah

There was no custom of wearing purdah, in the ancient India. After the arrival of Muslims to India, Indian women also learnt this custom from the Muslim women. This custom grew up in Hindu society to save their beautiful wives from other men. Because of this the women lost communications with the outside world. So women lost their freedom. Due to this custom, the women did not get enough sunlight which resulted in their illness. They got Asthma and other kind of diseases.\textsuperscript{82}

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{80} Judicial Consultations, Vol. 155-B, Dated 6 April 1821, p. 846.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Judicial Consultations, Vol. 155-B, Dated 6 April 1821, pp. 844-845.
\item \textsuperscript{82} Judicial Consultations, Vol. 182-A, Dated 4 February 1835, p. 157.
\end{enumerate}
1.4.3.6 Dowry Harassments

Before the marriage or during the marriage, giving money, Jewels, costliest things to the bridegroom’s family for the well being of the bride is called dowry. In Hindu society, the dowry was called ‘Kanya Sulgam’, ‘Stri Danam’, and ‘Thatcina’. Dowry system causes many social problems to the bride’s family. So the society started to hate the birth of the female child.  

The dowry system was first introduced by the Brahmins. Then it was followed by all the societies from rich to poor. In medieval period this system was there among the Muslims too. The Hindu law experts put forward some reasons for the dowry system. They are

1. Patriarchal society
2. No property right for women
3. Unequal society
4. Searching the alliance more than the ability in the bride’s family.
5. No education to women.
6. No awareness in the society.

The bride’s family arranged marriages without considering the debt loads, and gave dowry to their daughters in the medieval period. But in the husband’s home also she faced a lot of problems. She was tortured by the husband’s family members in many ways, such as harsh words, hopelessness, sexual abusement, beating up and torturing, not giving enough food, no communication with her own family, preventing her from going to her home, imprisoned at home itself and finally murder. This cruel dowry system was not controlled in the medieval period.

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83 File No. 997/1915, Devasvam Department, Letter Dated 12 December 1915.


85 File No. 997/1915, Devasvam Department, Letter Dated 12 December 1915.
1.4.3.7 Devadasi System

The Translation of the Tamil word ‘Devaradiyal’ in Sanskrit is Devadasi. The meaning of the word is ‘slave to God’. It is also interpreted as the slave servant of God, handmaiden of God, sacred slave girl, temple girl, temple dancer and temple courtesan. Devadasis were a class of women who were supposed to have been dedicated to the service of temples. Symbolically they were united in marriage with some God. During the simple ceremony called ‘Pottukattu or Trinket tying’, the girl was married to the God in the temple; she should devote herself to the service of God. After the sacred marriage, they were not allowed to have any further marriage with any human being.

In medieval period many parents used to offer their daughters to the temple priests during times of hardship and famine. Parents who had a number of female children set apart one of them for the service of God. If a childless Hindu happened to be blessed with a child, the same was given to the God for services. It was also a custom among the Hindus to dedicate children simply to escape from poverty.

Devadasis were experts in many arts, they knew singing, dancing, drawing, music, tattooing, hair and nail coloring, dying, making pillows, acting on the stage, making perfumes, speaking riddles, teaching parrot to speak, composing poems,

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86 Selvi Thiruchandran, *op.cit.*, p.65.
87 K. Srinivasan, *Devadasi* (Novel), Madras, 1976, p.3.
gambling, sorcery and judging a person’s behavior through their face.\(^{92}\) Originally the devadasis attached to the temples have to raise funds for the temples through musical and dance performances.\(^{93}\)

Dance was the main occupation of the devadasis in the temple. They were taught to dance at an early age of five. Older girls, when they adopted the profession, were also taught to dance. For teaching the art of dance to devadasis, special dance masters were appointed in temples.\(^{94}\) The elders among the devadasis seemed to have had also the job of teaching the art of dancing to the young maidens. The lessons in dancing were given daily two hours before day light in the morning. In the evening, after 4 p.m the same number of hours was devoted, so that each girl had to practice for four hours daily, and in about three years she was supposed to learn the art of dancing. Thus, they were able to make their appearance of about seven or eight years of age. They continued to practice dancing till they were thirty or forty years of age.\(^{95}\)

On learning the art of dancing, the devadasis were asked to dance in the temple on all auspicious occasions. Especially, the devadasis performed dances during installation of shrines, diparadhana and street procession of image on festival days. The movements of the eyes, breasts, hands and feet were exhibited in different ways during these performances. The devadasis were required to dance before the altar six times a day. This duty was carried out by them in turns. They conducted a kind of dance by name Sandikkunippam during installation of new shrines in the temple.\(^{96}\)


\(^{94}\) File No. 116/1916, Devasvam Department, 1916.

\(^{95}\) File No. 294/1911, Devasvam Department, Letter Dated 15 June 1911.

\(^{96}\) Frieda Hauswirth, *op.cit.*, p.89.
Besides these artistic performances, the devadasis of Travancore had a few more responsibilities. It was a common practice of the Maharaja of Travancore to visit temples with the family members on festivals and other occasions. During such visits the devadasis had to entertain the Maharaja and the members of the family. The devadasis were also obliged to do personal services to the kings in times when their wives were pregnant or away.97

So devadasis lived a respectful life in the society. When the temple authority had gone from the Government to the Brahmins, they stopped all the privileges and the funds. So they started to depend on the local rich men and the Brahmins. They were disconnected from the temple activities and became the concubines of the rich men and the Brahmins. In later days, they became an entertainment object to fulfil the lust of the men.98 They started to do prostitution publically. Sexual diseases spread from them. Though there were lots of actions taken against the devadasi system, it was uncontrollable in medieval period.99

In the Madras Presidency, an anti devadasi agitation broke out around 1868. In that agitation all high minded Hindus, patriots and benefactors of the society actively took part. Meanwhile, a similar type of movement was started by Josephine Buttler, an eminent English woman in London in 1886, aiming at the suppression of an evil in English society ‘State Regulation Vice’. In the midst of these developments the Indian National Social Conference, an offshoot of Indian National congress in 1887 decided to secure Social Legislation on a national scale for the control of prostitution. Following this, an Anti-Nautch Movement was started in Madras in 1894.100

98 Selvi Thiruchandran, op.cit., p.74.
100 S. Nataraja, Social Problems, Oxford Pamphlets on Indian Affairs, Madras, 1942, p.34.
1.5 Status of Women in Modern Period

Modern India refers to the period starting from the period of Later Mughals to the end of British rule in India (1700 A.D. to 1947 A.D.). In the British period the education of women was encouraged and this resulted change in the position of women. The educated women started to raise their voice against the British domination and entered the freedom struggle. Later they started to fight for their own rights.\textsuperscript{101}

1.5.1 Status of Women in the period of Christian Missionaries in Tamil Nadu

Christian Missionaries came to India to spread out their religion. But they were astonished to see the worst social condition prevailed in the society. This made them change their mind and attempted to reform the society first and to propagate their religion next. The Danes sent the first protestant mission to India in Tranquebar, an insignificant locality which they possessed in India. Zeigenbalg, the first missionary who reached India in 1706, candidly confessed that his mission had little success. Only a few poor or destitute persons were converted, and they had to be fed and maintained by the mission.\textsuperscript{102} Rev. Ringeltaube was the first European Missionary came to South Travancore, landed at Mylaudi near Nagercoil, in 1806 April 25 and founded the London Missionary Society.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{101} Saxena, \textit{Women’s Political Participation in India}, Jaipur, 1999, p.76.

\textsuperscript{102} J.K. Chopra, op.cit., p.357.

\textsuperscript{103} William Robinson, \textit{Ringeltaube the Rishi: Letters and Journals}, Sheffield, 1902, p.3.
When he came to Tamil Nadu, there was full of problems like social injustice, superstitious beliefs, women slavery, uneducation of women and prohibition of women from wearing upper cloths. He worked hard for ten years and built seven Churches. But he became ill because of his hard work. So he handed over the responsibilities to one of his assistants Vedamanikam of Mylaudi and left for his motherland.\textsuperscript{104}

Rev. Charles Mead came to South Tamil Nadu to do ministry in 1818 instead of Ringeltaube. He came to Colachel port of Kanya kumari district. Ringel taube’s assistant, Vedamanikam met him and took him to Mylaudi.\textsuperscript{105} A big crowd was waiting there to see him. Most of them were women. They did not wear upper cloth. When he saw them, he grieved for them. He determined to change this situation and changed his office from Mylaudi to Nagercoil.\textsuperscript{106}

Bishop Caldwell the Scottish missionary arrived in Madras on June 8, 1938 as a missionary of the London Missionary Society and later joined the Society for the Propogation of the Gospel Mission (SPG). Caldwell served as the Bishop of Tirunelveli and gave more importance to the development of women folk and did much original research on the history of Tirunelveli.\textsuperscript{107}

\section*{1.5.2 Caste Harassments in Travancore}

There were severe caste harassments in Travancore before the arrival of the foreign Missionaries. Inspite of the different caste system, people lived together. They were Brahmins, Nairs, Vellalas, Nadars, Parayas, Pulayas and Sambavas.\textsuperscript{108} Among

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{104} D.H.George, \textit{A Study of the Women Liberation Movement of KanyaKumari District} (Tamil), Chennai, 1982, p.4.
\bibitem{105} Annual Report of Mead Memorial District Church, Kotticode, 2007, p.46.
\bibitem{106} Cover File, Petition of the Missionaries of the L.M.S. to his highness the Rajah of Travancore, Dated 12 March 1859.
\bibitem{107} Annual Report of Mead Memorial District Church, Kotticode, 2007, p.50.
\bibitem{108} Cover File, Petition of the Missionaries of the L.M.S. to his highness the Rajah of Travancore, Dated, 20 March 1859.
\end{thebibliography}
them Brahmins, Vellalas and Nairs divided themselves as high castes and others as low castes. Many restrictions were made against humanism on the low caste people. The low caste people were not allowed to go near the high caste people. They were allowed to stand 36 feet away from Brahmins and 12 feet from Nairs. Nairs had the right to kill the low caste people those who did not follow the above restrictions. Severe punishments were given to the low caste people those who failed to pay the tax. They were punished by keeping heavy stones on their back and stood under sunlight. Hot iron rods were hanged in the ears was the another punishment of low caste people.\textsuperscript{109}

1.5.3 Upper Cloth Disturbances

The low caste women were not permitted to wear the upper cloths like the high caste women. They were banned from wearing dress above the hips and below the knees. One who did not follow this rule was tortured and their upper cloth was torn. The depressed class females were denied the right to cover their breast, which was the exclusive social and civil rights of the upper castes.\textsuperscript{110} Women were roaming without upper cloths in festivals, markets and roadways.\textsuperscript{111} They were not permitted to use costliest dress, jewels, shoes, and umbrellas. They were prevented from living in homes with tiled roof, rearing the cows and using vehicles. The women were not permitted to carry water pots on their hips. They were permitted to take the water pot on their head with support of their two hands. So Missionaries like Mead and Mault struggled for the low caste people’s rights and made them wear upper cloth above the hips.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{109} Annual Report of Mead Memorial District Church, Kotticode, 2007, p.46.


\textsuperscript{111} C.M. Agur, \textit{Church History of Travancore}, Madras, 1903, p.779.

\textsuperscript{112} Annual Report of Mead Memorial District Church, Kotticode, 2007, pp.46-47.
The lady Missionaries like Mrs. Mead and Mrs. Mault did not like the native Christian women moving with their breast exposed like their non-Christian friends. Therefore they decided to end such barbarous behavior. So they devised a plain loose jacket with loose sleeves and advised them to wear it. This loose jacket was called ‘Coopayam’.\footnote{C.M. Agur, \textit{op.cit.}, p.779.}

Missionary Mead’s wife trained the Christian women to stitch the dress coopayam. From these the Christian women used to cover their upper body with coopayam and used to go to church programmes and churches. The upper caste people became very jealousy of this.\footnote{D.H.George, \textit{op.cit.}, p.6.} Because of the motivation of the upper caste men, Queen of Attingal, ordered to cut off the breasts of women when they appeared in her presence with covered breasts.\footnote{J.W.Gladson, \textit{Social Impact of the Protestant Missionary Work}, Unpublished M.Th Thesis, Bangalore, 1975, p.80.}

In later days, because of the struggles of Missionaries and the low caste women, col. Munro, the Dewan of Travancore issued an order in 1812 that the Christian women had the right to cover bosoms. So the customs of coopayam wearing Christian women were increased.\footnote{Political Consultations, Vol. 193, P.448, Ordered from Munto to Sarvathikaryakhars of Trivandrum and Neyyatinkara, 1812.}

The Christian women, who were wearing coopayam were not satisfied with coopayam itself. They started to wear a kind of upper cloth on coopayam like the high caste people. But some women started to wear only ‘Thol Cheelai’ (shoulder cloth) and not wearing coopayam. The high caste people opposed this and it was called as upper cloth Riot.\footnote{C.M. Agur, \textit{op.cit.}, p.779.}
This kind of dress code of the Christian women earned the enmity of the upper class Hindu people. More than coopayam, the thol cheelai made this kind of opposition. Because thol cheelai, the dress was worn on the shoulder only differentiated the upper caste women from the lower caste people. In consequence, they gave a lot of troubles to the Christians.\textsuperscript{118}

They gave many false complaints against the low caste men and imprisoned them. The high caste men tore the dress of low caste women in the streets. They prevented the Christians participating in the church services and burnt many churches and schools.\textsuperscript{119} On the effect of this problem, Travancore-Dewan, Venkata Rao passed a bill in 1829. This bill instructed the low caste women not to wear the thol cheelai like high caste women except the coopayam.\textsuperscript{120} After this order, Muthu Kutty Swamigal, a Hindu revolutionary leader, instructed the Hindu low caste women to wear coopayam. So the coopayam wearing women’s number increased.\textsuperscript{121}

### 1.5.4 Interference of Missionaries

When rioting was at its peak, the Missionaries John Cox, Russel, Lewis and Baylis jointly complained to the British resident of Travancore.\textsuperscript{122} They wrote and met the king directly and explained to him the sufferings of the Christians.\textsuperscript{123} As the

\textsuperscript{118} D. Peter and Ivy Peter, \textit{Samaya Thondarkalum Samudaya Marumalarchiyum} (Tamil), Nagercoil, 2009, p.158.

\textsuperscript{119} Samuel Zechariah, \textit{History of the Travancore Church} (Tamil), Nagercoil, 1887, p.74.

\textsuperscript{120} V. Nagam Aiya, \textit{op.cit.}, p.527.

\textsuperscript{121} Samuel Mateer, \textit{The Land of Charity}, London, 1870, p.296.

\textsuperscript{122} Cover File No. 2115, F. Baylis to Cullen, Neyyoor, January 1859, English Records, Kerala State Archives, Travandrum, 1859, p.65.

\textsuperscript{123} Madras Political Proceedings 27 August to September 1859, Petition of the LMS Missionaries, Dated. 07-02-1859, Reffered by J.W. Gladson, Protestant Christianity and peoples Movement in Kerala, Trivandrum, 1859, p. 90.
Missionaries could not get any solution from the king of Travancore, they sought the help of the British Governor at Madras, Charles Trevelyan. On 6 May 1859, Trevelyan wrote a letter to the British Resident in Travancore, General Cullen expressing his dissatisfaction over the unlawful customs and traditions followed in Travancore. He asked General Cullen to impress upon the Maharaja regarding the painful dress regulations adopted against the traditions of Christians and others.\textsuperscript{124}

On the compulsion of the governor of Madras, the Dewan and Maharaja had half a mind to agree to the demand of the Nadars. Accordingly on 26 July 1859, the Travancore Government permitted all the Nadar women to wear coopayam like the Christian Nadar women. The Nadar women of any religion were permitted to cover the upper part of the body by any means excepting the style of the Nair women. Even though this order was not satisfactory to the Nadars, this privilege was not granted to the other low castes.\textsuperscript{125}

Missionaries were not satisfied with the 1859 order of the Government. As the other low caste women were not permitted to cover the breasts, the Missionaries expected clash in the future. Hence, regarding the dress, they again wrote a letter to the Governor of Madras condemning the attitude of the Travancore Government. The Governor advised the Resident, Malt to use all his influences on the Maharaja to remove all dress restrictions imposed on all castes. Malt reported the wish of the British Government to the Maharaja.\textsuperscript{126} Maharaja felt that if he did not oblige, there would arise strained relationship between Travancore and the British. Hence in 1865

\textsuperscript{124} Minutes of the Hon. President, Copies of Official Papers Sent from India Touching the Recent Disturbances in Travancore, Dated 7 May 1859, pp.39-47.

\textsuperscript{125} D. Peter and Ivy Peter, \textit{Liberation of the Oppressed A Continuous Struggle, A Case Study Since 1882 A.D}, Nagercoil, 2009, p.31.

\textsuperscript{126} Madras Political proceedings 28 August 1860, Despatch from the Hon. Sir. Wood, secretory of State for India, to His Excellency the Hon. Governor in Council, Fort St. George, 24 July 1860, p.17.
an order was released permitting all low castes to wear dress like the Nadar women. Even then the low caste women were not permitted to dress like the Nair women.  

As time passed by, all the restrictions imposed on the low castes vanished one by one. However, the enmity that arose between the Nairs and the Nadars remained unresolved. It re-emerged after century and the low caste had to fight again during the middle of the twentieth century to reclaim their liberation. This liberation is neither the gift of the Travancore kings nor the generosity of the Nairs and Vellalas but was the prerogative attained by the sustained efforts of the oppressed community, the Nadars, unrestrained support of protestant Christian Missionaries and the unrestricted co-operation of the British Residents in Travancore.  

1.5.5 Missionaries and Women’s Education

The Christian missionaries, who came to India to spread their religion, came forward to give education to the women to abolish women slavery. The first Christian mission which was started by the Jesuit priests under the leadership of father Fernantas in 1552 under Nayakas rule in Madurai with the name ‘Madura Mission’. In 1610 he built a church with the permission of King Veerapa Nayak at Madurai. There they planned to teach the women. The Hindu society did not allow anybody to learn. Then in 1606, Robert-De- Nobili, a Roman Catholic missionary from Italy came to Madurai. He introduced himself as a Brahmin, wore the sacred thread made of five strings, and wore saffron dress with sacred ash on his forehead to attract the Hindu people. He adopted the Hindu culture. He came forward to convert the people into Christianity and gave them education.

127 D. Peter and Ivy Peter, Liberation of the Oppressed A Continuous Struggle, A Case Study Since 1882 A.D, op.cit., p.31.

128 Ibid., pp.31-32.

Missionaries found educational institutions with the churches. The shed attached with the church came to be known as ‘Pallikoodam’.¹³⁰ In the Nayakas period, most of the Tamil kings supported Christianity. Because of this, churches and schools were built in Madurai, Trichy, Tanjore, Nagai, Tutucorin, Tirunelveli, Vellore and Tranquebar. Kings generally gave subsidy for this.¹³¹

The Tranquebar missionaries (Danish) established many schools. Ziegenbalg and Plutarch were the first Danish missionaries to contribute much for the cause of native education. Soon after their arrival they opened a charity school at Tranquebar to educate the slave Christians of the region. In the charity school, children were given food, clothing and books free of cost. With in a short period, the Christian Missionaries started many charity schools on the Coromondal Coast.¹³²

On 21 November 1707 as per the request of the Ziegenbalg and Plutarch started a Danish Portuguese school under the superintendence of Plutarch. A teacher who could speak German, Danish and Portuguese languages was also appointed in this school. In addition to the Portuguese school, the missionaries realized the need of Tamil Schools to educate the native children. Accordingly, in 1707 Ziegenbalg opened a Tamil School and also appointed a qualified native teacher.¹³³

In 1708 Ziegenbalg started a boarding school at Tranquebar. There after such schools were started in the place of Thirukkadaiyoor, Seerkali, Chidambaraam and Caddalore.¹³⁴ In 1709 Ziegenbalg started a school for girls at Tranquebar. It was the

¹³¹ A. Swaminathan, Tamilaga Varalarum Panbadum, op.cit., p. 139.
¹³² V. Yesudhason and R. Isaac Jayadhas, op.cit., p.185.
¹³³ Ibid., p.186.
¹³⁴ C.M. Augur, op.cit., p.247.
first girl’s school all over India. In addition to the academic subjects, the girls were instructed in vocational like sewing and house keeping.135

After giving basic education to the Tamil Children, the Missionaries wanted to help the poor of them to find a job of their ability and taste in life. To achieve the same, Ziegenbalg started a craft school at Tranquebar in 1716. In 1717 the Mission opened two charity schools in the city of Madras to help the poor children and also opened a school at Cuddalore for Tamil Portuguese children.136

In 1778, Missionary Frederick Schwartz started an English school in the Fort of Tanjore exclusively for the European children. He also started one Tamil school for the benefit of the Tamil children in 1780 at Menambuchavadi. In 1784 on the request of English East India Company, Schwartz started the first provincial school in Tanjore. This was the first school in India to teach English to the Indians.137

In 1800, a Tranquebar Missionary J.C. Kohlhoft stated a charity school in Tirunelveli. In 1806 William Tobias Ringle Taube an LMS Missionary started the work of the society from one of the southern most villages of South Travancore known as Mylaudi. He started six village schools around Mylaudi. His successor Rev. Charles Mead also started many schools like English schools, Vernacular schools, Day schools, Night schools, Charity schools, schools for the untouchables, Boarding schools and Training schools.138

In 1817 James Hough opened one school at Palayamkottai and another one at Tirunelveli in 1818. He requested the English East India Company’s administrator to sanction a monthly allowance of 25 pagodas for these schools. Hough was also

interested in the promotion of girl’s education. He started one girl’s school at Nazareth in 1819 and another at Mudaloor in 1820 respectively.  

The lady missionaries also did many things to the women’s education. Among them Mrs. Mead and Mrs. Mault contributed very much. Mrs. Mead started a school with boarding near the seminary built by Mead. This school was started with 14 girls. Free education was given to the students with food, dress and accommodation. Those who studied here were very intelligent. So, many parents voluntarily came forward and made their children study. Because of this, girl’s schools were started in Neyyoor, Santhapuram, Parasala and Marthandam.

Lately Mrs. Mead gave some vocational Training to girls to fulfil their economical needs. They were lace making, embroidery, crotchet and spinning. There were thousands of women in their homes doing lace and embroidery as a cottage industry in many villages and other areas such as Nagercoil, Neyyoor and Marthandam.

Lady missionaries ministered to the women education and against women slavery, without caring their lives also. They are Mrs. Dennison, Mrs. Thomson, Mrs. Lewis, Mrs. Mabbs, Mrs. Annie Lee Duthie, Mrs. Newport, Miss. Beatrice Duthie, Mrs. Foster, Mrs. Sinclair, Mrs. Blanchard, Mrs. Parker, Mrs. Marsden, Mrs. Towel, Miss. Hayes, Miss. Mummery, Miss. Mellroy and many other missionary women gave their time and talents to this department of the work among women which is now being superintendent by Tamil women.

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Christian missionaries worked more than 200 years for the upliftment of the education. Tamil and Kannada were taught in the Christian schools. Tamil literatures like Tirukural, Tiruvasagam were translated by them into English. So the Tamil language grew up. Many caste people studied and worked together in the schools. So brotherhood and equality increased.143

1.5.6 Status of Tamil Women in British Period

British men considered India as a market to sell their business products. So from the beginning itself their aim was exploiting the Indian economy. Whenever economic dullness happened they dumped their goods in India and sold it. In later days they introduced many changes more than the Indian kings to eradicate misbelief and women freedom. Chennai St.George fort, Kadaloor David fort, Puducheri Louis forts are the three places, reflecting the growth and changes of Tamil Nadu in British period.144

After wards, the British men removed the agents from the tax collection and collected tax directly from the people through Rayatwari. In 1886, 59 million acres of land were under ‘Rayatwari system. In the drought period Thomas Munro introduced 25% concession and also reduction in the taxes for poor. So the economical status of Tamil people started to increase. The education introduced by the English men reached easily to the Tamil people. Because of education the superstitious beliefs started to decline. Tamil women also benefited in this period.145


144 Ibid., pp.185-186.

145 Chellam, History of Tamil Nadu, Madras, 1976, p.93.
1.5.6.1 Growth of Education in British Period

In Tamil Nadu education sector saw a growth in the British period. In 1812 as per the advice of Thomas Munro they started to establish schools. There were 12,500 schools for the one crore and twenty five thousand Tamil people in 1826. Most of the schools were conducted under the trees, temple buildings and private house varandas. So Thomas Munro came forward to give Rs.50,000 yearly for the orthodox schools. In 1813, the British parliament sanctioned one lakh rupees for the growth of education. In 1821 first girls’ school was opened in Madras. In 1827 women were allowed to sit for university exams for the first time through the Madras University. In Tamil Nadu, the District schools had English and Taluk schools had Tamil as their teaching language. Seventy Taluk schools were established in 1839.\textsuperscript{146}

Sir, Charles Wood introduced a new ordered plan from primary education to University education in 1854. Because of this in 1857, Chennai University was established. Then Chennai Christian College, Palayamkottai St.Johns’s College, Nagercoil Scott Christian College, Chennai Pachiappan College were established in the end of 19 century. The British Government understood the importance of the women education and gave importance for women education in the planning commission in 1854 and 1855. Then Rs.12,000 was allotted for women’s education in the year of 1868. In Chennai there were 8 high schools for women in 1881.\textsuperscript{147}

\textsuperscript{146} A. Swaminathan, \textit{Tamilaga Varalarum Panbadum, op.cit.}, p.189.

\textsuperscript{147} Chellam, \textit{Tamil Nadu History and Culture} (Tamil), Chennai, 1998, p.465.
In India they had started 12 colleges, 467 high schools and 5,628 primary schools in 1901-1902 for women education. In Tamil Nadu 34 girls’ schools were started in 1903. Then, Palayamkottai Sarah Tucker College, Veiperi Joseph Convent College, Chennai Marry Frasandesan Convent College were started. After 1920, Tamil Nadu grew up very much in women’s education and developments started occur in all fields. The Women’s Indian Association and welfare programmes in Tamil Nadu developed the position of women in the highest way.\textsuperscript{148}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{148} A. Swaminathan, \textit{Tamilaga Varalarum Panbadum, op.cit.}, pp.190-191.}