CHAPTER IV

REMOVAL OF SLAVERY, EMPOWERMENT
OF WOMEN AND MEDICAL SERVICES

Slavery is a social system that reduced the certain sections of society into perpetual bondage. This ignoble institution had been in vogue in India as elsewhere in the world in bygone days.\(^1\) The erstwhile Travancore, as it had been a small state in India, had its quota of cruelty that man perpetrated to his fellow man. Though the British Government of India did not choose to thwart the efforts of some social reformers or find an end to this system, the full credit is due to the selfless Christian missionaries who had fought against this evil, even overlooking the dangers involved in the fight.\(^2\)

The history of slavery in Travancore and its gradual abolition provide a painful as well as complacent reading. The accounts of one sect of people keeping another sect of their brethren in abject conditions make the reading painful, and the bold and selfless efforts of the missionaries to get the pernicious system abolished provide a complacent reading. Historically the system of slavery took its roots in Travancore after bands

\(^1\) K.K. Ramachandran Nair, *Slavery in Kerala*, Delhi, 1986, p.I.
of people with a penchant for exploiting their fellowmen descended on the South from north India. The settlers from the north, who have been generally referred to as Aryan Brahmins, were not numerically strong, but they were very intelligent and had great religious and social authority. They made themselves masters of their neighbours and subjected all those classes of people who had been in poverty and ignorance to slavery. People who had been classified as low castes, hill tribes and Dravidians were thus brought into slavery. Vedars and so on had been slaves to the rulers as well as to those belonging to the high castes. They had been born as slaves, lived as slaves and died as slaves, and such slaves formed themselves into a major chunk of the population. Every wealthy man and even rich individuals of inferior castes had a number of bondsmen born in slavery. Syrian Christians also kept slaves. The sale of children that the famished men and women had resorted to also pushed up the number of slaves. The prisoners of war whom petty princes and chieftains took also added to the strength of slaves. Muhammadans and Roman Catholics purchased slaves in order to get them converted to their faiths. In the medieval times every

4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
eighth individual of the population was a slave. Landlords called *Jenmis* kept slaves of their own. They could sell, buy or pawn their slaves. During the first half of the 19th century, the price of a slave ranged from Rs. 6 to Rs. 9. Caste pollution was also considered condemnable and the slaves had to keep the stipulated distance from people of high castes. By 1847, there were 1,65,000 slaves in Travancore. Protestant missionaries like Rev. Charles Mead, Rev. Mault, Rev. Bailey and Rev. Baker as well as their brethren approached the government in 1847 with a memorandum seeking the emancipation of all the slaves.

**Origin of slavery**

Mythological conception as embodied in *Keralolpathi* attributes the origin of slavery to Kerala. Parasurama is believed to have reclaimed Kerala from the sea by throwing his axe over the briny spread. Thus the land is honoured as the divine gift of the Arabian Sea. Parasurama gave away this stretch of land to the Brahmins as a gift and enabled them to live as landlords, and the Brahmins, in turn, brought Sudras as slaves to

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8  Ivy Peter and Peter, *op.cit.*, p.68.
cultivate the land. Evidently the story is indicative of the origin of slavery in this land.

Some of the inscriptions also testify to the existence of slavery in Travancore in the remote past. The earliest one of such inscriptions of 849 A.D. of the Venad Raja, Ayyan Adikal Thiruvadigal, is related to Adimakasu (Slave levy). He had granted certain privileges to the congregation of Therisa Church at Quilon. He had laid down in it that the levy of Adimakasu need not be exacted from Christians.\textsuperscript{12} This is an evidence for such a levy called Adimakasu having been exacted from those who had kept slaves in those far off times. Documents show that the male slave was priced at 100 fanams and a female at 70 fanams in the early years of the 9\textsuperscript{th} and 10\textsuperscript{th} centuries of the Christian Era.\textsuperscript{13} References to slavery are found in the classics in abundance.

\textbf{References in classics}

One may find several references in the classics to the existence of slavery in the country. For instance, the episode of Sunasepha being sold to be offered as \textit{bali} (sacrifice) at the \textit{yaga} is narrated in the Ramayana. The Mahabharata describes the bondage of the Pandavas who failed at the

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, p.12.  
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
gambling, and the stories of Vinatha and Sarnishta, Nala and Damayanthis and Vidura, who is depicted as the son of a slave girl are some of the references to the practice of slavery found in the ancient literature.\textsuperscript{14} Manu, the law-giver, Yajnavalkya, Narada, Brahaspathi, Kautlya and a host of others of ancient India refer to different modes of slavery. It had a steady growth in Travancore.

**Growth of Slavery**

The system of government in those days was markedly feudal. The worst form of feudalism had made most of the people work as hewers of wood and drawers of water to their lords.\textsuperscript{15} The lower castes, who formed the majority of the people, were subjected to ignominious treatment. As they were in abject poverty, they lived in hovels and worked for the upper caste masters without getting fair compensation. If a low caste man stood up to the high caste master, he was harshly punished, sometimes with death.

\textsuperscript{14} K.K.Ramachandran Nair, *op.cit.*, p.3.

**Condition of slaves in Travancore**

There had been nothing of the sort of slave-owning system in the areas that comprise the present South India in the pre-Aryan period. There had been a large measure of social freedom and equality, and communal barriers were not very rigid in those days.\(^{16}\) The Panas, the Kuravas, the Vedars and other toiling classes occupied a much venerable social status. There were renowned priests and poets in the society then. The evils of the untouchability and unapproachability were unknown.\(^{17}\)

But the slow and gradual process of Aryan infiltration radically changed the Dravidian classless society. Thus by the 5\(^{th}\) century A.D. all pervading influence of the new social order resulted in the birth of slavery in Travancore. Hence Aryans differentiated themselves from non-Aryans. Occupational identification was brought up. The worst sufferers under the new society were the people branded lowly and condemned to be slaves. Cruel punishments such as beheading were inflicted on them.\(^{18}\)

\(^{16}\) T.K. Ravindran, *op. cit.*, p.vi
\(^{17}\) Ibid.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., p.vii.
The Brahmins to the South of Quilon are called Potties.\(^{19}\) In most of the northern parts they are known as Nambudiris. The name has some reference to their having been originally (as the legend says) immigrants. The Alwanchayree Tambrakul were viewed as the chiefs of Numbudiris.\(^{20}\) The eldest of them exercised the ultimate authority on matters connected with the community. The Nairs continued in some measure as their slaves.\(^{21}\) In addressing them, Nairs styled themselves so, and they referred to themselves in front of Nambudiris as *Adienmar* or slaves. This mainly happened when they acted as the custodians of Nambudiris’ lands. It is an easy servitude in which they preferred to be in by interest rather than under law.\(^{22}\) The task of deciding the castes to which the slaves belonged is difficult. However, Ezhavas, Pulayas and the other low castes were considered as slaves.

Abbe J. Dubis was a missionary in India between the years A.D.1792 and 1823. In his well-known book, *Hindu Manners Customs and*


\(^{21}\) *Ibid*.

\(^{22}\) *Ibid*.
Ceremonies, he describes the condition of Parayas as a pathetic one. He says that Parayas were born slaves and they resembled, to a certain extent, the serfs of France and other countries of northern Europe of olden times. Thus all the Parayas born in the country were serfs for life from father to son, and were part and parcel of the land on which they were born. All children born of Parayas were serfs by birth, just as their parents were, and their master had the right to sell or dispose of parents and children in any way he pleased. If any of the Parayas escaped and took service under another master, his original master, could recover him as his own property.

Col. Munro had also seen in 1812 a number of half starved and naked natives in irons as slaves at the Dutch settlement in northern part of Travancore. Their custodian was a man from Pondicherry. Col. Munro had also discovered another cruel practice of some people engaged in slave trade. They forcibly took away unwary children of high caste people and forced them to eat with low caste people and thereby

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24 Ibid.
25 Samuel Mateer, *Land of Charity*, p.301
caused them to lose their original caste identity and the privileges connected with their original caste. 26 Col. Munro reproved a Muhammadan agent for having effected such purchases and got him punished by the native court in Travancore. 27

Most of the men, who persistently preyed upon orphans and enslaved them, were Muhammadans. Girls were taken as slaves against their will, and a Mussalman was convicted of taking some girls to Bhopal and detaining them in Bombay en route. 28 Rev. H. Baker saved a Shanar family from the hands of some Muhammadan merchants, who had planned to take them to Zanzibar, by paying Rs. 21 as the price. Another instance was pointed out like this. A Muhammadan took away a girl of Travancore with a promise to make her wife of a man of Zanzibar, but he sold her off in that country. 29

Claudius Buchanan gives the following account of the systems of slavery that had been in vogue in Travancore. The first was called *janmam* system under which a person bought a slave by paying his / her entire

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26 Ibid., p.302.
27 Ibid., p.301
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
price. Under the second system, which was called ganam, a slave-owner received one third of the price of a slave from another person and allowed him to enjoy the services of the slave. The person who took a slave under this system, had to give a certain amount of rice to the actual owner of the slave every year. The original owner could redeem the slave by paying back the money that he had taken from the other person. If the slave died while in the custody of the second person, he had to replace him with another slave who could turn out the same quantum of work of the dead slave.

The third system was called pattam or lease. Under this system, the receiver of the slave paid a certain amount to the previous owner of the slave every year. The amount of eight fanam was to be given for a male slave and four fanam for a female slave. The slaves thus bought under the three systems were compelled to work hard for longer duration, but was not given enough food. The slaves bought under the second and third systems suffered greater hardships than those bought under the first system.  

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30 Claudius Buchanan, A Journey from Madras through the Centries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar, No. II London 1807, p.370
31 Ibid., pp.370-371.
The vedic laws assigned the property of the slave ultimately to the master who could dispose it of in any way he liked. The master had the overall right to sell, loan or give away his slaves. But unlike in most of other ancient civilizations, the master had no right over the lives of the slaves.\(^{32}\) Almost all the law books strictly ordained that the masters could on no account abandon them in infirmity and old age as had been the usual practice in most other ancient social orders.

Every wealthy man owned a number of bondmen born in slavery.\(^{33}\) Syrian Christians also owned slaves. There were instances of parents selling their children at the rate of a quarter of a rupee for a child during the great famine in 1860.\(^{34}\)

Manu, the ancient law-giver, says as follows in this respect: “A man may subject himself to poverty or sell his wife and children, but never his slave who does dirty work for him”.\(^{35}\) Manu restricts the limit of the right of the master to inflict corporal punishment in the following words. “A wife, a son, a slave, a servant or a younger brother may, when they

\(^{33}\) Samuel Mateer, *Land of Charity*, p.197  
\(^{34}\) Ibid., p.300  
commit a wrong, be beaten with rope or cane but only on the back and not on the head. If a man beats them otherwise he should be punished as a thief”. 36 Dharmasastras said that observance of Manudharma (code of Manu) was an act of piety, and so the followers of Manu’s code had an obligation to emancipate the slave under their custody as soon as he paid his debt by way of his labour. The code was against the sale of children except under unavoidable and extenuating circumstances. The slaves could own property and inherit it. They were free to earn money in spare time. The masters could not compel the slaves to do defiling acts for their self-aggrandisement.37

The Pulayas, Parayas, Kuravas and Vedars had served the government as slaves just as they had served people of high castes.38 The slaves belonging to the castes of Pulayas and Parayas were commonly referred to as praedial slaves as they had been employed by their masters to look after their farms.

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ivy Peter and Peter, op.cit., p.68.
PRAEDIAL SLAVES

Pulayas

The Pulayas and Parayas, who had formed the bulk of the repressed section of the Travancore society, had been bound to the land as farm workers. The value of a Pulaya slave varied from six to ten fanam and that of a female reached sometimes up to 12 fanam. The price differed from one place to another. Of the two castes, the former constituted the largest number of praedial workers. They were everywhere paid at lowest possible rate for their labour.

Pulayas remained divided into three sub-castes namely Villavas, Kunnakas and Moonnis. They lived in hovels put up along the ridges of their masters’ rice fields. Their humble dwellings consisted of mud walls, small poles and sticks and a roof thatched with dry grass or coconut fronds. A Pulaya’s hut was only an apology for a house and it gave him little protection from weather. During rainy season their huts remained surrounded by water and the occupants of the huts had to protect themselves from swarms of insects and crawling creatures like water snakes of the rice fields. As frogs in hundreds croaked around, they slept in snatches inside the lowly huts.

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39 Ibid., p.69.
They had to plough, sow, take care of the nurseries, transplant them with the help of their women, do the weeding, water the fields, make embankments, maintain hedges, manure the crop and protect the growing crops from wild animals and birds. During such times they had to keep awake throughout nights to protect the crop from such animals and birds. They also did the harvesting and safely handed over the paddy to the masters.\textsuperscript{40}

Their life was full of ironies. They were untouchable; they were unseeable, their presence was polluting. They could not even enter the local markets to purchase their provisions. However, the paddy that they produced with the sweat of their brow was wholesome.\textsuperscript{41} Brahmins and other high caste people avidly relished all varieties of eatables made of the grain in their kitchens. They also offered such delicacies made of the grain to their deities. But the actual producers of the grain could not even procure their necessary provisions easily as they could not enter the market.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{40} Samuel Mateer, \textit{Land of Charity.}, p.41.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid.} p.42
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ibid.}, p.41.
In some cases a Pulaya man and his wife worked for two masters. A Pulaya couple’s eldest male child belonged to his father’s master and his siblings remained with the mother till they acquired the capability to work. When they acquired such capability they become the property of their parents’ master.\(^\text{43}\)

The life of Pulayas had been more deplorable in North Travancore than that of their brethren in the south before they were emancipated.\(^\text{44}\) The Church Mission Society records say that they were bought and sold like cattles, and were quite often treated very badly. Their masters had been free to flog them and chain them and even maim them. They could even deprive them of their lives.\(^\text{45}\)

Another illustration would highlight the point further. A great landlord in a village near Mullapally had nearly 200 of them working on his farm daily. What is to be noted here is that he let out on rent three times that number viz. 600 of them to smaller farmers.\(^\text{46}\)

\(^{43}\) Ivy Peter and Peter, \textit{op.cit.}, p.150.
\(^{44}\) Cover file No. 15429, Year 1843. (Kerala State Archives).
\(^{45}\) Samuel Mateer, \textit{Land of Charity}, p.302
\(^{46}\) \textit{Ibid.}
Parayas

Parayas also, like Pulayas, lived all over Travancore. However their number was high in the southern region of the kingdom. This caste is known as ‘Sampavars’ in the areas that comprised the South Travancore. This caste also was divided into two sub castes named Perum Parayas and Monnay Parayas. The Parayas of the former sub caste were found in large numbers in the regions South of Kodungalloor. Perum Parayas claimed to be superior to the other sect, and the high castes considered their physical contact with a Monnay Paraya as a highly alarming pollution.47

Moral Code

One may be astonished to note the moral code that was in force in those days of slavery. The master could, under no circumstances, violate the chastity of slave girls and such acts were viewed with serious consequences. If a master raped a slave girl, he had to set her free immediately.48 He should also pay her due compensation for the act, and if she had a child by her master with or without her consent, both of them

should be set free.\textsuperscript{49} Thus we see that the general social condition of the slaves was most probably better than what we gather from the records of other ancient civilizations.

\textbf{Untouchability and unseeability}

The European travelers who came to India during the Middle Ages made mention about the slaves in their memo and travelogues and point out the virulence and vigour with which untouchability and unseeability were practised. According to them, the slaves could never use the highways but slunk along through marshes and bushes, shouting to warn high caste people of their presence.\textsuperscript{50}

If the Nairs found them otherwise they would punish them severely, sometimes with death. Durate Barbosa who came to Travancore in A.D. 1515 has reported that if a slave touched a Nair lady by some misfortune, her relations would immediately kill her and him and all his relations. And if a Nair man, in ordinary work to be done by peasants, (i.e, praedial slaves) or in buying anything, accidentally touched a peasant he could not re-enter his own house without first washing himself and changing his

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Ibid.} p.13.
clothes.\textsuperscript{51} While large sections of lowly people had been thus suffering under the yoke of merciless, rich, high caste exploiters that missionaries of London Missionary Society began their yeoman service to humanity in South Travancore at the beginning of the nineteenth century. During the same time another group of missionaries of Church Missionary Society began their service in the northern region of the kingdom. Naturally the missionaries who had come to preach the Gospel of the Meekest Lamb of God were appalled to take note of the miseries of the voiceless people. In due course, they started taking their efforts to get these bonded people emancipated.

**Missionary Efforts**

The institution of slavery had taken deep roots in Travancore when the missionaries started their work. The principal aim of the missionaries was preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and converting people into Christianity. But when they took note of the plight of the lowly people caught in the clutches of exploiters, they wanted to do something to liberate them. But they could not do anything in that direction all on a sudden. The caste-dominated administration was quite unmindful of the

\textsuperscript{51} K.K. Ramachandran Nair, \textit{op.cit.}, p.13.
suffering of the lowly people. The missionaries correctly understood the need for a strong public opinion against the pernicious system and so they started building up public opinion against slavery.\(^{52}\)

**Building up of public opinion**

In countering slavery, the missionaries built up a strong public opinion against slavery to attract the attention of the authorities. A series of articles describing the plight of the slaves was published in different journals.\(^{53}\) In 1841 John Abbs, the LMS missionary in Travancore pointed out that they could not number the sons of bondage prematurely removed from this world in childhood and youth for want of sufficient nourishment and clothing. Those who reached maturity were doomed to work like beasts of burden, to live in wretched hovels, to eat the most offensive animals and reptiles. They were treated as outcasts by their fellowmen.\(^{54}\) The Missionaries of Church Missionary Society also co-operated with the Missionaries of London Missionary Society in exposing the evils of slavery.\(^{55}\) The Government of India passed an Act in 1843. It officially abolished slavery in British India. It was an inducement

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54 Samuel Mateer, *Land of Charity.*, p.304
to the missionaries in Travancore to push ahead with their offensive action against the evil in the State.\textsuperscript{56}

**Combating slavery**

Rev. Ringeltaube, the first Missionary of LMS found that slavery, a social evil, was part of the rigid social system of Travancore.\textsuperscript{57} Expecting violent reaction he did not attempt any major work against the evil. He advised his Christian friends to follow the customs and traditions of the State. He hoped that the condition would turn for better if the oppressed people took to education. The arrival of lady missionaries in general and Mrs. Mead and Mrs. Mault in particular proved to be a turning point in the social history of Travancore.\textsuperscript{58} They concentrated their attention on the slaves. When the boarding school was established in 1820 at Nagercoil, slave girls were admitted to it.

The following incident would illustrate well the sad plight of slaves in Travancore. One day a girl of about eleven years of age was found on the premises of Mrs. Mault in a state of exhaustion due to hunger. She told the missionary that she was a slave. She had run away as her master had

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, p. 158.  
\textsuperscript{58} Samuel Mateer, *Land of Charity*, p. 278.
heartlessly flogged her. Mrs. Mault gave her asylum in her school. After
ten days, a morose man came and demanded his slave girl. Every possible
effort was made to induce him to show mercy on the girl. The Missionary
even offered to pay him the cost of her freedom. He was unmoved. He
rudely said, ‘I don’t want your money, but my slave.’ So saying he walked
away with the slave girl. When the girl was seen following her master to
her bondage, the other school girls rushed out with tears in their eyes and
requested him to release her, but he was unmoved.59 All these moved the
missionaries who spared no occasion to work for their emancipation.

The missionaries of the London Missionary Society exposed the
evils and outrages of slavery through its monthly publication, Missionary
Records. This monthly dealt mainly with its South Indian Missions. They
made the people realize that God has created all men equal and endowed
them with life that they might enjoy it, in subordination to His will. As
slavery violated a fundamental law of man’s nature, it expressly
contravened the revealed will of God. A man should love his neighbor as
himself.60

60 Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle, Vol. XXIII, (New Series,
October 1845), pp.676-677.
Abolition of Slavery; credit goes to Missionaries

A delegation led by the LMS missionaries like Rev. Charles Mead, Rev. Mault, Rev. Bailey and Rev. Baker submitted a memorandum to the Travancore government in March 1847. The memorandum urged the government to take some specific steps to ameliorate the miserable conditions of the people of the depressed classes. The memorandum pointed out that the steps suggested were on the lines of the humane and liberal policy followed by the British and other European Governments.

The steps taken:

(1) Traffic in slaves should not be permitted.

(2) It should be made a criminal offence under the law as it was in British India under the Act of 1843.

(3) Slaves should be given the right to acquire and possess property like other classes people.

(4) The hereditary or perpetuation of slavery should be done away with.\(^{61}\)

The King and the Resident promised to take effective measures in the direction suggested by the missionaries. But the government did not keep its promise and kept giving evasive replies for five years.

\(^{61}\) C.M. Agur, *op.cit.*, p.891
Rev. Mead’s efforts for the education of slaves

The schoolmaster of Ponneri, near the Manalicaud church, admitted a slave boy to his school.\textsuperscript{62} When he submitted his monthly list, Rev. Mead observed the new name, which was that of the slave boy. He made some enquiries with regard to this pleasing fact. After that Rev. Mead made an announcement that all schoolmasters who enlisted slave children to the school would get a raise to their monthly pay, of one \textit{fanam} for every slave boy, and one and a half \textit{fanam} for every slave girl they admitted to the Christian schools. It was an incentive, and within a year after Rev. Mead’s announcement was made more than one thousand slave children were admitted to the Christian schools run by all the congregations under the Neyyoor Mission.\textsuperscript{63} Encouraged by the progress of the children, Rev. Mead regularly visited such schools and closely watched the improvements of such children in their studies and other extra-curricular activities and amply rewarded the teachers for their efforts. He raised the pay of the catechists who took the trouble to enlist as many slaves as they could for the Sunday School. Similar efforts were successful in places like Kotticode and other near by places.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, p. 892.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
Royal steps to abolish slavery

As the first step towards abolition of slavery in Travancore the missionaries had to request the Maharaja to emancipate the slaves. They reminded the king that such an act of mercy would make his “name precious in Travancore for generations to come as the reliever of the oppressed.”

The king appreciated the missionaries feelings and wished to do something on this. Venkita Rao, the then Diwan of Travancore, wrote to the Resident on behalf of the king on 1\textsuperscript{st} June, 1847 on the question of slavery. However, the representation of the missionaries had not produced the desired result. So Rev. Mead felt that it was his duty to take the cause of the poor, ignorant and oppressed slaves and make a representation to the Resident. But as usual, nothing was done on his representation. The missionaries again approached the king with a petition to emancipate the slaves in his dominion. But this time also no positive action was taken on their petition. However, Gen. Cullen, the

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64  Petition of the Christian Missionaries to the Raja of Travancore, 19th March 1847, Cover file No. 286, Trivandrum Archives.
65  L.M.S. Report, 1848, p.89.
66  Ibid.
then Resident of Travancore, evinced keen interest in the abolition of slavery. In a letter to the Diwan, dated 12th March, 1849, he drew the attention of the State government to the Act passed by the Government of India in 1843. Gen. Cullen urged the Diwan to improve the condition of slaves as far as it could be done without affecting the interests of their owners. Hence he suggested certain measures to abolish slavery. In the preliminary effort he suggested manumission of all government slaves.\textsuperscript{67}

He also made the following three proposals.

1. The government should publicly dissociate itself from the perpetuation of slavery.

2. It should take measures for the future emancipation of slaves by declaring that all children born of government slaves should be free, and that while the government should receive no slaves on their own account, they should exact a like stipulation as to the emancipation of all children of slaves whom the government might restore to claimants as distant heirs along with their escheated estates.

\textsuperscript{67} General Cullen to Krishna Rao, Cochin, dated 12th March 1849, Cover file No. 286, Kerala Archives.
3. More stringent regulations should be established with regard to the
treatment of slaves; they should be given food, clothing and better
treatment on a tolerably good scale.  

Pressure from all quarters forced the king to act in favour of the
abolitionists. But the task of convincing the various *janmies* and land
holders proved a real problem. They contented that the abolition of
slavery would lead to ruin of agriculture. Hence the king put the matter in
abeyance. The continued delay in effecting the reform made the Resident
impatient. He, by his another letter, pressed the government for the
immediate introduction of the reform. M.C Montgomery, the then Chief
Secretary to the Madras Government, expressed the anxiety of the
Governor and the Court of Directors for not having abolished slavery in
the princely state even after a delay of six years. The letter of Rev.
Charles Mead, which is reproduced here, would illustrate the anxiety of the
missionary on the reform.

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71 General Cullen to Krishna Rao dated Courtallam, 2nd August 1853, cover file
No. 286 (Kerala Archives).
72 LMS Report, 1850, p. 72.
“We are sorry that nothing has been done to ameliorate the condition of the slaves of the soil in Travancore. Thousands of the people are prevented by their cruel owners from attending Christian instruction. Amongst our fishermen there are numerous slaves, who could be easily redeemed, if benevolent persons would contribute a little of their property for the purpose. We have redeemed several families of fishermen and others by private means, but a special fund is required for this object. The slaves who work in the paddy field must be liberated by the influence of the government, for in many instances the state is the slave proprietor.”

After sustained efforts, the king made a declaration on 15th September 1853 (M.E. 1029) that “all future children of Government slaves are free from bondage,” and also made provisions for the improved condition of the other slaves. After two years, i.e., in A.D 1855, the Maharaja abolished slavery in his dominons by a royal proclamation. The proclamation proved ineffective because it sought to liberate only the children born of government slaves after 15th September, 1853, the date of the original proclamation. Naturally the proclamation of 1853 did not satisfy the British. The desire of the Court of Directors was that the Raja

73 Ibid.
74 P.Shundgoony Menon, op.cit., p.477.
should be induced to extend the freedom to all the slaves. Madras Government conveyed the same to the Maharajah through the Resident, Gen. Cullen. Even after the proclamation of 1853, slave trade continued. But after continued heavy pressure, the Travancore government consented to the manumission of all the government slaves from the first day of the 1854-55.75

After the above proclamation the Madras Government suggested to the governments of Travancore and Cochin to liberate the children of the slaves of private proprietors and of all slaves. But both the governments feared that the measure would cause economic malignancy as well as alarm among private proprietors. Hence they were reluctant to emancipate the private slaves immediately. However, they agreed to place their slave proprietors exactly on the same footing as those in the East India Company’s dominions.76 After accepting the agreement, the Government of Madras insisted on the immediate issuance of necessary proclamations to that effect. Accordingly, the king of Travancore issued a royal proclamation on 24th June 1855 to better the condition of slaves and concede to them the “advantages, which are enjoyed by the same class of

75 C.M. Agur, op.cit., p.891.
76 Ibid.
subjects in the extensive territories of the Honourable East India Company.” It was a revolutionary social reform. It challenged the conventions and practices of centuries. The main credit and the honour of the emancipation of slaves goes to the missionaries. After the abolition of slavery, the missionaries devised measures to educate slave children on a large scale.

**Prospects of the liberated slaves**

The liberation of slaves brought so many blessings on them. They got the right to acquire property. Good houses were constructed by them. They applied to the government for the issue of waste lands. Government conceded to their requests. Many got professions in the government departments and coffee estates. They were attracted to enrol themselves in the schools of the missionaries. Some of them engaged in petty trades such as selling betel, tobacco salt etc., which they had been forbidden to do previously. Despite all these, there were many inequalities. The slave experienced difficulty in getting access to the public courts and offices. They were not allowed to use the public highways and markets. But the

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77 Revised Proclamation Abolishing Slavery, 1855, Cover file No.286, (Kerala Archives.)
government earnestly wanted to remove all the social disabilities of the slave classes.\textsuperscript{80} So the Diwan issued a circular on 21\textsuperscript{st} July 1884. In that he declared that the courts, offices, public highways and market places were for the use of all classes of people, without distinction of caste or creed.\textsuperscript{81} The Government also extended the benefits of education to the backward and downtrodden people. Special grants were given to the schools of backward classes on the basis of the grant-in-aid code.\textsuperscript{82}

The efforts of the missionaries and the follow-up works taken by the Government enabled the one time slaves to come up in the social ladder on equal footing with other caste people. Education made them conscious of their rights and freedom. Thus Rev. Mead’s work for the emancipation was marvelous. But his works against other oppressions were also equally remarkable.

**Medical Services**

The London Missionary Society started its medical service as a viable auxiliary for gospel propagation. The healing ministry helped

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{81} Circular of Ramiengar, Diwan of Travancore, 21\textsuperscript{st} July 1884, official papers, pp. 45-47 (R.N.Yesudhas, op.cit., pp. 312-313).

\textsuperscript{82} Travancore Gazette, supplement, 16 August 1904, No.29, Vol. VIII, Educational Department, p. 176.
attract the non-Christians towards the faith. They lent a willing ear to the truths of the Gospel in the course of taking treatment for diseases.\footnote{83} It is a sad fact of life that economic poverty followed by famine invariably causes certain diseases.\footnote{84} Travancore was predominantly an agricultural country. So, cultivation of crops was the common man’s occupation. Most of the people lived in villages. The deplorable sanitation of the rural area caused many diseases.\footnote{85} Very often the poor villagers were ravaged by epidemics.

The Travancore country had regular epidemic seasons. Cholera used to ravage the Southern districts during the month of November and December. It destroyed lives and livelihoods of thousands within a short span of time.\footnote{86} In the meantime the government could only watch, helplessly. In many places there were only a very few houses not visited by death.\footnote{87} Another scourge called small-pox started the country in the hot summers.\footnote{88} These two scourges had a free play in the coastal regions and plains of South Travancore. As if it was not enough the people lived in the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{83}{Samuel Mateer, \textit{The Land of Charity}, p.284.}
\footnote{84}{T.D.C., Report of the South Travancore Mission Hospital and Dispensaries for the year 1880, p.5.}
\footnote{85}{Ibid., 1862, p.4.}
\footnote{86}{T.D.C., Report of the Santhapuram Mission district for the year 1860, p.2.}
\footnote{87}{Ibid., Report of the Neyyoor Mission district for the year 1860, p.5.}
\footnote{88}{Ibid., Report of the South Travancore Medical Mission for the year 1934, p.15.}
\end{footnotes}
foot hills of the Western Ghats suffered from another epidemic called malaria.

In the caste dominated Travancore society yoked to tradition, illiteracy and superstition English medicines and western mode of treatments were alien. They held the belief that sickness was due to the wrath of God.\textsuperscript{89} When illness struck, people approached a diviner and offered some pujas to their favourite deities. If they could not see any signs of recovery then they approached a village physician. The exorbitant fees he collected and the strict regimen he prescribed often discouraged the people from seeking his assistance.\textsuperscript{90} The non-availability of good drinking water and hygienic food made them easy prey to common and virulent diseases. Altogether, the life of the masses appeared miserable.\textsuperscript{91} It was such a state of affairs that led Rev. Mead to start a dispensary at Neyyoor to extend medical aid to the poor and the uncared.

**Archibald Ramsay (1838-1840)**

Mead met the trained medical doctor Archibald Ramsay at London in 1838. Mead requested him to offer his medical service for the benefit of

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., Report of the South Travancore Mission Hospital and Dispensary, Nagercoil, for the year 1973, p.13.

\textsuperscript{90} Joy Gnanadhason, \textit{op.cit.}, p.102.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
the uncared for sick of the South Travancore Mission. Accordingly, Dr. Archibald Ramsay came to Travancore with the permission of the Home Board to start medical work at Neyyoor, a village in the Kalkulam taluk of Kanyakumari district 12 km west of Nagercoil Tower Junction. Thus the LMS could get a surgeon. He was in fact the second medical missionary of the LMS. Its first medical missionary Dr. John Taylor was appointed for Surat in 1804. Dr. Ramsay reached Neyyoor on 6 April 1838. At Neyyoor he was surprised to see a number of patients uncared for and untreated through suffering from flesh wounds and injuries.

Mead helped Ramsay with a thatched shed and other facilities to start the medical work at Neyyoor in 1838. Ramsay took up his abode with Miller, the missionary and gave instruction to the seminary students on medicine. In the meantime, the seminary was shifted to Nagercoil. Hence Ramsay decided to shift his medical centre from Neyyoor to Nagercoil. As the fast developing capital town of the South, Nagercoil

92 Ibid., p.92.
95 Annual Report of South Travancore Mission Hospital and Dispensaries for the year 1863, p.5.
96 Ibid., South Travancore Medical Mission, L.M.S. Madras, 1905, p.2.
97 Ibid., 1907, p.4.
had a predominant Christian community.\textsuperscript{98} This expanding town lacked a modern maternity and child care centre.\textsuperscript{99} To accommodate more patients Ramsay built small thatched huts with the help of Mault.\textsuperscript{100} Then he developed the idea of constructing a new building through public donations. Money was collected and the basement for the building was completed. Unfortunately, at this stage of development misunderstanding developed between Ramsay and other missionaries. Hence Ramsay left the mission service in 1840 and joined the government service at Trivandrum.\textsuperscript{101}

**Dr. Leitch (1852-1853)**

The indifferent attitude of Ramsay created confusion in the healing ministry of the L.M.S. in South Travancore. After he left from the Medical Mission, confusion prevailed there. His Christian act deprived the Mission of the services of a trained medical man for thirteen years.\textsuperscript{102} During all these years Mead was repeatedly requesting the Home Board

\textsuperscript{98} T.D.C., Report of South Travancore Medical Mission Hospital and Dispensaries, for the year 1876, p.34.


\textsuperscript{100} In 1828 when Mead went to establish the Neyyoor Mission Centre, he entrusted the Nagercoil centre in the hands of Mault. Thus when Ramsamy shifted the work from Neyyoor to Nagercoil, there at Nagercoil Mault was the L.M.S. missionary.

\textsuperscript{101} Annual Report of South Travancore Medical mission, L.M.S., Madras, 1905, p.2.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 1907, p.4.
to send a Medical Missionary to re-start the Medical Mission. At last, after a gap of thirteen years, the Home Board sent the evangelical cum medical missionary Dr. Charles Calder Leitch.\textsuperscript{103} He reached Nagercoil on 21 June 1852.\textsuperscript{104} As per the advice of Lewis, the missionary, stayed at Santhapuram. In the meantime, the place of the evangelical missionary of Neyoor fell vacant. Hence he was sent to Neyyoor to assume charge of the Neyyoor Mission. At Neyyoor along with his evangelical work Leitch started his first dispensary on 7 March 1853.\textsuperscript{105} While labouring with great zeal and devotion, he died on 25 August 1853 at Muttom a seashore 7 km from Neyyoor.\textsuperscript{106} The untimely death of Dr. Leitch was a great loss to the Medical Mission.

The unexpected demise of Leitch left the medical mission without a medical missionary for about eight years.\textsuperscript{107} The next missionary John

\textsuperscript{103} Rev. Charles Calder Leitch was born on 31st December 1822 in Scotland. He took an active part in the Sunday School and began to think of becoming a missionary. In 1850 he went to Edinburgh and studied Theology and Medicine. In July 1851 the L.M.S. requested him to start India and ordained him on 4 December 1851 at Gray Friars Church, Glasgow. He reached Madras on 17 December 1851. (Samuel Zechariah, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.227-229).

\textsuperscript{104} Annual Report of the South Travancore Medical Mission, L.M.S., Madras 1907, p.4.


\textsuperscript{106} Joy Gnanadhason, \textit{op.cit.}, p.93.

\textsuperscript{107} Annual Report of the South Travancore Medical Mission L.M.S. Madras, 1907, p.4.
Lowe came only in 1861. Till then, the Neyyoor evangelical missionary Frederic Baylis was in charge of the mission.

**John Lowe (1861-1868)**

John Lowe (1861-1868) worked for seven years. He laid the foundation for sound medical work. He was a unique person, generous and kind hearted. Dr. John Lowe wanted a branch dispensary in each Mission district of the LMS in South Travancore. Accordingly, in 1868 the Nagercoil dispensary was established. In the same year, his wife’s ill-health forced him to go back to England. Hence the Nagercoil dispensary began to be looked after by native medical assistants.

The Nagercoil dispensary was put under the control of some native assistants from 1868 to 1872. From 1868 dresser Masillamani looked after this dispensary till his death in November 1869. The death of Masillamani was a great loss to the Medical Mission. He was a popular and successful practitioner. Up to his death, he was busily engaged in his

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108 Ibid.
111 Martin Daniel Dhas, *op.cit.*, p.122.
112 T.D.C., Report of the Nagercoil Station for the year 1870, p.28.
work both at Santhapuram and Nagercoil dispensaries. After his death, the Nagercoil dispensary could not function properly for want of medical men. Hence, it became necessary to keep the dispensary open only on one day in a week with Packianathan, the Agatheespuram dresser in charge. In 1871 the Nagercoil dispensary received a royal donation for the supply of European medicine. Packianathan Dresser continued his work at Agasteeswaram and Nagercoil. The Mission decided to continue with this arrangement till the coming of the next medical missionary. After a gap of five years following the departure of John Lowe his successor Dr. T.S. Thomson arrived in 1872.

**Dr. T.S. Thomson (1873-1884)**

Dr. T.S. Thomson assumed charge in 1873 as medical missionary. In the same year the doctor established four branches of the Medical Mission. One of them was the Nagercoil Branch which had already existed as a weekly dispensary. When Dr. T.S. Thomson served as medical missionary, David, the medical Evangelist of Nagercoil worked

113 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
as a Dresser in the Nagercoil dispensary. After David, in the month of June 1873 Arumainayagam took charge as the dresser in the Nagercoil dispensary. Besides executing the dispensary work he regularly visited the patients belonging to Nagercoil Home Church, Seminary and Boarding Schools. So far the Nagercoil dispensary did not have a suitable building. To overcome this deficiency people under the leadership of Rev. Devadhason, collected money to build a dispensary. Finally a spacious building called the “Devadhason alm’s house and dispensary of Nagercoil” was built up. After Dr. T.S. Thompson the Neryyoor trained medical evangelist Dr. Henry was appointed in the Nagercoil Branch Hospital in 1885.

**Dr. Sargood Fry (1866-1892)**

With the untimely death of Dr. Thomson, the South Travancore Medical Mission was looked after by Dr. Sargood Fry.

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120 Ibid., Report of the South Travancore Mission Hospital and dispensaries, 1873, p.13.
Sargood Fry reached Neyyoor on 11\textsuperscript{th} February 1886.\textsuperscript{122} The next year of Dr. Fry’s arrival at Neyyoor was marked by the Jubilee Celebrations of Queen Victorian reign throughout Travancore as in the other parts of the British Empire. In connection with these celebrations, the LMS in South Travancore decided to erect a Jubilee Hospital and a ‘leper’s asylum’ in Neyyoor.\textsuperscript{123} The proposed Jubilee Hospital was established in April 1889.\textsuperscript{124} The Maharaja of Travancore Sri Rama Varma donated Rs. 1000 for this purpose. The LMS Home Board granted Rs. 1500.\textsuperscript{125}

The most important aspect of Dr. Sargood Fry’s period was the beginning of the work among lepers. In 1890 at Allencode near Neyyoor a separate Leper Asylum was erected. Later on, this Leper Asylum developed into the Charles Peare Memorial Leprosy Hospital, Colachel.\textsuperscript{126} During the reign of Dr. Fry’s, Miss. Macdonnel became the first lady Superintendent. She began to train nurses in the Neyyoor Hospital for the first time. Dr. Fry received financial help from various friends in India and abroad. In 1892 the Medical Mission had 1400 inpatients and

\begin{footnotes}
\item 122 Martin Daniel Dhas, op.cit., p.44.
\item 124 L.M.S Report, 1889, p.120.
\item 125 Martin Dantel Dhas, op.cit., p.45.
\item 126 Ibid., p.46.
\end{footnotes}
about 50,000 out-patients. Dr. Sargood Fry was mainly responsible for the establishment of Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) in Neyyoor.127

Dr. Arthur Fells (1893-1905)

Dr. Sargood Fry was succeeded by Dr. Arthur Fells. He came to Neyyoor on 30th January, 1893. He realized the need for a separate maternity ward at Neyyoor Hospital. With the assistance of Miss Macdonnel, he started the separate maternity ward at the cost of Rs. 4000.128 During his period, the Maharaja of Travancore granted an annual subscription of Rs. 500 to the Medical Mission. He also started a separate home for the female lepers of Neyyoor. He further appealed to the Home Board of the LMS about the need for more missionary doctors in Travancore. So Dr. Benall was sent to Neyyoor and he arrived there in January 1902.129

Dr. S.H. Pugh (1912-1921)

Dr. S.H. Pugh reached the South Travancore Medical Mission in 1912. He steered the course of the medical mission till 1926. He

127 Ibid., p.48.
128 Ibid.
improved the standard of the work of the Medical Mission, especially in the Neyyoor Hospital, to a great extent.\textsuperscript{130} He appointed many medical evangelists without whose services the medical mission would not have widened its scope. Similarly, he revised the salary of all the members of the medical mission.\textsuperscript{131} During his tenure, the mode of treatment and the introduction of modern techniques into it, raised the standard of medical attention in Neyyoor-higher than it was anywhere else in Travancore.\textsuperscript{132}

**Dr. T.H. Somervell (1923-1948)**

South Travancore Medical Mission was to enter into an era of marvelous changes with the arrival of Dr. T.H. Somervell of Mount Everest fame. He came to Neyyoor in September 1922.\textsuperscript{133} In the beginning he assisted Dr. Pugh un officially. Anyhow, Dr. T.H. Somervell joined the staff of the Medical Mission in 1923.\textsuperscript{134} New accommodation facilities and the introduction of modern techniques like X’ray apparatus etc attracted a large number of people from all over Travancore and even from the neighbouring provinces.\textsuperscript{135} T.H. Somervell was a great surgeon.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{130} Martin Daniel Dhas, *op.cit.*, p.57.
\item \textsuperscript{131} *Ibid*.
\item \textsuperscript{132} *Ibid.*, p.58.
\item \textsuperscript{134} Martin Daniel Dhas, *op.cit.*, p.60.
\item \textsuperscript{135} *Ibid*.
\end{itemize}
He took up the work of the medical mission straight away. He requested Home Mission Council LMS to sent more doctors including lady doctors to serve in South Travancore.\textsuperscript{136} Rapid growth followed because of his hard work in the medical mission. After a long and lustrous service in the Medical Mission, he officially retired from service in 1945.\textsuperscript{137} Even after his retirement, he came to Neyyoor in April 1948 and assumed charge as the Medical Superintendent and the Chairman of the Medical Board.\textsuperscript{138} In the next year, he left to Christian Medical Collage, Vellore to head its surgical side. Even then, Dr. Somervell made some suggestions for the reorganization of the Medical Mission which inculcated more responsibility.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., p.73.  
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., p.79.  
\textsuperscript{138} Church of South India-South Travancore Diocesan Council-Reports of Boards for the year 1948-1949, p.14.