CHAPTER – V

THE KALLARS AND

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As a citadel of Hinduism and a centre of religious life and enthusiasm, Madurai was inferior to no other place in South India. Hence when the missionaries landed in Madurai and concentrated on evangelism, the response was not that much rewarding. To gather an audience, the chief method adopted by the missionaries was preaching in vernacular since language is the gateway of reaching out to hearts. Hearing foreigners speaking in their own language worked wonders and wherever they went they were sure of an audience. To attract the crowd, a vigorous singing of Christian lyrics\(^1\) was made use of. True to their expectations, the very novelty attracted the people and made them very curious to know what was all about. Then ‘short addresses with singing interspersed and even interjected into the addresses’\(^2\) were made to keep them spellbound. At the end of the meetings tracts were distributed. But many being illiterate and superstitious did not like to receive them thinking them as plague passports.\(^3\) In fact the largest portion of the listeners was simply indifferent while a smaller portion was highly antagonistic and still a smaller number were curious but friendly disposed.\(^4\)

\(^3\) *Annual Report of the AMM for 1910*, p. 11.
\(^4\) *Annual Report of the AMM for 1906*, p. 11.
Of the three Missions connected with Madurai, namely, American Madura Mission*(AMM), Catholic Madura Mission and the Swedish Mission, the AMM has done a major work among the Piramalai Kallars** of Madurai. A cursory reading of the mission reports and correspondences of the missionaries would reveal how much effort and time the missionaries had put in to win over a single soul from this community. From the available sources of information especially of the AMM such as the Annual Reports printed from the AMM press (the Lenox press, Pasumalai, Madurai), and The Missionary Herald printed by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) from Thomas Todd and Co. printers, Boston, the attitude of these Kallars towards Christianity at different stages has been reconstructed.

Antagonistic attitude

As far as the Kallars were concerned they were violently opposed to Christianity in the beginning. It has been proved from the words of Rev. Zumbro that once a missionary was assaulted in open day light and roughly handled in the streets of Melur. The meetings of the missionaries were broken up by throwing eggs and stones; lands were denied to the erection of houses of worship and were

* American Madura Mission henceforth referred to as AMM.

** Piramalai Kallars herein after referred to as Kallars only.

in fact driven off with violence.\(^6\) False cases were filed against the missionaries and the converts.\(^7\) During distribution of tracts, they were assaulted by the Hindus and the Muslims.

Thirumangalam area, the abode of the Piramalai Kallars, proved to be one of the hardest places for evangelism. It is plainly shown in the Annual Report of 1839 that distrust and suspicion were reigning in the minds of the Kallars and that they even refrained from sending their children to the mission schools except for a very few. The situation got worsened with the organisation of the churches numbering five in Madurai and one among them in their own place Thirumangalam which was enough to kindle alarm and anxiety in the minds of the Kallars.\(^8\) To add to their distrust, there was a rumour that the school masters, monitors and the children connected with the mission would be made to drink a ‘magic potion’ and thereby all would be made Christians.\(^9\) The parents also feared that their children would be made slaves after conversion and transported beyond the seas.\(^10\) Consequently even the small number who had the guts to send their children to mission schools took them away under one pretext or the other.\(^11\)

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9. Ibid.
A shrewd analysis of the then prevailing conditions could very well lead to the reasons for the antagonistic attitude of the Kallars towards the missionaries.

i. Owing to the misdeeds of the British officials who were all Christians, the missionaries suffered much odium and the Kallars and the natives at large saw behind them the shadow of a strong, aggressive foreign power. In fact this fear was in the air not only in the Madurai region but all over India. “First comes the missionary, then comes the Resident, last comes the regiment”, says Brahmabandhu Upadhyaya which resembles the words of Nelson Mandela who said that when the Europeans came to Africa the land was in the hands of the natives and Bible was in theirs; after some decades Bible was in the hands of the natives and the land was in the hands of the Europeans. Hence when they saw that their people deserting and breaking their social ties to put themselves under the spiritual and material domination of foreigners they became highly antagonistic.

ii. The role of the missionaries as champions of the depressed classes was enough for the Kallars to harass them. Known for their high sense of social superiority,

12. Brahmabandhu Upadhyaya was censored by the R.C. Authorities in 1899 for writing such things.


they could not tolerate the uplift of the depressed classes whom they held as ‘service castes’. The vehement opposition to this attempt of the missionaries could be gleaned from the following account given by Dr. Jones. At Shempatty in Tirumangalam taluk, since the congregation was constituted entirely by the depressed class, the Kallars set fire to the churches and the majority of the houses of congregation. When they tried to save the church they were stoned; their crops and cattle were stolen off and on, thus putting the converts of the depressed class to much hardship.14 In course of time though they wanted to send their children to mission schools on realising the overall development of the children of other castes, they could not digest the very thought of their children being treated on par with the so called ‘untouchables’. The ‘love feasts’ in which all, irrespective of caste and creed, were made to dine together with a view to break caste barriers was too much for them to tolerate.15

iii. Caste as a social aspect was another factor that kept the Kallars far away from Christianity. For a Kallar caste was more sacred than anything else. In the Hindu society at large the individual was subject to the family and the family to the caste. The family system denied any one of the rights of conscience and action upon his own personal responsibility. It was a very common feature in

India, as Pickett views that a villager had been trained to sub-ordinate personal initiative to the guidance of the caste group and had been more controlled by the judgement and desire of his group.\textsuperscript{16} The Kallars being a caste ridden group feared ostracism more than death itself. If any body became a convert that person was considered to have ‘fallen’ from their dignified caste. Not only his own family oppressed him in innumerable ways but also their caste group which would make the family suffer because of the action of that particular individual. That convert was looked down upon as an outcaste by his own kith and kin and was reduced to an object of ridicule. Hence conversion was thought of as a great dishonour done to the family and also to the clan at large. Hence they preferred death than to become a Christian.

Further they had hypochondriacal nightmares about the persecution that was sure to follow, whenever mental ascent to the truth led to an open confession of Christ. Rev. Perkins, a missionary at the Thirumangalam station, bears a testimony to this when he writes about the Mandapusalai congregation.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Annual Report of the AMM for 1893}, p. 13.
i. The converts were excommunicated from the community.

ii. Washer man was forbidden to wash their clothes.

iii. Barber was forbidden to attend to them.

iv. Many of their fowls, cattle, young paddy etc. were stolen.

v. Their lands were occupied by some rich land lords, and thereby landing the converts in expensive law suits.

vi. Their jobs were taken away from them. Even public notice was given that nobody should engage them for any work. If at all anybody wanted to work in the harvest field, it was necessary for him to relinquish his new religion.

vii. They were completely boycotted and even burial grounds were refused and false charges were levelled against them.\textsuperscript{18}

viii. Above all they were disowned by their own family members and friends, deprived of their inheritance and obliged to leave the place of their birth and wander in search of work.\textsuperscript{19}

ix. Even the children if came under the influence of Christianity in their school atmosphere, were administered the most powerful drugs, to make

\textsuperscript{18} The Missionary Herald for 1846, pp. 352 – 353.

\textsuperscript{19} Hoole, Elijah, Personal Narrative of a Mission to the South of India, 1820 – 1828, London, 1829, p. 213.
them throw up as so much poison, the religious influence they had exerted upon them. If they were adamant they were driven out of their home and treated as the vilest outcastes by their own parents who seemed to have lost every parental feeling. The affronts and insults to which the converts were exposed were too much for them to accept Christianity.

Thus caste proved to be so strong and vindictive and the members were so dependent on each other for livelihood and maintenance. Hence when the missionaries especially the Americans made an attempt to do away with it, it excited a great tumult in Pasumalai in which Mrs. Tracy was knocked down and Rev. Tracy himself sustained injuries. They were awaiting pretexts to pick up quarrels with the missionaries. In 1846 when Rev. Tracy got the ground dug up for the erection of some new buildings at Pasumalai, he found out some cists and that led to a wide spread of rumour that already thirteen victims had been sacrificed in order to obtain the buried treasure and with four more victims, they would succeed. This caused much chaos and confusion which finally ended with the intervention of the District Collector. The missionaries wondered not at the invention of such rumours but at the rapidity with which it spread and at the

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20. Edward Chester in his letter to his friends in the U.S.A, dated July 16, 1859, UTC Archives, Bangalore, Box I, Folder I.
credulity of the people both in the city and country. As an expression of their hatred and an attempt to demoralise the missionaries, even house breaking attempts were made on the mission bungalows and even their cattle were lifted on a few occasions.  

In fact the fear of the British Raj alone kept them from resorting to direct actions against the missionaries often.

To their astonishment no retaliation came from the side of the missionaries. They simply endured all the hardships smilingly. Being chivalrous by nature, the Kallars began to feel it a disgrace to harm such innocent, selfless, loving-natured and humane strangers. Because among these Kallars a peculiar custom was prevalent that if a stranger was murdered near a village and the murderer was not to be traced, one among them must volunteer to be murdered so as to avenge the death of the stranger. For this sacrifice, the family of the volunteer was given a piece of land. Though this custom seems to be barbarous outwardly it definitely reveals their sense of honour and justice. This they considered imperative to ensure the honour of their society. Hence in due course they gave up their animosity towards the missionaries and learnt to attach scant importance to their missionary activities. Had the missionaries behaved in a vindictive way, the reaction of the Kallars would have been a different story to tell.


Indifferent attitude

Though open antagonism subsided, hatred was there like a smouldering fire ready to burst out anew at the slightest provocation. The missionaries, on the other hand, showed love and affection towards these people in spite of their highhandedness which moved even their stony hearts. But still they were so much determined to keep themselves aloof from this ‘contagious disease’-Christianity. They had their own reasons for that.

i. The first and foremost reason being, they were strongly entrenched in their own religious beliefs and customs with no desperate sense of need for a better religion. Even if their customs attacked them in the very citadel of their very being they never ventured to discard them. Hence they did not find any valid reason to switch over to a new religion or culture. Further they were not at all attracted by the miracles performed by Jesus Christ since from generation to generation they had heard much about the better miracles performed by their own gods and hence they did not find any valid reason to forsake their gods and to respond positively to the messages of the Christian evangelists.26 Further they assumed that their traditional religion would die out as the Gospel displaces animistic beliefs and practices which they could never accept. Thus they had no craving for any new faith and were contended with their religion.

ii. It was very difficult for them to give up what their fathers and grandfathers were cherishing. As seen earlier ancestor worship was an important feature of their religious belief. Hence as a mark of honour to them, they wanted to stick on to their forefathers’ ideas and never liked to deviate from the path through which they passed. In fact fear of men withheld them and they used to say that they would like to remain with those people among whom they were born – be they good or evil.

iv. Perhaps Christianity might have seemed to be a ‘sober’ religion to them. In their religious life feasts, festivities, animal sacrifice etc. played an important part than the gods themselves. The absence of all these in Christianity failed to attract them. Further the doctrines of Christianity such as Ten Commandments were quite contradictory to their life style. Being idol worshippers and predatory in character they could not accept the ideologies such as “thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image”, “thou shalt not kill”, “thou shalt not commit adultery, “thou shalt not steal”, “thou shalt not covet any of thy neighbour’s belongings etc. “Turning the other cheek”, “Walking the second mile”, “resisting not the evil” etc. could never be imagined by them, who believed in ‘tit for tat’.

28. Ibid., p. 61.
30. Ibid., St. Matthews 5:39, 41.
iv. Moreover their marriage customs made Christianity unpalatable to them.31

Because polygamy was very common among those with whom it was affordable; divorce was quite easy and the remarriage of widower as well as widows also had the approval of their caste. But on the contrary, according to the rules and regulations of the AMM, no polygamist should be admitted to any of their churches until he had entered into a covenant with the church that he would henceforth be the husband of only one wife.32 Hence they had fallen back on the excuse that Christianity is the religion of the Westerners while Hinduism is the religion of the Indians.

v. The impermeability of thought and life of the Kallars was another reason which was lamented by Dr. Jones, an American missionary at Pasumalai. In spite of the bustling educational activities at Pasumalai (Thirumangalam taluk) these Kallars who sat at their very doors, persistently oblivious to every blessing Christianity offered and seemed to be equally satisfied with their colossal superstition, ignorance, wretched life and childish customs.33 To the missionaries their indifference was worse than open antagonism.

32. Minutes of the AMM, Abstract of the Rules of the AMM, May, 1885. (See Annexure - ii )
Friendly disposition

In due course their attitude towards the missionaries underwent a drastic change. Perhaps this would have been due to the outward expression of the constraining love of Christ by the missionaries.

i. The Kallars were very well aware of the fact that their community was despised by many other communities who were in fact longing for the extermination of it. On the contrary though the missionaries had heard much about them and their variety of crimes and themselves had experienced their belligerent nature on a few occasions, began to sympathise with them. They had understood clearly that the pessimistic and fatalistic outlook of these people and their apathy and indifference towards improvement were mainly due to the inhospitable geographical environment. They had also understood that since the Kallars were busy on their lands only for a period of five months a year, the available seven months was conducive for them to follow their ancestral customs of robbery with much immunity since Madurai district was with many lonely stretches of road. Hence with a better understanding of their problems, the missionaries looked at them as the most appropriate lot for

whom, they believed, Jesus came to redeem – because Jesus came in to the world not for the righteous but for the sinners. This aspect made them concentrate more on the ‘robber-caste’ or ‘thief-caste’ as the Kallars were known to them and to do something substantial to uplift them and purge their community of its criminal proclivities.

ii. The recurrences of chronic famine and chronic scarcity for food which were usually accompanied by epidemics such as cholera that filled the cup of sorrow of the people, provided the missionaries with opportunities to exhibit their concern for them. When the ruling British Government was unwilling to assume any responsibility for the orphans, the missionaries willingly came forward to shoulder it. This worked wonders and hence the poor, irrespective of their caste and creed, began to repose much confidence in the missionaries and the Kallars were no exception to this. This could be clearly understood from the following episode. A dying Hindu Kallar who lost his wife and two of his children in the worst famine of 1877 which swept away his land and house in an eligible part of the village, wanted to leave four of his living children into the safe hands of the missionaries before his death. But for the missionaries, those 4 children along with their sister who was ailing in the village and left behind, would have definitely perished, having been rendered penniless
orphans. This sort of unconditional love and humane attitude of the missionaries must have won over the hearts of the Kallars and brought them closer to the missionaries.

iii. The leaning was further accelerated by their medical mission which was a proof of the benign nature of Christianity.

The unhygienic sanitary conditions, the prevalence of many diseases, the attitude of the people towards diseases and the ‘prescription’ of the ‘doctors’ etc. were heart rending to the missionaries and this necessitated the AMM to start its medical ministry in 1837. Dr. Steele, Dr. John Scudder and Dr. Shelton were the pioneer medical missionaries. Severe epidemics of cholera ravaged Madurai quite frequently leading to a high mortality rate. During such occasions not only the physicians but also the missionaries and their wives came forward to alleviate the suffering of the masses. Even the Brahmins who feared the ‘polluting touch’ of the foreigners approached them for surgery.

The Kallars became the victims of mycetoma, commonly known as ‘Madurai foot’. This was the most prevalent disease in the black cotton soiled tracts of Thirumangalam. This disease was manifested by swelling on foot,

ulceration, rupture and discharge of fluid.\textsuperscript{38} Besides this another dreaded disease which was common among them was leprosy, caused by the hot, dry climate and also by the biting of a small venomous reptile which goes by the name \textit{kz;qspg;} \textit{ghk;g} \textit{kw;Wk;} \textit{rpW ghk;g} in Tamil.\textsuperscript{39} While they were estranged by their own family members and relatives the humane attitude of the missionaries towards them proved to be the most effective door of approach to their hearts. They became friendly and faithful to the missionaries by this gesture.

Moreover the customs of the AMM to give each girl student a dowry of Rs. 25/- was enhanced to Rs. 45/- when she left the school to get married, in addition to the provision of all their wants in the school, irrespective of their caste or creed.\textsuperscript{40} This made the people taste the real love and concern of the missionaries.

Naturally filled with a sense of gratitude they could not help reposing their confidence in the missionaries and so they became very friendly and hospitable towards them. But even at this stage, fear of ostracism kept most of them back from making a bold stand to accept Christianity despite the fact that very many of them lost all their faith in their idols. They used to tell the


\textsuperscript{39} Personal Interview with Mr. Chinnasamy Thevar, aged 65, a retired teacher, on 18\textsuperscript{th} May 2006, at Madurai.

\textsuperscript{40} J.S. Chandler, \textit{Op. cit.}, P. 56.
missionaries “just wait till I get my children married” “wait till my father divides the property and I will surely come”\textsuperscript{41} etc. Nevertheless in the Kellar areas, the missionaries were given a warm welcome and the Kallars listened to the Gospel willingly.\textsuperscript{42} However in spite of painstaking efforts of argument and persuasion, the missionaries could not make any head way among the Kallars. It was true that there were successes, but they were a few and far between. Hence all conversions from this caste were received with great rejoicing.

**Opening to Christianity**

**The Kallars and the AMM**

Conspicuous by their paradoxical character, this community attracted the attention of the missionaries of the AMM. On one hand, they were turbulent, marauding, insubordinate and dishonest but on the other hand they were affectionate, chivalrous, hospitable and responsible. Moved by their frankness, the missionaries felt constrained to bring light to these people in the dark.

The AMM’s ministry among the Kallars started as early as 1839 when Rev. \textit{Tracy} travelled through the Kallarnad and preached the Gospel.\textsuperscript{43} However the first instance of conversion among the Kallars took place only in 1869 when five men and one woman were admitted into the church. Of whom one

\textsuperscript{41.} Annual Report of the AMM for 1903, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{42.} Annual Report of the AMM for 1904, p. 18.
confessed his high-handedness of having stolen a pair of oxen from the mission bungalow some years earlier.\textsuperscript{44}

Though the Kallars were known for their love of hearing novel things conversion among them was a far cry since the mantle of caste was closer to the mantle for Christian religion. However the converted Kallars, though a few in number, proved to be ‘the salt of the earth’. This could be understood from the words of Rev. \textbf{J.C Perkins}, the American missionary at Thirumangalam station.\textsuperscript{45}

He has recorded the “faithfulness and bright Christian example” of a man and his wife living in the heart of a Kallar section of that station. He has also boldly declared that the life of that converted ‘thief’ (Kallar) preached a better sermon to the thousands of that caste that lived around him than all the preachers and catechists. Despite the persecutions he was subjected to he proved to be too good. When his land yielded about four times the crops on the lands of his fellow villagers, the Hindus of the vicinity seemed to have said, “His God is making up to him the loss we caused him when we stole his crops to get him back to Hinduism.”\textsuperscript{46} Thus unknowingly they began to develop faith in Christianity as a religion which could change lives. Though only a few had the boldness to come

\begin{footnotes}
\item 44. \textit{Annual Report of the AMM for 1869}, p. 38.
\item 45. \textit{Annual Report of the AMM for 1899}, p. 8.
\item 46. \textit{Ibid}.
\end{footnotes}
out openly to profess the new religion, their example made many others also long for that life. The following episodes bear testimony to that change of attitude.

At Kallarpatty in Tirumangalam taluk, a young gambler of 20 years of age was touched by the example of his friends who had confessed Christ at one of the Gospel meetings. Though he too wanted to become a Christian, he wanted one month’s time so that he could settle his gambling debts. When the missionary Rev. Perkins tried to convince him to give up gambling, to his great surprise, the large crowd that stood about especially the women wanted the missionary to succeed which was something unusual. Hitherto on such occasions the bystanders had always been against the missionaries. The reason for the uniqueness of the occasion being, that person was the root cause of that evil in their village and the one who led their men-folk in to that vice. Finally he promised that he would gamble no more and had kept up his promise\(^\text{47}\) which was another characteristic feature of this community.

Likewise a mother wanted to become a Christian following the change of life of her wicked son who was bold and daring and was awaiting the opportune time to kill his enemy. But when he accepted Christianity, his entire life pattern underwent a dramatic change that he became friendly even to his enemy who caused him so much of suffering. His mother who had no idea about

\(^{47}\) Annual Report of the AMM for 1903, pp. 43-44.
Christianity whatsoever, also wanted to become a Christian by declaring “the God who could change my wicked son must be the true God and I want to worship Him.” Thus a little leaven began to leaven the whole lump.

These powerful testimonies made many Kallars believe that they could turn a new leaf in their lives too. Gone were the days of suspicion, distrust, antagonism and indifference and during the year 1902 the Kallars began to “show much desire to hear the Gospel and more signs of being influenced by its teaching than any other caste.” The conversion of 9 members of this community which took place in 1904 bore testimony to this fact. Perhaps this positive change among the Kallars who “though not of the lower and poorer classes” might have emboldened the missionary Rev. F.E. Jeffrey to refute emphatically the observation of the Madras Census Commissioner that conversions took place only from among the lowest classes of Hindus who had little to lose in forsaking their creed. Jeffrey, with statistical evidence has proved that Thirumangalam station was an exception to this since out of the 2313 Christians, only 568 were from the lowest castes and the rest, being high caste lost much and suffered much for their profession of Christianity.

48. Ibid., p. 43.
49. Ibid., p. 44.
In the meantime the whole taluk of Thirumangalam was waking up educationally and even the Kallars began to clamour for education. With firm determination they too wanted to see their children climb higher in the social ladder of education. Hence they started sending their children – both boys and girls to the Christian schools (See Plate – IV). They were fully aware of the fact that in those schools the missionaries, besides providing their children with formal education, would inculcate into the minds of the children the words of scripture and the principles of Christian religion. In fact sending the children to schools itself meant a great sacrifice on the part of the parents because the former could be of much help to the family by way of watching the fields, tending flocks, minding the siblings, attending to domestic works etc. But still they were very much satisfied with the schools which were intended to be social centres of the community where the teachers imparted knowledge of social service and personal hygiene too. Through the schools the missionaries hoped to achieve knowledge of the Bible, development of leaders and social amelioration for a poverty stricken people. In the boarding schools which proved to be places of character building, the children were taught to work in their villages during their holidays and to educate the villagers in all rural problems. During week ends centres were chosen

54. J.C. Ingleby, Missionaries, Education and India, ISPCK, Delhi, 2000, p. 227.
for sanitary work, for enacting dramas on rural problems and holding exhibitions.\textsuperscript{55}

To improve the economic condition of the people of Madurai were given the agricultural and industrial training to students.\textsuperscript{56} Their advancement in these fields earned their family members double happiness, who were happy to refer to their children as Christians ‘ntjf;fhutf’;f‘ in colloquial Tamil.

This had a snowballing effect on the mind set of the Kallars who in earlier times trained their children in the art of thieving, to have begun to shun the crime culture. Thus as each Christian school was a lighthouse, there was more light shining in the Kallar country ever before.\textsuperscript{57} Though spiritually the gain was less manifest yet it was encouraging because many Kallars, though guilty of many crimes which they acknowledged, started listening to the Gospel and asked the missionaries to visit them often. They also assured them that if they could place a catechist or teacher among them to teach these spiritual things to them daily, they would soon become Christians.\textsuperscript{58} This made Rev. Hazen, a missionary at Thirumangalam station, believe that there was certainly an open door there and the harvest was ripe and was so confident of a precious ingathering in the near


\textsuperscript{56.} \textit{Annual Report of the AMM for 1906}, pp. 16-17.

\textsuperscript{57.} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 54.

\textsuperscript{58.} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 33.
future.\footnote{Ibid.} Hazen was right in his assumption since conversions began to take place in large numbers. The narration of \textbf{Rev. Perkins} regarding the formation of a congregation became very much true in the case of the Kallars. To quote Perkins, “First 2 or 3 men are impressed with the truth; then before they announce themselves as Christians, they endeavour to influence their brothers and relatives and when they think they have a number large enough for protection in case of persecution which is sure to follow, they will give their names to the missionary and are enrolled as Christians. Some of these numbers have followed their leaders and influential men in to Christianity just as they would have followed them in to Mohemmedanism or any other religion.”\footnote{Annual Report of the AMM for 1898, p. 17.}

This fact has been corroborated by \textbf{Pickett’s} version. According to him, an individual convert had become active among his relatives and later the group was influenced by him and subsequently they sent a deputation to the missionary who helped them further join Christianity as families.\footnote{J.W. Pickett, \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 55.} A present day church historian \textbf{Hugald Grafe} when he deals with the \textit{kudumbum} conversion or family conversion is of the view that such conversions often took place in joint families where the relatives followed the decision of the head unquestionably,
indicating their affinity to the family and to the jati at large. One among the major group movements of such nature in Tamilnadu took place among the Piramalai Kallars of Usilampatti. But the period specified by him as ‘after 1924’ is probably wrong because Francis, in Madurai Gazetteer, wrote in 1906 itself “Still the Kallars are becoming Christians as families through the mission work and through the witness of a few Christians.” Likewise the conversion of a chief of the ‘thief’ caste with thirteen of his followers in 1913 happened which might have been the reason for Dr. Banninga to come out with the vision of the missionaries - of “establishing the kingdom of God among this stalwart, daring class of men and women.”

Thus education and the entrance of new ideas had begun to shake their old faith and served as a bridge between the Christian community and the Kallars. In the meantime the British Government decided to apply the Criminal Tribes Act on the Kallars which fell on them like a bolt from the blue. At this juncture it becomes imperative to throw light on the CTA which also proved to be a definite catylist in bringing them still more close to Christianity.

65. Ibid., p. 43.
The Kallars and the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA)

The imperialistic British Raj which could not bear with the independent disposition of the Kallars let loose an array of stringent measures to subdue this valiant race both physically and psychologically. In fact the era of revolutionary terrorism which began after 1907 accelerated the pace of the British action against the Kallars with a view to keep the latter off from the National politics. Hence the application of the CTA on them must be viewed “as a culmination of the collerie image, the annihilation of Kallar resistance and the destruction and perversion of the kaval system.”

CTA, an All India Act, was originally meant to control tribes which made crime a tribal profession and amongst whom there was no sense that crime was a wrong or undesirable thing, thus proving to be addicts to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences. Originally passed in 1871, it was extended to the Madras presidency with certain amendments as Act III of 1911 on the basis of the recommendations of the Indian Police Commission appointed in 1902-03. The circumstances under which the provisions of the CTA were applied to these

68. Ibid.
Kallars were detailed in certain Government Orders.\textsuperscript{69} As far as Madurai was concerned it was “in essence a Kallar control Act.”\textsuperscript{70} As pointed out by Blackburn in the complete census of 1871 the Kallars were listed among the agricultural castes and the transformation of the ‘culleries’ to ‘cultivators’ was so sudden\textsuperscript{71} so also from ‘cultivators’ to ‘criminal tribes’ which could be warranted by facts. Because the British officials themselves had accepted that the Kallar was a ‘fine stuff’ and he would turn to be a criminal, only when he could not get enough succour to support himself and his family.\textsuperscript{72} Moreover the fact that the Kallars were neither incorrigible nor wild or savagery, as wantonly portrayed by the British, had already been proved by the precedent of the Kallars living in the eastern part of Madurai, commonly known as Melur Kallars. These Kallars had already become remarkably reclaimed by giving up their thieving habits and settling down as an agricultural and law-abiding people, when they were offered the Periyar scheme of 1896 which provided them with irrigational facilities. As Francis puts in “The Department of Public Works succeeded where the Army, the Police and the Magistracy have failed and has made an honest man of the notorious Kallan.”\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{69} G. O. No. 1023, Judicial, dated 4\textsuperscript{th} May, 1914; G.O. No. 2233, Judicial, dated 16\textsuperscript{th} September, 1915; G.O. No. 1331, Home (Judicial), dated 5\textsuperscript{th} June, 1918; G. O. No. 862, Home (Judicial), dated 26\textsuperscript{th} March, 1920; G. O. No. 2430, Home (Judicial), dated 3\textsuperscript{rd} April, 1920.

\textsuperscript{70} S.H. Blackburn, \textit{Loc. cit.}

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p. 44.

\textsuperscript{72} G. O. No. 596, Law (General), dated 16\textsuperscript{th} June, 1921.

\textsuperscript{73} W. Francis, \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 73.
In fact a similar economic change might be said to have come to the Piramalai Kallars also with the advent of Cambodia cotton and groundnuts and with the sincere efforts of the then Deputy collector of Usilampatti division Mr. A Vedachala Ayyar during 1910-11.\(^{74}\) Owing to the initiative taken by him, the heads of Mela-Urappanur village, the capital of Kallarnad, agreed to convene a caste meeting in which Vedachala Ayyar appealed to the good senses of the Kallars “to live down their old name and become useful members of society by organising credit societies and resorting to the cultivation of cotton and groundnuts besides the usual raising of grains.”\(^ {75}\) To everybody’s surprise the response was immediate and ample in the form of many Kallar co-operative societies and large expansion in the growth of cotton and groundnuts. It seemed as if a great career was open to the Piramalai Kallars. Though there was a set back due to the ill-timed transfer of Vedachala Ayyar in 1911 reports showed that during the following 3 years dacoity had ceased, fascination for crime had vanished and a sounder public opinion about them had developed.\(^ {76}\) It was thus made crystal clear that if tactfully handled the Kallars would prove responsive to sympathetic and considerate treatment.

\(^{74}\) Notes connected with G. O. No. 2956, Judicial, dated 2nd December, 1915, p. 1.
\(^{75}\) Ibid., p. 2.
\(^{76}\) Ibid.
Instead of proceeding on the same line, at this juncture, the Government came out with its drastic plan of notifying the Kallars in Kilagudy, a village a few miles away from Madurai, as a criminal tribe in 1914 and went ahead with the registration process which was totally an anachronism. To make matters worse, there was a proposal to notify the Kallars of Mela-Urappanur too. With a view to avoid this stigma, complying with the suggestion of the then District Magistrate of Madura Mr. Knapp, the elders of Mela Urappanur agreed to refrain from crime and also to constitute a caste panchayat to co-operate with the police and magistracy by reporting crimes duly. True to their promise, crime almost ceased in the village and in the rare cases that occurred, they were duly reported to the authorities. Despite all the bona fide efforts on the part of the Kallars, without giving them a fair chance of trial to this new experiment, they were also notified as criminal tribes.\footnote{“Kallars in the Madurai District, Protest against Registration,” The Hindu, dated 25\textsuperscript{th} Nov. 1915.}

Since the British believed that every Piramalai Kallar was not only a potential but also a probable criminal,\footnote{E.B. Loveluck, “The Kallar Problem”, The Police Magazine, Journal for Publicity Bureau, September, 1921, p. 91.} despite many pleas to the Government through petitions\footnote{Petition from Sivanandi Tevan and others, residents of Mela Urappanur, Thirumangalam taluk, Madurai district, through their counsel George Joseph, Madurai, to His Excellency, the Governor-in-Council, Fort St. George, Madras, dated 20\textsuperscript{th} November, 1915. See Annexure – iii.} and telegrams\footnote{Telegram from M.R. Ry. Sivanandi to the Honourable Rao Bahadur P. Kesava Pillai, Tirumangalam, dated 25\textsuperscript{th} November, 1915. See Annexure – iv.} to reconsider its move which hurt the self-
respect and dignity of the community, the British Government did notify the whole
tribe of the Piramalai Kallars as criminal tribes village by village.\textsuperscript{81} Accordingly all
the adult male members of the Piramalai Kallar community were registered under
Sec.10 (1) (a) and those who were convicted earlier by the courts of law under
Sec. 10(1) (b) of the CTA. All the registered persons were to leave their thumb
impressions in the registers where their bio-data had also been recorded. It was
mandatory on the part of the registered member to attend a roll call once or twice
every night of his life at inconvenient hours such as 11.00 P.M. and 3.00 A.M.
besides being made to take a ‘passport’ if he left his residence between sunset and
sunrise. As far as those who were booked under Sec.10 (1) (b) were concerned,
they were subjected to close watching and their movements were strictly restricted
and they could be arrested on mere suspicion. Any violation of this restriction was
considered punishable with imprisonment up to three years or a fine of Rs.500/-.\textsuperscript{82}
The plight of the registered person who was made to answer a roll call at a police
station, three or four miles away from his residence and lie down there being
exposed in the rainy days where there was no adequate shelter could never be
imagined.\textsuperscript{83} The worst part of it was, once notified the members had no right to
appeal against it in the court of law and in which ever part of the British territory

\textsuperscript{81} Paddison, District Magistrate of Madurai, proposed after consultation with the police authorities that
the whole of the Piramalai Kallar tribe be proclaimed a criminal tribe.
Letter from G.F. Paddison, District Magistrate of Madurai, to the Secretary to Government, Home
(Judicial Dept.), through the I.G. of Police dated 27\textsuperscript{th} April, 1918. No. R.O.C. 15-B and G/Mgl.

\textsuperscript{82} Y.C. Simhadri, \textit{The Criminal Tribes of India}, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1979, p. 33.

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{G.O. No. 149, Judicial, dated 27\textsuperscript{th} March, 1923}.
they wandered they were identified as criminal tribes only. The Kallars felt that their communal pride had been touched by the CTA which drove them to the brink of requesting the Government for a new caste designation since ‘Kallars’ as an appellation was indicative of a thieving profession. On the realisation of the reproach the CTA attached to them, they were determined to resent it. Hence their registration was not an easy affair. There were frequent clashes between them and the police, culminating in the Perungamanallur shoot out on 3rd April, 1920 (See Plates V, VI, VII & VIII). This riot has been described as the “Jallianwala bagh Massacre” enacted on a small scale by M.S. Mantreshwara Sharma, Joint Manager of the “Independent” of Allahabad. The Kallars demanded a judicial enquiry into the incident but it was turned down by the Government.

85. Hindu Nesan, Madras, April 24th 1916. Infact their demand was attended to and the term "Indra Kula" was of set purpose used in schools, industrial centres, co-operative societies etc. (G.O. No. 596, Law (General), 16th June, 1921.
86. Report on the Administration of Police of the Madras presidency for 1920, Govt. Press, Madras, 1921, p. 16. At Perungamanalur, a village in Tirumangalam taluk of Madurai district, the Kallars refused to appear for registration in spite of persuasions and warning. Warrants were therefore issued against them and about a 1000 of them, armed with deadly weapons, were determined to resist registration. When the police made arrests, the Kallars fired a ‘rocket’ as a signal for the Kallars of the neighbouring villages to join the fray and the enraged mob enveloped the police and magistrates. The authorities stood in imminent danger of being attacked by the reinforced mob, hence shooting order was given to disperse it. As a result 17 were killed. The drastic action taken against them there and the subsequent raids conducted against Kallar villages facilitated registration considerably.

87. Swadesamitran, dated 6th June, 1921, MNNR, Madras, p. 715.
88. The Hindu, 29th Nov. 1920,
In fact the CTA was a stigma and a blot on the statute book of a civilized nation as portrayed by Begum Sultana Mir Amruddin, a member of the Muslim League in Legislative Assembly.\textsuperscript{88a} W.J. Hatch doubted that any other Act on the statute book goes so far in giving the police powers to take away a man’s freedom.\textsuperscript{89} It was nothing but an outward expression of the 'Kallarphobia' from which the British suffered and a clear cut sign of the vindictive spirit of the British who wanted to keep this turbulent people off from National politics either by hook or by crook. Nevertheless in spite of all these measures the registered criminal was ‘shrewd enough’ to find out ways of evading the rules and it was impossible for a small police force to tackle the situation. Being convinced of the futility of coercive measures, the Government had to devise a satisfactory method of tackling them and hence it came out with the reclamation scheme. Though it appeared like pinching the child and rocking the cradle or setting them to run and watching the fun on the part of the British, the reclamation scheme could not be underestimated since it opened up new vistas of life to the Kallars.

\textbf{The Kallars and the Reclamation scheme}

The problem of the Kallars which posed as a serious threat to the Government was a socio-economic one. Because they were always at logger heads with their environment and had run the risk of progressive deterioration both as a

\textsuperscript{88a} Madras Legislative Assembly Debates (MLAD), 17th April 1947, p. 16.

community and an individual. Hence if their economic problem was solved, crime from tribal motives would become negligible. Having convinced of this fact, the Government was determined to tackle it in two ways.90

i. By eradicating their perverted traditions

ii. By improving their economic conditions.

With these intentions, the Government appointed Mr. Loveluck, a Police Superintendent, in 1919 to initiate new plans in this regard. Thus was started the reclamation scheme in 1920 with the chief aim, as expounded by the British Government, of suppressing the criminal proclivities in the Kallars and also of uplifting them morally, socially and economically. To realize these ends, three new proposals were put forth.91

i. Making the criminal thoroughly unpopular within his own community.

ii. Providing an alternative occupation.

iii. Channelising the energies of the younger generation towards constructive purposes.

To execute these proposals, the principle of making the communities responsible for the acts of each of its individuals through Panchayats was

90. G.O. No. 596, Law (General), dated 16th June, 1921.
introduced. Loveluck who was well informed of the importance of the panchayats in the life of the Kallars and also of the successful experimentation of it by Mr. A. Vedachala Ayyar and Mr. Knapp in Mela-Urappanur village, wanted to enforce it throughout Kallarnad. Though it was not a ‘striking innovation’ of Loveluck as it has been portrayed, he should be credited with the conception of making the best use of it so as to induce the criminal to give up his criminal activities of his own accord. 

Through an agreement called the Kallar Panchayat Agreement in 1920, it was proposed to elect panchayats in each of the Kallar villages and to make the panchayatdars responsible for

i. reporting crimes and controlling the bad characters of the village.

ii. stoppage of levy of kaval fees or tuppu cooly.

iii. surrendering of all wanted criminals.

iv. ostracising the incorrigible criminals and also refusing to allow girls of their villages to marry them and making their lives miserable in all possible ways

v. and ensuring compulsory attendance in schools of the children of the villagers.

92. M.A. George Joseph, Bar-at-Law, Editor of the "Independent" around 1921 was mainly responsible for the establishment of the Panchayats in the land of the Kallars through his strong recommendations to the British Government in India. Swadesamitran, MNNR., Madras, 6th June, 1921, p. 715.

If the panchayat was honest enough to carry out these conditions that village was exempt from the operation of the section 10 of the CTA\textsuperscript{94} i.e., from attending the roll call and taking the passport while leaving the residence between sunset and sunrise. But at the same time, it was made quite clear that if the Kallars of any such exempted villages began to misbehave, the exemption of the entire village would be cancelled. This provision had emphatically changed the Kallar public opinion so much so that those who indulged in crime more from a love of adventure and hitherto considered, ‘heroes’, came to be considered ‘intolerable nuisances’ especially by the women.\textsuperscript{95} As a result crime had almost ceased in places where panchayat system was introduced.

For the effective implementation of the system, the Government appointed Rao Sahib A.K. Raja Ayyer as a Special Kallar Officer, to be assisted by one Special Inspector and two Sub-Inspectors.\textsuperscript{96} He worked on the principle – ‘minimum of force and restriction and maximum of help and trust’ to be shown to the Kallars. He quickly acquainted himself with the Kallars and even won over their confidence. Nearly 501 Kallar panchayats were established in Kallarnad.\textsuperscript{97}

The panchayat system having succeeded in making the life of a criminal unpopular and his personal freedom most insecure, the alternative offered

\textsuperscript{94} Kallar Panchayat Agreement, Govt. Press, 1920, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{96} G.O. No. 447, Home (Judicial), dated 1\textsuperscript{st} March, 1921.
\textsuperscript{97} G. O. No. 2683, Law (General), dated 8\textsuperscript{th} November, 1922.
to him became more attractive. This was the desired effect and the Government lost no time to fix the seal when the wax was warm. Hence the Government took effective steps to improve agriculture, the main occupation of the Kallars.

**Improvement of agriculture**

A commission was appointed to enquire into the conditions of the villages and to suggest the best methods of improving their agricultural production. On the basis of its recommendation, co-operative societies were established with the objectives of ‘thrift, self-help and co-operation’ among the Kallars. These societies granted loans for agricultural purposes. Loans under the Agriculturists’ Loans Act and Land Improvements Loan Act were also granted to them. Lands and house sites were assigned to deserving Kallars wherever practicable. But *pattas* issued were made inalienable whether by sale deed or mortgage. Problem of drinking water scarcity was solved by digging wells at the cost of the Government in their villages. Local schemes for the improvement of

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98. G.O.No.541, Judicial, dated 29th October, 1924.
101. G. O. No. 596, Law (General), dated 16th June, 1921- Enclosure I - Note for the Collector of Madura, from T.E. Moir, Commissioner of Labour, dated 18th March, 1921. See Annexure – iv.
102. In 1949 an investigation of irrigation project for most of the Kallar province was completed in response to the request for the extension of the Periyar system into the Kallarnad. As Dumont feels it was the most effective action the Government could possibly undertake. As a result the Chellampatty block of the Usilampatti taluk came to be irrigated by the Periyar - Vaigai project.

existing tanks and other sources by the Public Works Department and the Minor Irrigation Department and for the construction of new ones were carried out. Training in improved methods of agriculture was also imparted.

**Industrial development**

Hitherto the attitude of the Kallars towards industries had been one of contempt. To put an end to the unemployment problem among the Kallars which posed a serious threat the Government formulated a few programmes. Accordingly sufficient training to the Kallar boys with improved equipments so as to enable them to stand on their own legs was given. Cottage industries such as weaving, carpet-making, mat-making, carpentry, tailoring, blacksmithy, brass-smithy, bee-keeping, jaggery-making etc.were introduced. Starting of poultry and dairy farming and granting of loans to cottage industries helped them to earn their livelihood. Though industries could not provide all Kallars with jobs, it did train a good number of them at each centre and also made the Kallars realise that such a kind of labour was quite compatible with their self-esteem. Thus

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104. Of all branches of industry, weaving continued to be the most popular among the Kallars so also carpentry. At the annual exhibition held at Madras, at the Park Fair, a gold medal was awarded for Kallar made articles. Report on the Administration of Police of the Madras Presidency for 1926, Govt. Press, Madras 1927, p. 19.
vocational training too became a part of reclamation process. A Kallar Employment Bureau, started in 1937, did excellent work in finding employment to many educated and uneducated Kallars. Many Kallar labourers emigrated from Kallarnad to estates and foreign countries. Steps were taken to recruit Kallars to the army. The Kallars were offered employment in quarrying and in the installation of railway tracks between Madurai and Bodinaickanur. Dry cultivation was also extended and advance was given for purchase of cattle for manure purpose. A Kellar Common Fund was constituted with short and long term loans for improvements in agriculture, handicrafts and other industries.

By means of all these measures, the economic status of the Kallars was uplifted.

**Education**

With a view to mould the Kallar children and to divert their energies to constructive purposes, education was given much importance under the reclamation scheme. Illiteracy which fostered criminality in the Kallars was being

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dispelled through hundreds of schools, setup in Kallar villages. Higher education, both general and technical, was encouraged by awarding boarding grants, scholarships, stipends etc. to Kallar pupils.\textsuperscript{112} Even funds were allotted from the discretionary fund of the District Magistrate of Madurai.\textsuperscript{113} While implementing the reclamation scheme, the Government preferred non-official agency, a body of self-sacrificing men who were prepared to devote their lives for the work. The Government declared its willingness to welcome the entry of Hindu and Mohemmedan agencies in this field of social reform.\textsuperscript{114} However only the Christian missions who were then at work in Madurai such as AMM, CSM and CMM responded positively\textsuperscript{115} and identified themselves with the reclamation work in the Madurai district.

\textbf{The AMM and the Kallar Reclamation}

\textit{Kallar Voluntary Settlement}

The first step of identification of the AMM with the Kallar reclamation work was its willingness to undertake the management of the proposed Kallar voluntary settlement which became a necessity on the part of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{112} Letter from A.R.C. West Lake, to the Secretary to Government, \textit{Loc. cit.}
\item \textsuperscript{113} \textit{Administration Report of the Kallar Reclamation Work, Madurai and Ramnad Districts}, Madras, 1925, p. 37.
\item \textsuperscript{114} \textit{Note Showing the Progress of the Criminal Tribes upto January}, 1925, p.1.
\item \textsuperscript{115} G.O. No. 596, \textit{Law (General)}, dated 16\textsuperscript{th} June, 1921.
\end{itemize}
Government. At the outset it appeared as though the strict enforcement of Sec. 10 of the CTA on them was enough to make it impossible for the Kallars to commit crime. But the wholesale registration reduced it to a mockery since a small police force was rendered helpless to have close vigilance on them. Moreover it led to a great deal of corruption among the police who were bribed by the Kallar to let him be absent from a village for the night though he was marked present.\(^{116}\) Hence the Government was constrained to device some other effective method of tackling this problem. Hence it was decided to implement the formation of criminal settlements as followed in North India for the criminal tribes. As it was a difficult process to have a wholesale scheme for the settlement of the Kallar tribes of Madurai, it was suggested that remedial measures should be undertaken within the practicable limits. It was decided to settle the Kallars of Keezhakuyilgudi, MelaUrappanur, Sorrikampatti, Pusalapuram etc. in to a voluntary settlement.

When the District Magistrate of Madurai sent a proposal to the Government to this effect, the Government refused its sanction on the ground that it was not very much satisfied with the agency with whom the management of the settlement was intended to be entrusted.\(^{117}\) It also expressed its desire to reconsider the proposal in the event of the AMM or a similar agency coming forward to


\(^{117}\) *G. O. No. 735, Home (Judicial), dated 2\(^{nd}\) April, 1917.*
undertake the management of such a settlement.\textsuperscript{118} Hence the AMM was approached whether it would undertake any such responsibility if the Government established a settlement for the criminal tribes. The AMM which had profound influence among the Kallars\textsuperscript{119} expressed its willingness to take up the management of the settlement on two conditions.

(i) The manager should be provided with quarters.

(ii) A grant of Rs. 600/- per annum should be sanctioned – half to be spent on office charges and the other half on a day school.

The Government has accepted the proposals on these terms and directed that the experiment would be tried for a period of one year.\textsuperscript{120}

Accordingly in 1917 a large tract of government land of about 3000 acres at the head of the Cumbum valley with a proximity to an irrigational canal was set apart for this work.\textsuperscript{121} Thus the Government’s plan of emigrating some families (60-75) away from the village environment was executed. In fact the primary object of a criminal settlement was reformation and not merely segregation or confinement.\textsuperscript{122} The Government offered some inducements such as

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Ibid.} \\
\textsuperscript{119} J.J. Banninga, \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 140. \\
\textsuperscript{120} G.O. No. 1725, \textit{Home (Judicial) dated 18\textsuperscript{th} August, 1917.} \\
\textsuperscript{121} Annual Report of the AMM for 1917, p. 11. \\
\textsuperscript{122} G. O. No. 1314, Judicial, dated 20\textsuperscript{th} May, 1916.
\end{flushright}
a grant of free land to the landless Kallars, the promise of waiving some of the onerous restrictions of the CTA etc. to join the settlement. It also looked after the welfare of the settlers and even paid for their transportation, erection of huts, tools and seeds for their cultivation. Offering employment in quarrying was a measure usually undertaken by the Government in the form of settling the notified criminal tribes. The subsidiary industries such as weaving, silk-rearing, carpentry and sewing were the measures adopted along with mat and basket making. The sale of cattle, mats, ropes and involvement as coolie labourers were a few activities adopted for the settlers.

Besides the overall supervision of the entire project, the AMM was expected to take care of the welfare of the settlers particularly as regards education and morals. Rev. J.X. Miller was first to be named as Superintendent and since he felt he could not give up his educational work in Pasumalai Rev. E.P. Holton was then appointed. For some time it went on satisfactorily but later tended to be a failure since not many Kallar families responded as it was expected. Only 20 families had joined the settlement because the Kallars by nature never liked to

124. *Ibid*.
125. *G.O. No. 2740, Home, dated 7th December, 1914*.
126. *G.O. No. 2273, Home, dated 22nd September, 1915*.
leave their homes and to be under any authority that would curtail their independence. Moreover it was found that the site selected was malaria prone and hence the Government had to give it up. This failure, added to the ongoing First World War made the Government close the settlement in 1919\textsuperscript{130} and confine itself to the other activities for reforming this caste.

\textbf{AMM and Education}

The Act of 1911 authorized local government to establish industrial, agricultural and reformatory schools and to separate the children from parents so as to enable them to grow up as honest citizens by eradicating the criminal habits of the tribe from the minds of the youth of the criminal tribes.\textsuperscript{131} Hence education was given much importance in the reclamation scheme. In accordance with the third proposal of the reclamation scheme concerning compulsory education, the government desired the Kallars also to get themselves involved in it. Hence it was made mandatory on the part of the Kallars to provide a school building and one-fourth of the salary of the teacher as a good will gesture, so that a Panchayat would be allowed to be established which stood as a guarantor for exemption from the operation of Sec. 10 of the CTA on the village as a whole. The Kallars whose life had already become miserable by CTA, found in this a real redemption and hence the result was electric and the entire scenario under went a drastic change.

\textsuperscript{130} J.J. Banninga, \textit{Loc. cit.}

\textsuperscript{131} Notes by Scott - 11-8(b) dated 12\textsuperscript{th} January 1915, p. 170.
The government had to approach the Christian missions. Having heard from the government the opportunity for opening new schools among the Kallars, the AMM passed a resolution that the Madura Church Council (MCC) should take over the management of schools, started by the police department and to make every possible effort to find out teachers for them. With the willing cooperation of the AMM in the Kallarnad the gathering of the children into schools was proceeding with marvelous rapidity which could be gleaned from the words of the missionary Dudley. To retain the charm of his narration, it has been presented verbatim:

“Every village wanted to show it deserved a Panchayat. Formerly no village cared about a school but now every village wanted one immediately. For decades our mission has run schools here and there among these people; it has won a few converts but we ran against the tide. Suddenly the tide turned and ran with us. 30 years ago, the proud conservative Kallar did not make the Christian preacher feel much at home in the Kallar country. Now the same Kallar welcomed the preacher not usually from a conscious desire for the Christian message but because the preacher had education and could be trusted to point the way out from the restrictions of the CTA…. The appearance of the missionary was a signal for the villagers to assemble. They pointed to a cow stable or the village rest house,

132. Minutes of the AMM, Resolution 35, January 1921, p. 34.
which they were ready to dedicate to the cause of education. A glance revealed the children who perhaps were already assembled and waiting for a teacher to come and open the school.”133

Despite the fact that it was welcoming news for all the missions, they found it very difficult to supply qualified teachers for such a good number of schools. Even the AMM was unable to supply so many teachers to work in Kallarnad in spite of the fact that there was a regular supply of trained teachers from the Pasumalai Training School. Hence to meet the sudden demand for teachers, the AMM resolved to start a ‘Lower grade’ Training class at Thirumanagalam in July 1922,134 comprising students mainly from the Kallar caste. It is said, in the beginning, as a stop-gap arrangement the mission had appointed even those with I Std. qualification and it was considered enough if they were able to sign their names till suitable hands were available.135 As a result 3500 pupils from this caste were studying in those village schools which originated with the Police Department, the building constructed in every case by the people themselves and the village and the government sharing in the salary of the teacher. In addition, 150 of these Kallar youth were trained to become teachers to their own caste people.136 Most of them had already become Christians due to their exposure

to Christian influence. These inspired youth were trained to go back to their villages and teach and support the new reforms. To supplement the efforts of these Lower grade teachers, more educated and experienced evangelists were appointed to preach effectively to the Kallars.

**Boarding Schools**

Five AMM boarding schools which were centres of strong religious life and character building were run in Madurai district. Hundreds of these Kallar youths were enrolled and were on government scholarships.\(^{137}\) In these schools which resembled the *Gurukula* of our ancient times, the boys were given Christian nurture whereby they were taught to read the Bible, to pray, to attend the churches and to live like Christians. With a view to instill in their minds the principles of honesty and industry, these boys who were mentally and physically equipped for hard work were given training in weaving and carpentry. In fact these trades made their life in the schools not only interesting but also enabled them to earn their livelihood through honest means in future.\(^{138}\) In order to prevent these boys running away from schools, a Panchayat was formed from among themselves and the leaders were instructed to be vigilant and also to make others understand the value of vocational training.

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\(^{137}\) *The Missionary Herald* for 1925, p. 7.

\(^{138}\) *Annual Report of the AMM* for 1922, p. 59.
A special effort was made during 1924 to secure in the Thirumangalam boarding school a class of girls selected from the Christian families. A total of nearly 30 girls from the Kallar community were at Thirumangalam and a few in boarding schools in other stations. Sewing was taught to them. Two girls' schools were already started in Kallarnad and the third one was in the offing.\textsuperscript{139} In boarding schools all the children were required to do some manual or vocational work. They were taught agriculture, poultry, cattle farming and a score of crafts besides the regular education. Girls did most of the work in the kitchen such as pounding, grinding etc. in turns.\textsuperscript{140} By 1925, 66 village schools were under the management of the AMM. Thus because of CTA, the Kallars became sensitive to their backwardness and anxious to improve their status and the missions rose up to their expectation through their school systems. The Kallar boys going to 40 miles to Pasumalai to demand admission into schools was a sufficient indication of the stirring among the community.\textsuperscript{141}

In 1934 Rev. Dudley introduced a balanced diet to the boarders which was cheap as well as relishing to the boys on account of its variety. To get the boarders an increased supply of milk cows, buffaloes and \textit{Surti} goats were purchased and left in charge of the teachers and pupils. Further the boarding school

\textsuperscript{139} The Missionary Herald for 1925, p. 7.
141. G.O. No. 596, Law (General), dated 16\textsuperscript{th} June, 1921.
was made a breeding and distribution centre for goats and Berkshire pigs as well.\textsuperscript{142}

**Industrial Schools**

The AMM had also requested the Government of Madras to provide scholarship of Rs. 5 per month for 25 Kallar boys at Pasumalai vocational school which had well-equipped press, farm, carpentry, iron work shed etc. where printing, carpentry, masonry, gardening and farming were taught. Since weaving was a favourite industry with the Kallar, a shed and four looms were also sought for the Kallar boarders at Thirumangalam so that with four shifts of five boys each working for two hours a day, twenty boys could learn to weave well in a year.\textsuperscript{143}

True to the expectation of the Government, the schools played an important part in transforming this community into an honourable one. As Lorbeer emphatically says this was made possible since for 75 years teachers, pastors and missionaries had been preaching truth and honesty in the Kallar country and prepared a base on which the new foundation could be laid.\textsuperscript{144}


\textsuperscript{143} Proposal for the co-operation between the Govt. of Madras and the AMM for the Reformation of the Kallars of Madura District. Enclosure IV of the *G.O. No. 596, Law (General), dated 16\textsuperscript{th} June, 1921*.

See Annexure – iv.

\textsuperscript{144} *Annual Report of the AMM* for 1921, p. 13.
**Scout Movement**

Athletic and Boy Scout activities were started to replace their love for thieving expeditions and to divert their energies. Mr. Lorbeer, the then District Commissioner of the Scout Movement, was responsible for the success of the Boy Scouts among the Kallar youth through the Kallar teachers who were given Scout Masters' training.\(^\text{145}\) This movement served as a means of inculcating the value of honesty and self-help and creating a desire for selfless service in the Kallar youth. On seeing their love for sports, the missionaries conducted events like distance runs, high jump, broad jump etc. and the idea was taken up by the police who ran three big carnivals a year with good and moral effect. The AMM made a request to the Government to assign play ground for each village and a sum of Rs. 10/- to each school for the purchase of sports articles.\(^\text{146}\)

**Piramalai Reformer**

With Lorbeer as the Manager and G. J. R. Athishtam as the Editor, a Quarterly Journal in vernacular by name *Piramalai Sirthiruthan* (Piramalai Reformer) was started with the aim of educating the public.\(^\text{147}\) Many useful articles were contributed by the mission workers, well-wishers and even by officials. The


\(^\text{146}.\) Proposal for the co-operation between the Govt. of Madras and the AMM, *Loc. cit.*

articles were simple, interesting and valuable to them. The AMM requested the Government to make use of this journal as a means of communicating to the Kallars and also to subscribe for 200 copies at Re. 1 per year so that copies could be given free to all literate *Panchayatdars*. Moreover the Government was also made known that 1000 literate Kallars were willing to subscribe if it was made cheap.\(^\text{148}\) Unfortunately this was stopped when other vernacular dailies came into the field.

**Social Reform**

An important social reform carried out by Rev. Dudley and his co-workers in Kallarnad was concerned about ‘bride-money’.\(^\text{149}\) Owing to the paucity of educated girls among the Kallars, the bride’s parents demanded exorbitant ‘dowry’ from the groom’s parents as against their ancestral caste custom according to which bride money was fixed at Rs. 101. To enable the educated girls to get married to the prospective bridegrooms, Rev. Dudley appealed to the good senses of the bride’s parents and succeeded in making them observe the old ancestral custom. Moreover he succeeded in persuading the Kallars to set a limit to the amount of jewellery to be worn by them and to start a ‘Marriage Fund’ so as to facilitate the meeting of marriage expenses. The AMM also encouraged everyone to deposit Re.1 per month in to the Thirumangalam Rural Reconstruction Co-operative Society.\(^\text{150}\)

\(^{148}\) Proposal for the co-operation between Govt. of Madras and the AMM, *Loc. cit.*


\(^{150}\) *Ibid.*
Rural Reconstruction

A well organized and comprehensive programme of rural reconstruction was launched\textsuperscript{151} with a view to achieve economic uplift of the Kallars. Accordingly loans were secured from the Government by the AMM who supplied Kangeyam stud bulls and heifers on co-operative basis. \textit{Surti} goats were supplied with the help of Katpadi institute on the same basis. Leghorn hens and eggs were also supplied. With the co-operation of the Government the missionaries educated the Kallars to have improved methods of cultivation and supplied iron ploughs and seeds. Thus the Kallars were educated to make the best use of the welfare measures of the Government.

Rural Y. M. C. A

Young men Christian Association (YMCA) commonly called \textit{Grama Sangam} was started by teachers and pastors in many villages. They had weekly meetings and discussed the rural problems. Good books were supplied to these centres and thus fruitful work in rural uplift was carried out.\textsuperscript{152}

Thus CTA indirectly helped the Kallars who felt desperate and abandoned by other Hindu communities in getting closer to the missionaries who

\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Ibid.}
saw in it a great opportunity to suppress the evil and sublimating the best in the Kallars through Gospel. The reclamation scheme, though sponsored by the Government, went a long way in enabling them to understand the selfless sacrifice of the missionaries which was exhibited on every occasion. The efforts they took to secure scholarship for students from the Government, to bring absentees to the schools by going to cotton fields, to bring back the dropouts from schools so that they might not lose their scholarships etc. had a telling effect on the Kallars. Lorbeer who assumed a special responsibility for the work in Kallarnad writes without fear of equivocation – “The Kallar country for Christ by 1925 is our slogan ……. The present movement among the Kallars is away from crime and toward education. 25 baptism and hundreds of inquirers show that the movement was also towards Christianity though not in mass yet. Our faith and hope lead us to believe that the Kallars will enlist under the banner of the Cross in larger and larger numbers till Christian thought and conduct will permeate the whole of the Kallar area.”153 Perhaps this might have enabled Rev. James A. Hess of the American college at Madurai to come out with the declaration that never at any time in the experience of the missionaries had a movement been so pronounced than the movement of the Kallars of Thirumangalam taluk towards Christianity.154

This has been vouchsafed by the baptism that took place in quick succession. On the New Year day of 1922, 17 people received baptism. During the year 1922, 64 adults received baptism from this caste alone\footnote{155. \textit{Annual Report of the AMM for 1922}, p. 56.} which made the missionaries hope that it was but the 'beginning of a strong, steady movement to their church'.\footnote{156. \textit{The Missionary Herald for 1923}, p. 210.} The trend was further accelerated in the following years which could be gleaned from the missionary records. “We are witnessing the transformation of men and boys and a whole caste. Our church records show it, Police statistics show it and we read it from the book of experience, a new page of which opens fresh to greet us each morning.”\footnote{157. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 211.} During the year 1923 relations with the Government in the work which hitherto had been some what experimental were largely stabilized. The Government was grateful to the missionaries for their kind co-operation and also for the results which were attained.\footnote{158. \textit{The Missionary Herald for 1925}, p. 7.} In 1924 there had been 85 baptism from the Kallar caste of which 61 were of adults. Larger and greater results were looked for and several of the villages were regarded as places of great hope.\footnote{159. \textit{Ibid.}} In the opinion of Thekkadath the life of hardship and insecurity which was the lot of the Kallars turned the thoughts of many to another life of eternal peace of which the preachers had spoken to them. Many of those peasant - soldiers and some of their leaders...
were simple, unsophisticated people sincerely seeking deliverance from the harshness and misery which they found all around.\(^{160}\) Thus CTA proved to be an indirect catalyst for the promotion of Christianity among the Kallars which opportunity was best made use of by the evangelists who preached Gospel to the eager crowds through lantern lectures, movies and \textit{kalachebams}.

**The Kallars and the Church of Sweden Mission  (CSM / TELC)**

Early in the 20\(^{th}\) century the CSM had taken over the Leipzig Missionary Society’s work in South India which included Trichy and Madurai as seen earlier. The first Lutheran congregation in Madurai was formed by the Lutherans of Trichy who settled at Madurai. With ‘soul-care’ concern, the mission took up regular work in Madurai from 1869 onwards.\(^{161}\) During the ministry of Rev. Kremmar in Madurai from 1878–’84 the mission work was rewarded with a large accession of about 800 during the great famine of 1878–’79.\(^{162}\) To consolidate their gain, a Girls' school was removed from Trichinopoly to Madurai in 1882. The entry of Rev. C.J. Sandegren in to the ministry at Madurai seems to have opened a new era since he is credited with the construction of a new church and a mission bungalow at Ponnagaram and a girls' school on the outskirts of the


town. Only due to his initiative, the first lady missionary of the CSM—Miss Esther Peterson (See Plate – IX) came to Madurai to under take the zenana work. From thenceforth Madurai became an important centre for the missionary activities of the Lutheran Mission.

A new field of evangelistic work was started in Kallarnad in 1912 with Madurai and Virudhunagar as their centres.\(^{163}\) It was given a further impetus when the Government came out with its notification of the Kallar community as criminal tribes which necessitated the Kallars to turn a new leaf in their lives. Since education was considered as the most urgent and fruitful method of uplift, interest in female education was stimulated by starting a Girls' School at Usilampatti in 1915. After the Perungamanallur incident the Kallars felt desolated by all even by their gods and sought mental solace and redemption.\(^{164}\) At this juncture Rev. Paul Sandegren, son of Rev. C. J. Sandegren, (See Plate – X) who was born in Madurai stepped in to the Kallarnad with the comforting message of Jesus Christ’s love for them. His selfless, arduous and zealous missionary work among them brought about a telling effect on the attitude of the Kallars and hence they gave a willing ear to the Christian messages. The mission saw in

\(^{163}\) Ibid., p. 27.

Government’s reclamation programme an earnest attempt to kindle in them a
desire for socio-economic improvement. Having worked for more than 200 years
in the Tamil districts, this mission had done a substantial work among the Kallars
of Thanjavur district. These Kallars were also addicted to crime like the Kallars of
Madurai, and the mission achieved great success in transforming them into an
honourable community. Their success encouraged them to take a deep concern for
the Kallars in Madurai too. The Government also on finding that the missionary
efforts for pacification of the Kallars were more successful than their own
extended its full support to the mission.165 Thus in co-operation with the
Government, the mission opened a number of schools and Christian teachers from
the Thanjavur Kallars were set at work to educate their kinsmen.166 The very
appearance of those caste brethren with beneficial results made the Kallars of
Madurai also long for such progress in life which actually made the beginning
much easier for CSM.

Thus the CSM entered the field of Thirumangalam taluk where
missionary activities of the AMM were going on in full swing among the Kallars.
As the AMM found it difficult to persuade them to leave their established
missionary centre, it was decided to arrive at a comity arrangement with the CSM.

165. Ibid., p.138.
After a number of indecisive meetings, at last in 1917, it was agreed that neither mission would enter into a village of less than 2000 inhabitants if that village were already being visited by the workers of the other mission.\textsuperscript{167} This paved the way for an intimate relationship between the two missions. To bring the CSM into closer fellowship with the AMM with regard to female education in the High School and Teacher Training Grades, on the suggestion of the latter CSM agreed to pay Rs. 600/- a year towards the expenses.\textsuperscript{168} However co-operation in village work was a real problem. Since it was the usual practice of the CSM to follow its Christians wherever they went, it was very difficult to observe the comity rules. Hence in the September meeting of 1920, the AMM Committee on comity suggested to divide the field harmoniously in order to avoid unnecessary friction as well as unhealthy competition. As a result Thirumangalam taluk was divided in such a way that the southern and western portion was given to the CSM and northern and eastern portion, to the AMM. Involved in this territorial division was the question of their work in Kallarnad.\textsuperscript{169} By this division the major part of that work fell to the AMM. To all intents and purposes this division gave the town of Usilampatti to the Lutherans. Hence the CSM concentrated more on this place and Usilampatti became a separate pastorate in 1922 and Rev. John Himmelstrand and

\textsuperscript{168} \textit{Ibid.} \\
\textsuperscript{169} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 161.}
his wife Mrs. Elsa Himmelstrand were sent here to work among the Kallars
(See Plate – XI). The Girls' School started in 1915 was made a Boarding School.
With the co-operation of the Government they started a number of schools and
were even prepared to start schools in the more inaccessible parts of Kallarnad.
The mission also requested the Government to pay three-fourths and the panchayat
one-fourth of the salary of the teacher and to furnish the needed buildings. They
had also expressed their desire to send some Kallar children to their boarding
schools in Pudukkottai and Thanjavur districts in order to keep them away from
their village environment and to provide them with opportunity to mingle with
other boarders drawn from several communities\footnote{170} which was sure to go a long
way in moulding their character.

Mrs. & Rev. Himmelstrand spent their ‘everything’ for the
upbringing of these Kallars and did valuable spiritual work in Usilampatti. To suit
to the taste of the Kallars, and to make it fit in to the Indian environment, he built a
church in the model of a Hindu temple which has served as a model church
(See Plates XII & XIII). His parental care moved the hearts of many a Kallars who
used to call him affectionately their father.\footnote{171}

\footnote{170. Proposed scheme of work for Reformation of the Kallars by the CSM with Govt. Assistance -
Enclosure III, G.O. No. 596, Law (General), dated 16th June, 1921. See Annexure-iv.}
\footnote{171. Personal interview with Rev. Daniel Manoharan., above 75 years of age who worked among the
Kallars in Usilampatti for more than ten years, on 10th May, at Madurai.
As a centre of active Christian influence among the Kallars the Girls' Boarding School at Usilampatti fulfilled a great need for higher elementary education of the girls of this community. Out of 240 boarders about one hundred were Kallars. Splendid rural training was given to the students in the cultivation of cereals, vegetables and fruit trees. The senior girls did even farm work in turns. Every foot of the campus was effectively utilised for agricultural purposes. Bulls, cows, leghorns etc. were reared. The girls attended to all the work in the kitchen including the pounding of paddy. Mrs. Himmelstrand, the Manager of the school, started the ‘Home Savings System’ in which farmers, coolies and others who were economically very weak became members. They were required to save one to two annas each per week and deposit their savings in the Society. So also the women vendors of vegetables and of milk and its by-products were induced to deposit a small portion of their sale proceeds with the Society and were given periodical interest which enabled them to buy their requirements.

Rural work was also planned. Accordingly a survey of the economic condition of the Lutherans in every village was to be taken and the services of a rural reconstruction expert was to be secured to develop Christian rural work on progressive lines; a rural community school was to be opened and nurses with

mid-wifery training were to be employed to work in villages with the assistance of
the village Bible women. Thus every unit around which was to develop
educational, medical, and agricultural and other aspects of work with Higher
Elementary Schools and High Schools as centres of rural reconstruction.¹⁷⁴

With Miss Ellen Nordmark from Sweden taking charge of the
mission in 1938 a significant period began. Her self-sacrificing effort to develop
Usilampatti area and to educate the illiterate Kallar girls in and around Usilampatti
was noteworthy.¹⁷⁵ She visited those women and interacted with them in Tamil
and was successful in bringing about a change in their lives. She loved the female
children and was determined to start a High School in Usilampatti besides Higher
Elementary School. As a result TELC High School for Girls was started in 1943
with Miss Nordmark as the Correspondent. She had a vision that a female child
entering standard I should come out as a qualified teacher in Usilampatti itself.
Hence a Teacher Training School for Girls was also started at Usilampatti in
1951.¹⁷⁶ To mobilise children for this school, she used to go in person to the
nearby villages and convinced the villagers who were mainly Kallars to send their
female children for teacher training. As a Correspondent of the school, she used to
go to the Kellar Reclamation Office, Madurai, to plead for the students, never

¹⁷⁴. Ibid., pp. 179-183.
¹⁷⁵. Personal interview with Mr. Mathuram, the Correspondent of the Teacher Training School, Usilampatti
on 20th May, 2006.
¹⁷⁶. Ibid.
minding for how long she had to wait there. She took personal care that the Kallar students received their scholarship amount in time and the other benefits due to them. She spent her time, energy, money and her life for the welfare and uplift of the girls and women in this Kallar area. Even after her departure to Sweden due to her old age, her thoughts were always with the institutions.

Though she was a spinster she was considered as the ‘mother’ of so many. She adopted so many orphaned children, conducted marriages for them and for the girls she bought all the vessels and the other things needed to settle them in marriage life. Every year she used to invite them all during the month of May and provided them with free boarding and lodging for three days. She had a very big ‘family’ of daughters, sons-in-law and grand children. Former M.L.A. Mr. P.K. Mookaiah Tevar bestowed on her the title _Veerammal_ for her boldness in facing the high officials and getting things done for the pupils. He used to fondly refer to her as _nooru mark_ meaning cent percent, instead of Nordmark as she completely allowed herself to be spent away for the sake of the Kallar women of Usilampatti.

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177. Personal interview with Miss _Krenappu Kalarani_, H.M. of the TELC Hr. Sec. School for Girls, Usilampatti, on May 22nd, 2006.
178. In one of Miss Nordmark's letter to Mrs. Kanagaalli Asirvatham, the former H.M. of the TELC Hr. Sec. School for Girls, Usilampatti, dated 4th June, 1992, she has stated that she got a fairly big amount as a gift which she was willing to add to the fund for stipends to students. See Annexure –vi.
179. Personal interview with Mrs. _Kanagavalli Asirvatham, aged 65_, on 26th May, 2006, at Madurai.
Another Swedish missionary of the Sandegran family who dedicated her life for the uplift of the Usilampatti area was Miss Ulla Sandegran (See Plate XV). She ably managed the Middle School and Boarding Home where many of the Kallar children were accommodated. She was noted for her deep concern for them. The Bible women’s work and Sunday school work were also placed under her management. She also threw herself heart and soul in bringing light into the dark lives of the Kallars.

Thus the entire concentration of the Swedish missionaries was on the uplift of the Kallars in general and women in particular.

The Kallars and the Catholic Madura Mission

The Catholic missionaries of both Old and New Madura Missions were impressed by the dash and dexterity of the Kallars. In the opinion of Fr. De Proenzena, a Jesuit of the Old Madura Mission, they were a batch of gallant men worth an army with irresistible boldness and valour who were feared by the Muhammedans more than the regular troops; for sudden attacks they were unequalled; combining courage, shrewdness and agility they used to leave their jungles in small groups, spread in disguise and rally at the sound of a whistle to operate into a farm or an encamped army.  

The connection between the Catholic missionaries and the Kallars of the Madurai region seems to date back to sometimes before 1700 A.D. when Fr. Borghese S.J. is said to have founded a Christian community at Ariapatti, near Usilampatti. In 1700 it was visited by Fr. Peter Martin who enjoyed the hospitality and the kindly disposition of the Kallars while passing through Kallarnad and then by Fr. Cappelli in 1711. Owing to lack of frequent contacts and Christian nurture, all but two families had left the faith.\(^{181}\) In the year 1857 Fr. J.B. Trinca of the New Catholic Madura Mission, in accordance with the mission’s principle of social reform and public well being opened a medical unit in Madurai and distributed medicines free of cost to the poor. In 1867 the District Superior Fr. Saint Cyr gave him Rs. 100/- to go to the region of the Kallars and plant the seed of the Gospel.\(^{182}\)

Fr. Trinca established his contact stations for the exploration of the western region and after two years of exploration he had the beginnings of Christian villages. Six of them were villages of 40 or 50 kilometres from Madurai. He was given full charge of all the country near the hills to carry on the work of conversion.\(^{183}\) The central administrative district of the New Madura Mission


\(^{182}\) Ibid., p. 92.

included the Kallarnad also consisting of such centres as Usilampatti and Thirumangalam. Fr. Trincal’s ordinary conveyance was a *vandi*, a high wheeled cart. An account of his missionary tour into the Kallarnad explains the methodology he adopted to win over the Kallars. It goes as follows. “At every village I meet and stop under the largest mango or tamarind tree in the vicinity and whilst two of my little disciples prepare my meal, my European look attracts inquisitive people; they come forward at first cautiously. But as I start talking with the nearest, the others feel encouraged and little by little, they form a circle around me. I can then make a display of my eloquence. They listen, they do not interrupt me, except by signs of approbation. The boldest answer my questions but briefly and in very polite terms. When I have concluded, the catechist who followed me, make a commentary on what I have said in terms more familiar to them. After these have gone, others come and these meetings occupy the whole morning”\(^1\)  

\(^1\) Ibid., pp. 58 – 65.

Since Thirumangalam had already been monopolised by the AMM where it carried on its systematic missionary activities in full swing through pastors, school masters and Bible women, Fr. Trincal settled down in Usilampatti in 1881 and started a Parish at Valanthur which was subsequently transferred to Usilampatti. From there he extended his sphere of work and had acquired a site in
Thirumangalam. However the prospects of mass conversion drew him in to the
taluks of Srivilliputtur and Sathur.\textsuperscript{185} Thirumangalam was left as a mission station
under Usilampatti till it was entrusted to the Capuchin Fathers in 1970.

The Jesuit missionaries were touched by the openness and hospitality
of the Kallars\textsuperscript{186} and this drew them closer to the latter. The missionaries were
convinced of the need of frequent contact to keep up and nurture the faith of these
poor illiterate people. As the Kallars were not impervious to friendly approach and
to the prospect of their children receiving a sound education, the Jesuits were
determined to wean them away from their attachment to superstition and to liberate
them from the grip of social evils and practices. To such people was sent
Fr. Isidore Prince with whose arrival a new saga in the history of the mission
began. He was a roving missionary in Madurai and preferred his roving part,
calling his cycle ‘my home’ and went everywhere to try to solve problems
especially marriage cases of the rarely visited and illiterate believers in
outstations.\textsuperscript{187} Because of his friendly approach, he won over the good will of the
Kallars. Moreover the importance these missionaries attached to external
solemnity of the religious festivals, the passion plays, annual festivals, ceremonies,

\textsuperscript{186} Clement Montaud, “Kallarnad – Usilampatti”, \textit{Caritas}, March 1943, p. 68.
feasts etc. contributed very much in bringing the Kallars to the Christian fold and preserving them in religious life. These celebrations were in keeping with the character of the Kallars who were so fond of external manifestation of their faith.

At this juncture the Government notification came out declaring the Kallars as criminal tribes and its subsequent reclamation scheme for them. As seen earlier the educational side of the reformatory programme was entrusted with the Christian missions. For the Government it was a philanthropic work but for the Jesuits it had a higher purpose beyond Government objectives who saw in it a great opportunity to inculcate positive and healthy values such as dignity of labour, value of hard work, self-reliance and self-respect in the Kallars. The Jesuit labour for the reform of these people is generally known as “Kallar Mission Work”\(^{188}\) Education at all levels was used by the New Madura Mission as an agent of social change and modernization. Jesuit education emphasised intellectual and moral training of youth.\(^{189}\)

Fr. Prince was credited with the establishment of 43 schools in Kallarnad with government stipends and liberal subsidies.\(^{190}\) Promising students

from the elementary schools were sent to high schools and boarding schools, run
for both boys and girls in the cities. Through strict supervision, socio-economic
improvement and education, Fr. Prince endeared himself to the Kallars which
earned him the title ‘Prince of the Kallars’. Fr. Prince had thus sown the seeds
which his successors continued to cultivate.

Fr. Clement Montaud, his successor, worked for 9 years putting up
chapels, schools and building up parish associations for the Kallars. The seeds,
sown by Fr. Prince, began to bear fruit in the time of Fr. Montaud. He always had
a soft corner for the Kullar community, took an interest in their affairs and advised
them to lead honest and upright lives so as to secure God’s blessings. His
success among the Kallars was mainly due to his identification with them. He used
to tour Kallarnad in a bullock cart and even shared their poor diet. Owing to his
initiative, some girls joined the school run by the Sisters and some boys were sent
to St. Mary’s High School Madurai. To invite the Kallars to Gospel way of life,
he organised musical recitals i.e., kadakalachebam, since music would help
religious ideas to enter their minds in an interesting way. This powerful
combination of piety and entertainment worked wonders with the Kallars. Through

192. Ibid., p. 158.
194. Ibid.
his incessant work and genuine concern for the Kallars, he began to sway over many a heart of the Kallars who bestowed on him the title ‘Perpetual Lamp of the Kallarnad’ (See Plate – XVI). Even today many Christians of Karumathur area take pride in calling themselves “Montaud Christians”.  

Besides Fr. Prince and Montaud, Fr. Regis Gammon and Fr. Joseph Ingacy were also responsible for the success of the Jesuit endeavours of Kellar reclamation and are still hailed as the “Apostles of the Kallars.” Their contribution was appreciated both by the public and the Government. Through cottage industries and co-operative societies the missionaries helped them to earn their livelihood through honest means. The Jesuits express their willingness to accommodate 50 Kallar girls who could be taught embroidery, weaving and lace-making and also boys in their schools belonging to the Kellar Community. 

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Lyons opened a school and boarding house and a crèche for foundlings and visited the villages to contact the womenfolk, to distribute medicines to ailing children, giving advice and help thus making them friends and collaborators of the scheme. The Sisters cared for the

196. Madras Mail, 6th June, 1926.
abandoned children of the society. Hundreds of orphaned, abandoned and neglected children were sheltered and cared for. The crèche and orphanage had been veritable homes for these children, since the Sisters proved to be real mothers for them. They gave them not only education but also took pains to find them some job so as to fix them in a better position in life. Thus CTA paved the way for a very good rapport between the Kallars and the missionaries through the reclamation scheme in general and education in particular.

It is true that educational institutions played an important part in conversion. J.W. Pickett, the most important chronicler of the Mass Movements in India, has recorded that in every one of the mass movements that he studied (ten in all) schools played a prominent role. Nevertheless it must be kept in mind that in schools only the Christian children were taught the Bible, prayer, hymns, lyrics and the elementary catechism. Nobody taught Christian doctrines to non-Christian children but left it to the free will of them to read Christian religious books and learn Christian doctrines.

However it must be remembered that conversion to Christianity was not used as a pretext to escape police observation as had been recorded by the church historian Hugald Grafe. According to him, “it was exemption from police surveillance and rehabilitation in view of the CTA which required non-Christian
Kallars to bear a passport and report to the nearest police when leaving the
village”¹⁹⁹ that made the Kallars embrace Christianity. Unfortunately his view was
based solely on an interview given by Rev. Athistam belonging to the Piramalai
Kallar Community to Rev. Asirvadam.

Logical inferences and circumstantial evidences stand against that
assumption since

(i) nowhere in the CTA has it been stated that the Kallars who had embraced or
would embrace Christianity would be exempted from the CTA. If it were the
case, there ought to have taken place mass conversion since they were
brought into this hook wholesale.

(ii) It was originally decided that all Kallars should be registered once for all and
exemptions from Sec. 10 (a) were to be freely granted and the section was to
be enforced only against the worst characters and held in terrorem against
others.²⁰⁰ As a result a considerable number was removed from the registers
either as a reward of good conduct or because no suspicion was attached to
them.²⁰¹ Further the educated and respectable Kallars, irrespective of their
religion, were exempted from registration.²⁰² Hence there is no valid reason
for a Kallar to use Christianity as a tool for exemption.

²⁰¹. Ibid., p. 25.
²⁰². Letter from A.R.C. West Lake, District Magistrate of Madurai, to the Secretary to Govt., Loc. cit.
(iii) Moreover nothing could daunt a Kallar from committing crimes if he had decided to carry it out. By setting up alibis through incorrect record of checking, the Kallar criminals were able to commit crime in between the reporting times and the police were rather helpless to forestall them since it became impracticable to have any sort of effective checking for such a large number. This has been corroborated by the administrative report which gives out a statistics of the increase of the Kallar crime due to continued failure of monsoon particularly in the latter part of 1926.\textsuperscript{203} Hence the police were constrained to find out an effective alternative. The result was the introduction of the Abeyance System in 1929.\textsuperscript{204} It enabled the police to concentrate their attention on the really bad characters by exempting less dangerous or less active members on the condition that if their activities were suspicious they would be asked to report to the police station twice every night.\textsuperscript{205} Thus only the police out of desperation were forced to find out different ways and means to rope them in to legality. The Kallars never out of fear or coercion or punishment deterred away from committing crimes. They were dauntless towards any form of oppressions.

(iv) Therefore it is crystal clear that the Kallars must have come into the Christian fold not out of fear for police surveillance but of conviction, rather a longing to have a changed life.

\textsuperscript{204} Madras Criminal Tribes Manual, Madras, 1935, p. 75.
(v) Since the reclamation scheme was a Governmental project meant for all Kallars whether Hindus or Christians the assumption that just to get the benefits of the scheme only they changed religion sounds illogical and unacceptable.

**Other reasons**

Besides education and CTA, there were ever so many reasons for the Kallar conversion.

When the Kallars experienced the power of Gospel through healing miracles and exorcism, they always accepted Christianity as a family which automatically paved the way for web movement among their relatives towards Christ. The oral history of one Ponniah Thevar family\(^{206}\) is a marker on the introduction of Christianity in a community and its acceptance by a family.

The maternal grandfather of Mr. Ponniah Thevar was an honoured member of his clan and was venerated as the *poojari* (head priest) of the *sondha Kovil* viz. the Moonusamy Kovil at Madhipanur. This family’s introduction to Christianity was an interesting and a true episode. Once when a missionary was preaching in the market place about the healing ministry of Jesus Christ, this

\[206.\text{Personal interview with Mrs. Annie Vinoth, aged 30, on 21st May, 2006, at Madurai.}\]

\[\*	ext{The poojari’s name is not known to the grand daughter of Mr. Ponniah Thevar, a Piramalai Kallar who narrated this episode which has been passed on to her by her grand father.}\]
characteristic of Jesus Christ as the healer caught the attention of the priest of the Moonusamy Kovil. Intrigued and fascinated at the revelation, the pujari challenged the missionary whether he could cure the children afflicted with impairment of speech and hearing. For at that time many children of his clan were born deaf and dumb. The missionary replied that he might not be able to cure the already born with this impairment since it had fallen on them as a punishment for their sins, but could stop the occurrence in future through fervent prayers. And so the challenge was accepted by both that if in future the children were born without this physical challenge, the pujari should accept Jesus as the Supreme God. If otherwise the missionary would be burnt to death. Time passed and curiosity aroused and to the amazement of the clan every other child born could speak and hear. Consequently the pujari and his family became converts to Christianity as they were always known for their word of integrity.

Further when death was at hand, chiefly in times of epidemics, the priest or catechist who could dispense remedies were called by the Hindus who submitted themselves to the Christian blessing – the Baptism. The conversion of a sorcerer of Braviampatty, belonging to this caste while on death bed in 1934, recorded by Houpert is a proof of it.\(^{207}\) He has narrated the episode in an

interesting way. The sorcerer Ramasamy was a bitter enemy of the new converts who lost no chance to wreak vengeance on the ‘traitors’ of his tribal gods. In due course, he was laid down with pulmonary tuberculosis. While on deathbed he sent word for the priest to get himself baptised. The missionary in turn insisted that he should first learn the prayers. Just after two weeks once again he sent word for the priest and astonished him by his recital of a part of Catechism and also obliged to get rid of the sorcerer’s tools and the sacred box from his house. On seeing the heir-loom of their family thrown out, his brother began cursing him. The whole village was astir and people could not believe that the old wizard was willing to become a Christian. When asked whether he took the decision with the sole aim of escaping death, he replied that he never cared to know the future instead he expressed his desire to be at peace with God and was immensely happy about becoming the child of God at least then. As he wished he was baptised and rechristened as Vedamanickam Fidelis. After three days he breathed his last in peace. It can very well be understood that unrest and longing for peace with a strong desire to know God made him accept Christianity and nothing else like poverty or suppression or force.

Many patients, forlorn and sick to death in hospital, were very much receptive to the Christian message which provided him/her with mental solace. Temporal calamities such as the death of the dear ones in spite of offerings and
vows made for their recovery to their gods, made some become sick of their gods who could not hear their prayers.  

While some had spiritual motives such as to obtain God’s blessings to their families thereby peace in their hearts whereas some others were attracted by their influential relatives who had become Christians.

In the case of certain others it was out of conviction and inner urge to know spiritual matters as explained in Christianity that made them embrace Christianity. Undeniably some would have embraced Christianity for material benefits too such as free accommodation in the boarding schools, admission in the orphanages, preferences in jobs and such as these.

The enduring love and concern of the missionaries towards the converts was another reason for the conversion. The personal letters of some of the missionaries speak volumes for the love they had for the converts. It would be worth mentioning to quote Pascal’s famous dictum in this regard. “The heart has its reasons which reason does not know”. Since heart is credited with intensive

208. Personal interview with Mrs. Mary Kalavathi, aged 63, a Piramalai Kallar and a Rtd. Staff Nurse of the Mission Hospital, Madurai, on 22nd May, 2006, at Madurai.
209. Personal Interview with Mrs. Stella Sathiyia Seelan, aged 60, a Piramalai Kallar and a retired H.M. of a Govt. Hr.Sec.School, on 23rd May, 2006, at Madurai.
210. Personal Interview with Mrs. Reginiia Jeharaj, aged 56, a Piramalai Kallar and a retired Teacher, on 23rd May, 2006, at Madurai.
211. Letter of Miss Nordmark to Mrs. Kanagavalli Asirvatham. See Annexure – vi.
powers of quick judgements, truth could be understood not only by reason but also by the heart. No wonder that this community with a great sense of gratitude and a chief characteristic of spontaneous submission to love, courtesy and justice felt constrained to accept Christianity. Thus the kindness of the missionaries had gone a long way in converting many Kallars than their zeal, eloquence or learning.

Moreover suppression as a reason for Kellar conversion sounds more illogical because in that case mass conversion ought to have taken place as a natural sequence as was the case with the Nadars, formerly known as Shanars in South Travancore. In Travancore the then society was caste ridden\textsuperscript{212} and the Shanars, the palm tree cultivators, constituted the highest division of the low castes\textsuperscript{213} and their social status corresponded to that of a tenant class.\textsuperscript{214} The law of the land was not equalitarian\textsuperscript{215} and the sooty institution slavery remained as a crying wound in the body politic of the country which could be gleaned from the letter of Mrs. Mault to LMS dated June 21, 1830\textsuperscript{216} which says “slavery as it exists in this kingdom is in some respects worse than that of the West Indies.” Their

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{212} Rev. I.H. Hacker, \textit{A Hundred Years in Travancore}, H.R. Allenson Ltd., London, 1908, p. 16.
\item \textsuperscript{213} \textit{Ibid.}, p.14.
\end{itemize}
indeterminate social status which reduced them to the level of slaves with much
d socio-economic and civil disabilities\textsuperscript{217} such as infringement on their natural rights
in the form of heavy taxation, inhuman treatment meted out by the upper caste and
the inhuman practice of forbidding the womenfolk even to cover the upper part of
their body, provided the missionaries of the LMS who were then at work in South
Travancore with an opportunity to champion the cause of the downtrodden through
an agenda of social reforms with both religious and altruistic motives. The
introduction of western education and liberal ideas and utter disregard for
traditional values found expressions in three Upper Cloth Revolts which took place
in 1822, 1828-30 and in 1855. The involvement of the Christian missionaries like
Charles Mead had brought many a people to Christianity as understood from Rev.
White House’s letter to the Mission dated March 5, 1851. It has been stated “they
became converts not because of their faith in the religion but because they believed
that they could be given protection by the preachers since they had profound
influence on the ruling community.”\textsuperscript{218} It is not much to say that it was the
initiative, enthusiasm and compassion of the missionaries later championed by the

\textsuperscript{217}. Pon. Krishnaswamy, trans., \textit{Marakkappatta Varalaru} (Tamil) I ed., Indian Educational
Academy, Madurai, 1998, pp. 18 – 43.

Resident that prompted the steps towards the abolition of slavery\textsuperscript{219} and the legal sanction for the women folk of the low castes to cover their upper body in 1855 and 1859 respectively. As a mark of gratitude there took place mass conversion.

Perhaps the absence of such circumstances in the history of the Kallars did not necessitate mass conversion among them.

On the basis of the above facts brought forth, it would be sagacious to conclude that the Kallars embraced Christianity for so many reasons and not just because of their poverty or deprivation and suppression by the Government through its coercive methods.