CHAPTER – VI

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Judged by the number of converts, the missionary effort to evangelise the Kallars seems to have yielded not very rewarding results. On the other hand the influence of Christianity on the moral and social life of the Kallar converts had been immeasurable and pervading. Missions aimed not merely at securing the spiritual enlightenment of the individual but also at promoting the healthy social life of the community. The missionaries adopted the promising goal of leavening society with Christian concepts rather than making converts. Though the church could not exert influence it ought to have, there was a dramatic change in the life of the Kallars who accepted Christianity. In the opinion of Mrs. Himmelstrand the effects on the moral and social life of the converts were perhaps more marked than in the matter of education.¹

Change in habits and customs

Though it cannot be said with certainty their customs stopped altogether it is true that a beginning was made in the right direction. Loveluck has

¹ J.S. Ponniah, The Christian Community of Madura, Ramnad and Tinnevelly, Department of Research and Extension, American College, Madurai, 1938, p. 48.
observed that the Kallars had believed that their mission in life was to distribute the wealth of the country by 'robbing Peter to pay Paul'\textsuperscript{2} – Peter being the one with property and Paul being the one without and they invariably considered themselves as being in the position of Paul. Thus they had a strong justification for their inveterate addiction to dacoity and thieving which they assumed to be ‘a duty and a right, sanctioned by descent.’\textsuperscript{3} This very notion underwent a drastic change. The Kallar Christians had begun to show a marked tendency to put away their old habits and to adopt education and other such standards of life.\textsuperscript{4} This fact has been vouchsafed by Mrs. Himmelstrand according to whose version the old ‘occupation’ of cattle lifting and stealing was not practised by the Kallar Christians.\textsuperscript{5} In fact they had become stories of the past among the Christians since they were exposed to the constant teachings of the missionaries which instilled in their minds the principles of honesty and industry. This new awareness enabled them to increasingly abandon their traditional occupations which were considered to be atrocious.

The missionaries had taught them values such as dignity of labour, work culture etc. The missionaries had made them conscious of their dignity as

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{2} E.B. Loveluck, “The Kallar Problem”, \textit{The Police Magazine}, Journal for Publicity Bureau, September 1921, p. 88.
  \item \textsuperscript{3} Jean Abbe Dubois, Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies, III. ed., trans., Henry K. Beauchamp, Oxford,1906, p.17.
  \item \textsuperscript{4} Annual Report of the AMM for 1921, p.12.
  \item \textsuperscript{5} J.S. Ponniah, \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 48.
\end{itemize}
human beings and inspired them with the sense of self-respect and so the Christians had taken up agriculture seriously as their chief means of earning their livelihood. Hitherto they were under the impression that doing certain jobs was below their dignity. But that very idea was combated by the missionaries who left no stone unturned to imprint in their minds the value of dignity of labour. As seen earlier even before the launching of the Kallar Reclamation Scheme by the Government, the Kallar children also were given pre-vocational training in schools in agriculture, carpentry, weaving etc. so that they could stand on their own legs and could lead honest lives. The missionaries realised that if they were offered interesting employment as a substitute that would absorb their attention and keep their minds off robbery. Hence they strained their every nerve to channelise the spirit of emulation which brought more recruits to crime for constructive purpose. Introduction of Scout Movement and Athletics served the purpose.⁶ As a result there was a tremendous change in the mind-set and their life pattern and in their attitude towards labour.

The Christian missionaries had also succeeded in cultivating personal virtues in the Kallar Christians by establishing high standards of personal purity. The substitution of Christian humility for barbaric pride and foolish conceit was manifested in their lives and this helped them to climb up the ladder of their social

and economic life. Instead of acting vindictively, they had started exhibiting Christian doctrines such as love, peace, forgiveness etc. They had kept themselves aloof from quarrels and murders which continued to be a common occurrence in Kallar villages, as witnessed by Mrs. Himmelstrand. They had also stopped carrying with them any deadly weapons.

Moreover the missionaries had cultivated in them habits of industry and frugality. The people who were in the habit of whiling away a major part of the year in idleness hitherto became industrious like other people around them and started enjoying the fruits of their hard labour with pride and dignity. Further through the ‘Home Savings’ system, introduced by Mrs. Himmelstrand they learnt to be frugal too.

Gambling which was the root cause of many vices was very common among the Kallars. The increasing extent of gambling especially among those who could ill afford it alarmed the missionaries and called for action. Though legislative control was most difficult they believed that public sentiment would support the suppression of all forms of gambling. As a result of constant preaching against this vice most of the Kallar Christians refrained from practising it, as vouchsafed by Mrs. Himmelstrand.

8. J.J. Banninga, *Letter Written to the Indian Statutory Commission*, New Delhi, dated June 12, 1928, UTC Archives, Bangalore, Box - 2, Folder No. 11.
Polygamy was another important aspect which drew the attention of the missionaries. Since the Hindu law legalised polygamy making the marriage of a second wife as legal and binding as the first marriage even while the first wife was alive, rendered the job of the missionaries very difficult. To make matters worse, even the British Government recognised that law as valid since it did not want to meddle with the problem connected with the customs and culture of the natives. Hence in certain cases it became impossible for a polygamist to obtain a legal divorce from either of his wives.\textsuperscript{10} The difficulty was even more pronounced with regard to the Kallars who had grown up in the midst of such practices and had never heard the validity or rightfulness of such unions questioned. But the church was keen on eradicating this evil from the Christian community and so only those who got a legal divorce from others except the first wife were admitted into the church. However in due course the AMM had formally decided to admit polygamists to baptism provided “they had contracted their marriage in ignorance and that there seemed no equitable way of securing a separation.”\textsuperscript{11} To all intents and purposes polygamy and concubinage which were allowed by the caste rules were given up by most of the Kallar Christians.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[10] Missionary Experience or Reports or Letters Feb - May 1855 - Connected with special Meetings of the Mahratta, Madura and Ceylon Missions of the ABCFM, Printed at the presses of the Board, Bombay and Madras, 1855, p. 41.
\end{footnotes}
In their married life too a great difference could be noticed. Mrs. Himmelstrand has observed that the custom of marrying a quite young boy to a much older woman in the name of Sudanthiram was done away with among the Christians.\textsuperscript{12} Divorces and re-marriages which were common among the Hindu Kallars became rare phenomena among the Kallar Christians. Very rarely the Christian Kallars had left their wives and re-married in the old fashion.\textsuperscript{13} The old custom of bridegroom riding on a horse back on wedding day and the bride walking behind at a distance became rare and both used to go together in wedding procession.\textsuperscript{14} The custom of enlarging the ear-lobes among the girls was to a great extent abolished among the Christians.\textsuperscript{15} So also, according to Mrs. Himmelstrand, the custom of circumcision of boys was also done away with.\textsuperscript{16}

Thus despite the fact that custom was the great law for the Kallars, one by one it was given up by the Christians.

**Changes in Moral life**

The strongest factor instrumental for moral and social changes was the stimulus given to education. According to Rev. Athishtam, himself a

\begin{itemize}
  \item[12.] J.S. Ponniah, *Loc. cit.*
  \item[13.] Ibid.
  \item[15.] J.S. Ponniah, *Loc. cit.*
  \item[16.] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
beneficiary, thousands of Kallar boys and girls were taught in Mission Boarding and Day schools, Training schools, Colleges and in the Industrial and Divinity schools. Approximately 60% of men and 25% of women between the age of 5 and 30 became literates. The Boarding school was unique in the sense that it afforded the largest possible opportunity for surrounding the children in their developing stage with those wholesome influences which became imprinted upon their characters. Improvement in morality was the direct outcome since children were away from their villages. The upbringing of Kallar youth in Christian Boarding Homes had caused a great change among the women because they learnt from childhood a more disciplined way of life and to conform to healthy rules. In the field of education missionaries wanted to impress the younger generation with their new theories, ideas and beliefs. As stated earlier, in the beginning in the event of baptism the educational institutions became empty due to panic and there was a general belief that the missionaries ran the educational institutions with the sole aim of conversion. In spite of these misgivings the Kallars had the mind to send their children to mission schools because of their anxiety to procure a government job which was the ‘magic wand’ for these schools. Thus it was mainly financial

desire that induced the Kallars to take up education rather than any love for education. Though the missionaries were guided by religious motives to start with, when days went by the object of mission education shifted from conversion to a mere diffusion of Christian principles and ideals leading to much attraction for mission schools. As a result a good number of Kallars received education and became teachers, pastors, evangelists and catechists. Many entered into government services, army and police services.

Education brought about a remarkable change in their personal behaviour. The converts developed an intense feeling of self-respect and self-reliance they had never before. The educated Kallars had become very refined and tried to imitate the missionaries in many ways. First of all, the children who were raised in the orphanages which were veritable homes of the forsaken developed no sense of attachment to caste. They learnt to exhibit their love and concern for others openly as the missionaries did. The impact of the missionaries on the minds of the Kallar children could be understood from the following episodes.

“One of the boys who recently left our school and failed in the High school went into business and is earning a good salary in a Government Office. Only a few weeks ago, he sent a liberal contribution, a part of which was to be used for the Boarding school and the remainder for work in one of the newly
organised schools for the Kallars”.20 Thus by imitating the missionaries the Kallar boy could exhibit his concern for others.

“There is a small Kallar boy of 9 or 10 years, an orphan, so poor that every stitch of clothing he has to his name is one veshti (loin cloth). For several months outside of school hours he has been bringing water and helping our language teacher in various personal ways for a trifling sum a month. When vacation time came, the teacher was sick. The little 9 year old boy brought him the money he had received for the work of the last 3 or 4 weeks saying, ‘you are sick, sir, take this and buy something to eat’. When the language teacher refused it saying that he received a salary and had plenty, the little fellow was not content. But the teacher was firm. Soon the little chap bringing a cupful of dried peas and a few pieces of candy, the first Christmas present he had ever received and insisted that the teacher take this at any rate. Though this too was refused, he would not be satisfied until one piece of the candy was taken”.21 Thus they were made to taste the pleasure of giving which they observed in the missionaries.

Rev. Athishtam had been an eye witness to the following episode.

The mission school in the village Kovilangulam, near Usilampatti, had made a permanent change in the lives of 8 students through its Christian education. Even

21. Ibid.
after leaving the school those students used to meet very often and prayed together. After a period of nearly 20 years they got baptised as Christians. When they returned home their wives refused to serve them food. Had it happened earlier, such an act would have ended in a divorce since no Kallar could tolerate such a breach of duty on the part of his wife. As a rule a man never served himself food when the wife was at home. But those resolute young men sat on their verandas for 3 days without food. Within a year, their life changed their wives and they too were baptised and they had built even a prayer house. They led a true Christian life in the real sense of the term. When once beaten without any valid reason by the Hindus they refrained from reporting and instead prayed for their aggressors.\textsuperscript{22}

Rev. and Mrs. George Athishtam of Usilampatti were running an orphanage called “Our Home” in their place from 1934 as a mark of gratitude to the AMM missionary Dr. Washerburn, in whose orphanage the parents of both were brought up and educated. That orphanage was a good piece of Christian service with a powerful message for progress of evangelism and rural uplift.\textsuperscript{23}

Thus the missionaries succeeded in the creation of a new type of individual character through personality reconstruction.


\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 28.
Changes in Social life

Education and character had raised their dignity and respect in the eyes of other castes. In their dress, manners and habits they began to imitate the missionaries. Many of them were able to secure higher posts in the official hierarchy as IPS officers, Revenue officials, Magistrates, Army personnel etc. Many became professionals like doctors, engineers, lawyers etc. Thus they could grab elite positions in all spheres and in all walks of life. Some of them with more leanings towards religion took to preaching as pastors, evangelists or engaged themselves in full time ministry. Many lesser privileged, thanks to the openings of Teacher Training colleges and Institutes, became dedicated teachers. The people of other castes who desired their extermination, now started loving them. Thus the missionaries succeeded in bringing about a change in public opinion about the Kallars.

Uplift of women

The well known social reformer Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy says, “the missions have done more for women’s education in our country than the Government itself”.24 Rev. V.S. Azariah, is absolutely right with his comment .... "Christians were every where the first to break the shackles in which the women

were bound and set them free to know and understand the world”.\textsuperscript{25} The
pronounced aim of female education by the missions and churches was originally
not to produce scholars but to give women ‘the capability to fulfil their new role in
a changing society’.\textsuperscript{26} Zenana work helped the leavening of society rather than
conversion.\textsuperscript{27}

One of the greatest difficulties for the missionaries in the work of
Kallarnad was the backwardness of women.\textsuperscript{28} Kallar women were said to be
‘inflexibly vindictive and furious on the least injury even on suspicion’ which
prompted them to take the most violent revenge without any regard to
consequences. They had been the driving force of men into their guilt.\textsuperscript{29} There was
not a single Kallar woman in 1000 in Thirumangalam region who knew to read
and write. That was why Mrs. Dudley of AMM took pride in 10 little Kallar girls
who received education in the Thirumangalam Boarding school.\textsuperscript{30} According to
Mrs. Himmelstrand the women in Kallarnad had a status and an importance not
always common.\textsuperscript{31} Very often the freedom of the Kallar women and certain
unsteadiness in their character were the causes of domestic trouble.

\textsuperscript{25} Sundararaj Manickam, “Missionary Education and Social Progress in India,” \textit{Studies in Missionary
\textsuperscript{26} Hugald Grafe, \textit{History of Christianity in India}, Vol. IV, CHAI, Bangalore, 1990, p. 205.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 206.
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Annual Report of the AMM for 1922}, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Annual Report of the AMM for 1921}, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
When the missionaries first attempted to commence work among the girls it was with the greatest difficulty that they could induce their parents to allow them to learn. Education in women was associated with immorality. Conservatism of the older members of the family made them strongly oppose it on the ground that gods would be angry and show their displeasure for departing from their time-honoured customs by removing the husbands of girls who had been taught. The lady missionaries of various Missionary Societies had to destroy such prejudices through their persistent efforts. Through the wide spread of education many young Kallar women were trained as teachers (See Plate XVII) and they found employment in Government Kallar schools with a good salary. They had thus been enabled to help their parents in all possible ways. Besides being teachers, as wives of pastors, teachers and officers, these women had a high standard of culture. Their old caste custom of leaving the upper part of the body uncovered with clothes was done away with was the testimony of Mrs. Himmelstrand. These educated Kallar women were able to prevail upon their husbands to turn a new leaf in their lives.

**End of Female infanticide**

Female infanticide proved to be a real menace among the Kallars. As seen earlier, woman was considered as economic liability. While the birth of a son

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32. Personal interview with Mrs. *Kamala Rosalind*, aged 70, a Piramalai Kallar and a Rtd. teacher, on 27th May, 2006, at Thirumangalam.
was welcomed with great jubilation, the birth of a girl was viewed with disfavour since marriage customs and prestations were a real burden on the parents. Since Christianity refines and purifies man’s estimate of woman and insures to her a measure of respect and fealty the missionaries had felt themselves compelled to speak out in condemnation against the atrocity of female infanticide. The missionary view was so decided that it was impossible to let it pass unnoticed. As a result of constant preaching against this social evil, it was put an end to among the Kallar Christians.

Even among the members of the Kallar caste who were non-Christians a movement had taken place for the betterment of their women. A ‘Society' was formed to promote the marrying of only one wife and the remarriage of widows. They started approaching the Christian workers to inquire the teaching of the Bible on the subject of marriage.35

**Change of attitude towards caste**

Though caste system is anti-ethical to Christianity, many South Indian Christians maintained it and used their new religion as a way of gaining greater respectability for their caste in the social hierarchy.36 Same was the case with the Kallars too. Caste barriers against inter-dining and inter-mingling with

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people of other castes were slowly disappearing. Formerly the low caste people were called by their caste name. Even officers of low caste too had to suffer from many social disabilities such as getting water or seats in a Kallar village. Rev. Athishtam has recorded that once a Harijan teacher was seen with a missionary on village platform and for that ‘crime’ of having treated himself an ‘equal’ with the Kallars of the village, he was beaten up as soon as the missionary left the village.\textsuperscript{37} Such unreasonable treatments were slowly disappearing. Rev. Athishtam had been an eye witness of this change of attitude of the Christian Kallars towards caste. They even championed the cause of the poor Harijan Christians when they were beaten and rendered homeless by their Hindu brethren. Along with their pastor, they went and chided their brethren for their acts and even threatened to file a suit for damages in the court.\textsuperscript{38} Thus Christianity enabled them to identify themselves with the low caste Christians and treat them as brothers. Nevertheless, the evil of casteism could not be completely eradicated from the minds of the Kallar Christians and unfortunately it still persists.

\textbf{Changes in the economic life}

In the view of Mrs. Himmelstrand the effect of their changed religion had not meant a great difference in their economic life.\textsuperscript{39} Even after conversion the Kallars continued to be poor. Some of them had to mortgage their lands even and

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{39} J.S. Ponniah, \textit{Loc. cit.}
were heavily indebted. However the entire scenario underwent a change with the spread of education which kept the doors for employment wide open for the educated. The educated youth both male and female were able to shoulder the responsibility of their parents. Even semi-literate and illiterate found employment in factories, mills and also in the railways. The co-operative societies started for Christian employees had also greatly helped in this matter. As seen earlier the small Savings Society which was started for poor village Christians enabled them to start some small scale ventures. Mr. Dudley’s social reform of setting a limit to bride money and jewellery had provided them with great relief. As a result economically they were becoming far better than many other communities.

General housing conditions and the general sanitation of the locality were improved. They were taught to cut unnecessary expenditure and to limit borrowing so that they could be saved from interest charges. By removing the wrong notion about illness much economic loss had been stopped by the contribution of Christianity to the prevention and cure of illness. Literacy gave them the needed protection against fraud. Thus education was mainly responsible for bringing changes in the economic lives of the Kallars in general and not conversion as such. In fact conversion to Christianity had not brought about any spectacular change in their economic condition.
Changes in the religious life

The Kallar Christians had stopped all idol-worship and were evidently convinced of the futility of sacrifices to demons and of magical rites to ward off evil spirits in which they no longer believed. Christian instruction inculcated into their minds the existence of only one Almighty God who is good and a loving Father to them.40 As a result some ruling ideas were dethroned. Tangible changes in the life of the former Hindus such as the surrender of idols and sacred boxes and other utensils for sacrifices and other forms of worship had taken place. Because they were convinced of the fact that through sacrifices they could not free themselves from punishment for their sins after their death and hence they were taught to confess their sins and pray for forgiveness to Jesus Christ whose mission was to save the sinners through His bloodshed. Further resorting to sorcerers for curing illness was also given up by the Christians.41

Thus in diverse ways – directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, Christian missions have played a major role in the transformation of the Kalla community into an honourable one. At present the Kallars are recognised in the society for their outstanding record of achievements as teachers, pastors, scholars, administrators and leaders of thought and movements.

40. Personal interview with Rev. Daniel Manoharan, aged around 70, on 10th May, 2006, at Madurai.
41. Personal interview with Rev. Daniel Duraisamy, aged 85, on 22nd May, 2006, at Usilampatti.
Why less Impact

In spite of the merits mentioned above, Christianity has failed to make long strides among the Kallars. The following could be the possible reasons for that.

i. The uplift work for the Kallars, though channelised through Christian missions, was definitely a governmental project for all Kallars whether they were Hindus or Christians. To be a beneficiary of the reclamation scheme, a Kallar need not to have become a Christian at all. Moreover the organisations run by the missionaries were secular in total. No pre-conditions regarding the faith or caste were laid. Their premises were kept wide open for all those entering and enjoying the benefits. Hence the situation did not necessitate a Kallar to become a Christian.

ii. The missionaries of course did not compromise in certain matters in the wake of conversion especially caste and polygamy. In the words of a protestant missionary E.T. Rhenius, “After a 100 years of mission work, attachment to caste has increased, not diminished among the Christians.”42 Since the mantle of caste was closer than the mantle of Christian religion for a Kallar, he did not like to give up his caste which was more than his life. The Kallar

Christians continued to assume their caste title *Thevar* and to marry within their caste and never liked to inter-marry. Even if there was any such thing, it was a rare one with all boycotts. True to the observation of Oddie that the converts who opted for Christianity outside the mass movement were faced with problems related to the selection of spouses, here also the Kalla converts found it very difficult to get proper partners within the small group of Christians. They had to resort to their Hindu relatives and this was sometimes done at the cost of the Christian faith. To prevent them from relapsing to Hinduism, in the early years, the missionaries assumed a large measure of responsibility for introducing their individual converts to marriageable partners. Perhaps such incidents only made Rev. Sharrock pun on the need for missionaries in India to be M.A.s (Matrimonial Agents). The unwillingness of the missions to admit polygamists into the church also might have reduced the charm of Christianity in the eyes of the Kallars.

iii. The firm grip of the Kallars in their religion and culture also could not be uprooted so easily. Moreover the missionaries especially the Roman Catholics also did not want to alienate them from the social life of their non-Christian

44. Personal interview with Rev. Dr. D. Chellappa on 17th May, 2006, at Thanjavur.
caste fellows. The customary rites and rituals at the time of birth, puberty, adulthood, marriage, old age and death were retained by the Christians too with slight modifications – just by adding a sign of cross and by giving a new Christian interpretation to the customary rituals. In other areas of cultural life too the Kallar Christians retained their Tamil cultural identity.\(^{46}\) This fact is corroborated by the letter of the missionary Dr. Washerburn to Dr. Banninga which goes like this…. “And now the time has come when India would have the story of the Christ in a style more in harmony with her modes of thinking.”\(^{47}\) As a result, the converts were not alienated from the non-Christian Kallars. Their affiliation to their ancestral religion was exhibited even in christening their children with Hindu names along with Christian names such as James Mayandi, George Virumandi, Peter Perumal, David Malaichamy etc. The reverence for their guru (religious leader) could be seen in their attitude towards the pastor. Though the redeeming power of Christ was accepted still they believed in the concept of punniyam or righteousness. Dumont opines each Muslim or Christian has something Hindu in him.\(^{48}\) So also every Kallar Christian. That was the main reason why they were not able

\(^{46}\) Personal interview with Mr. Chinnasamy Thevar, on 12\(^{\text{th}}\) May, 2006, at Karumathur.

\(^{47}\) Letter from Washerburn to Dr. Banninga dated August 29, 1924, UTC Archives, Bangalore, Box 2, folder No. 2.

to leave their Hindu ceremonies and festivals especially those related to home life which proved to be very attractive. They were even tempted to take part in them to please their Hindu relatives and neighbours. Lapses occurred mostly among the uneducated who had no sufficient knowledge of the Christian faith and therefore were more or less indifferent. Hence the impact of Hinduism on uneducated Kallar Christians was evident in many ways.\textsuperscript{49} The consultation of astrologers, the observance of auspicious and inauspicious days, the practice of magical rites to ward off evils, so on and so forth had a tenacious grip on the minds of the Kallar Christians. On critical occasions, some secretly sought the help of the old gods. On occasions of serious sickness in a family, epidemics or other calamities, soothsayers, sorcerers, magicians and Hindu priest would be resorted to. Thus the converts mostly needed constant watchfulness and much instruction to keep them in the right way.\textsuperscript{50} Otherwise with some there was a tendency to relapse into idol worship and other Hindu practices, probably because of fear for the demons. The people who believed that the old gods were visiting their house or village especially of those who had been converted because of marriage showed a tendency to relapse in to Hinduism.

\textsuperscript{49} Personal interview with Mr. \textit{George Virumandi}, on 4\textsuperscript{th} May 2006, at Madurai.

iv. Some Kallar Christians had never left their evil practices like quarrel, consumption of liquor etc. fully. After the departure of the missionaries, they felt free to continue their evil practices and hence they ceased to be an attraction to their Hindu brethren. The adage ‘a friend who is unfriendly makes the worst enemy’ was probably nowhere more conspicuously illustrated than in the attitude of those nominal Christians towards missionary effort. Dissatisfaction or quarrels with the pastors in the case of church discipline proved to be real stumbling blocks to the growth of Christianity even.\textsuperscript{51} Since they were following a religion (Hinduism) which was the most democratic of all religions with no controlling authority, wherein every Hindu had full freedom of thought and interpretation, they could not get along with the domination of the church and the mission.

v. Kallars, being very sensitive to hurting words and quick tempered by nature, used to lose their balance of thought if they were offended in their independence. When they were called as ‘rice-Christians’\textsuperscript{52} by their fellow men they were put to shame and this forbade them from openly confessing the new religion.

\textsuperscript{51} Personal interview with Rev. Daniel Manoharan on 12\textsuperscript{th} May, 2006, at Madurai.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
vi. The last but not the least was the revival of Hinduism. “The fear of the Christian missionary has been the beginning of much social wisdom among us” says K. Natarajan, the proprietor of the Indian Social Reformer, founded in 1890 by the rationalist wing among the Madras reformers.\textsuperscript{53} It is true that the social reform movement in India owes its inspiration to Christianity. The missionaries through their educational institutions, hostels and hospitals exerted much influence on the views, ideas and ideals of the non-Christians too. The educated young Hindus evinced so much admiration for western culture which was at times expressed in a bizarre way such as eating of beef etc. so as to prove that they cared a jot for their society which imposed odd customs on them.\textsuperscript{54} Hence the alarmed Hindu society started several organisations such as the Hindu Literary Society (1833),\textsuperscript{55} the first English School (1834), the first Hindu News Paper – the Native Interpreter (1840),\textsuperscript{56} the Vibuthi Sangam or Sacred Ashes society and the Sadur Veda Siddhanta Sabha\textsuperscript{57} at Madras in the 1840s which published tracts as well as periodicals with a view to counteract the activities of the missionaries and thereby to create a new Hindu consciousness.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{56} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 159.
\bibitem{57} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 158.
\end{thebibliography}
Consequently there came into being educated elite among the Hindus with a conviction of purging the Hindu society. Missionaries for the purpose of the promotion of Hinduism were sent to different parts of the country. A ‘Hindu Progressive Improvement Society’ was started in 1852 due to the awareness of social change and uplift in terms of reforms as a reaction to and effect of Christian thought and life. This trend was given further impetus by the formation of the Theosophical society in 1875 in New York with many branches in South India at Adyar, Trichirappalli, Thanjavur, Kumbakonam, Mayiladuthurai, Nagapattinam, Madurai, Tirunelveli, Nagercoil etc. Besides this the ‘Hindu Free Thought Union’, founded in 1880 at Madras, attacked Christianity tooth and nail and the ‘Hindu preaching society’ (1881) and the ‘Hindu Tract Society’ (1887) turned the Hindu revival into a systematic campaign against Christianity. Their main aim was declared thus – “Let caste and sectarian differences be forgotten and let all people join as one man to banish Christianity from our land by winning back all Christians to Hinduism and withdrawing all children from Christian schools.” Christianity was portrayed as an absurd, contradictory, unscientific, second-rate and evil religion. Hindu preachers labelled missionaries as enemies of Indian

60. Ibid.
61. Ibid., p. 162.
culture and civilization\textsuperscript{62} and the vilest abuse of the Bible, Christ and Christians became the order of the day.\textsuperscript{63}

A fillip was given to Hindu revivalism with the return of Swami Vivekananda from America after the World’s Fair at Chicago in 1897. He presented Hinduism as a religion for all mankind. Hence the Hindu community emerged more self-assertive and the attitude of the educated class towards the Christian church ranged all the way from friendship to open defiance.\textsuperscript{64} Patriotism was interpreted as being synonymous with loyalty to their ancestral faith and a tenacious maintenance of Vedantic philosophy by the educated Hindus.\textsuperscript{65} Thus Hindu revivalism succeeded in arousing a new Nationalism which was positively averse to Christianity. As a result the Hindus also started preaching Hinduism in the streets and giving religious instructions in schools besides daily opening prayers.\textsuperscript{66} The tenets of Hinduism were taught to the children of the religious boarding school, opened by Meenakshi temple in Madurai and boarded at the expense of the temple funds.\textsuperscript{67}

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\item \textsuperscript{62} Swami Chidbhavanandha, “The Hindu View of Christianity”, Christianity in India – A Critical study, Vivekananda Kendra Prakasham, Madras, 1979, p. 29.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Annual Report of the AMM for 1901, p. 166.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Annual Report of the AMM for 1898, p. 10.
\item \textsuperscript{65} Annual Report of the AMM for 1901, p. 165.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Annual Report of the AMM for 1898, p. 10.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
In their frantic effort to revive Hinduism, the activists began to
denounce the missionaries of Christianity of trying to convert people of other
religions through allurement and force. Helping the poor and the needy, feeding
the hungry, clothing the naked etc. were viewed with great suspicion and
considered deplorable. The new self-conscious, nationalistic Hinduism stigmatized
the mass movement as proselytism.\textsuperscript{68} The ‘enormous’ salaries to Christian
missionaries from the Indian revenues was criticised as being misused for
‘converting the progeny in their youth into the enemies of our race.’\textsuperscript{69} It is to be
admitted that revival of Hinduism was a spectacular attempt on the part of the
Hindu activists to bring many new converts back to Hinduism. Nevertheless their
‘memory loss syndrome’ could be seen in the forgotten stories of the missionaries
who served our Hindu society with self-less dedication and compassion.
Arun Shourie in his work of recent times\textsuperscript{70} has wrongly categorised the British
administrators, scholars and the missionaries in to one ‘mission team’ with the
main purpose of converting the Hindus, serving the British imperial interests and
destabilising our nation. He has thus posed himself as strong voice of the adverse
Hindu sentiments against Christian missionaries. It is a pity that he could see no

\textsuperscript{68} S. Estborn, \textit{The Church among Tamils and Telugus}, NCCI, IMC Study series, Nagpur, 1961, p.30.
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Desa Bhaktan}, 26\textsuperscript{th} April 1921, Madras, MNNR, p. 545.
\textsuperscript{70} Arun Shourie, \textit{Missionaries in India – Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas}, Horper Collins,
New Delhi, 1997, pp. 130 – 160.
worth while motives of the missionaries who did every thing for the welfare of natives through an agenda of social reforms. However this has attracted criticisms from secular writers such as Mani Shankar Aiyar\textsuperscript{71} and Kushwant Singh\textsuperscript{72} who have dared to label his attempt as ‘a mission of hate’ and an act of ‘eating missionaries’ respectively.

It must be remembered that conversion from one religion to another has been a reality in India from ancient times. In fact Hinduism was given its first blow by classical Buddhism through its teachings against the social evil - caste. If conversion meant exploitation what justification could be given to that scenario in the 6\textsuperscript{th} century B.C. or what could have been the ‘ulterior motive’ of Dr. Ambedkar who spear headed the Neo-Buddhist Movement? In the case of the so called ‘untouchables’ of Meenakshipuram what factor actually lured them to switch over to Islam in spite of the great reform in Hinduism? It is crystal clear that in the aforementioned cases conversion proved to be nothing but an outward expression of their social protest or an act of revolt against the society in which the converts were born and brought up. It was nothing but an answer to the search of the depressed for self dignity and freedom from the oppressive caste system of the Hindu society. Hence denouncing the missionaries and belittling their intentions would not be appreciable on the part of any civilised community of any nation.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} Mani Shankar Aiyar, \textit{Mission of Hate}, Arun Shourie and the Christian Evangelists, Sunday, 26\textsuperscript{th} June, 1994.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Kushwant Singh, “Eating Missionaries”, The Week, 12\textsuperscript{th} June, 1994.
\end{itemize}
Undeniably the missionaries committed a blunder of westernising their new converts through western names, dress and even western habits of eating etc. Perhaps this impact might have been due to the close contact the converts had with the missionaries. Unfortunately in due course the converts began to assume airs of superiority and started condemning their traditional heritage. Their ‘affected dignity’ was enough to create a mistaken identity for the converts in the public mind.  

73. Even the Kallars began to misconstrue the best intentions of the missionaries who strained their every nerve to transform their lives for the betterment and drifted away from Christianity.

To make matters worse the best of the Kallar congregations started leaving their villages to urban areas so as to keep themselves away from their ‘unsaved’ brethren. This had a telling effect on those who had some justification or the other for their positive aversion to Christianity. Hence attempts were made to thwart every kind of missionary activity. Street preaching was disturbed and broken up in some cases. Christian preachers were even molested.  

74. Perhaps the resurgence of Hinduism which was thus closely bound up with the Nationalist movement might have begun to dominate the outlook of the Kallars towards Christianity. The Kallars were accused of betraying their country, their ancestors and their own caste and of stooping down to the level of

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73. Kesari N. Sahay, *Christianity and Culture Change in India*, Inter-India Publications, New Delhi, 1986, p. 23.

the depressed classes. Most probably many Kallars who showed positive signs of becoming Christians might have given up that idea and drifted away from Christianity and there by rendering the missionary slogan “Kallar Nad for Christ by 1925” only a dream. Perhaps the thought that such a big and valiant community should not be lost to Hinduism, might have forced some Hindu officials to take some drastic steps to contain the spread of Christianity.\textsuperscript{75} One among the steps was wrestling away the Kallar schools from the hands of the missions and placing them directly under the control of the Government.\textsuperscript{76} Obviously this might have forced many Kallars who were oscillating to return to Hinduism and consequently a reduction in the number of converts.

Moreover a continuous effort was going on to engulf the Kallars in to the Hindu fold through various efforts of Sanskritization with all the help of the Government and Brahmin organisations. Further the Kallars proved to be the backbones of the Self-Respect Movement and became prominent political leaders in all Dravidian and Communist parties which opposed all religious activities. Thus the missionaries met with so many hurdles in the form of Hindu revivalism, communism and pessimism. Naturally the gospel work underwent a sluggish and unproductive period. Hence despite the zeal and zest of the missionaries, their

\textsuperscript{76} J.J. Banninga, \textit{Notes on the History of the AMM Since its Seventy Fifth Anniversary in 1909}, Boston, 1944, p. 167.
efforts were not crowned with any grand success and the condition of the then existing churches among the Kallars was neither cold nor hot.

**Modern Missionary period**

With the devolution of powers and responsibility of the missions to the Indian churches and the Christian community by the foreign missions, the Indian churches became self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating. Besides the Church of South India (CSI), the Roman Catholic Church (RC) and the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (TELC), many modern indigenous organisations such as the Church Growth Missionary Movement (CGMM), India Church Growth Mission (ICGM), and many Pentecostal Missions such as Ceylon Pentecostal Mission (CPM), Indian Pentecostal church (IPC), Assemblies of God, (AG), Maranatha, Zion church, Layman’s Evangelical Fellowship and Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) have taken up the responsibility of evangelism among these Kallars as a continuation of western missionary efforts. While the missionaries had education and social service as means of evangelism, these organisations concentrate only on the preaching of Gospel in which process even lay people are involved.

**Pentecostal Ministry**

As far as the Pentecostal ministry is concerned, to begin with a branch work in the form of Sunday class for children is started. Then a house is

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77. Personal interview with pastor P. Prabhakar, aged 40, a Piramalai Kallar and Dean of the Students, A.G. Seminary, Kalavasal, Madurai, on 6th May, 2006, at Madurai.
prepared for prayer wherein the sick and the needy are called over for prayer. The
Sunday Class Ministry gradually grows into a Sunday Service. Depending on the
number of believers, a branch church is established in a hired place for Sunday
service and an assistant pastor is appointed. With the increase in the number of
believers a regular church is born. Through personal evangelism, street preaching,
Gospel meetings and Deliverance and Healing crusade, (since it is vital for a
Kallar to see Jesus’ power as a God of deliverance) the Gospel work is carried on.

**Missionary Organisations**

A missionary movement called Madurai Missionary Movement got
split in to two organisations - CGMM and ICGM which carry on evangelisation
among the Kallars.

**CGMM**

The Church Growth Missionary Movement was founded by Rev.
Bose Meiyappan at Madurai. Originally the aim of this ministry was to preach
gospel in Madurai district. But in due course, their work got extended not only
outside Madurai district but also to other states. Hence their ministerial base
among the Kallars was confined to two places within the Usilampatti taluk –
Vaalandur and Kannanur. Consequently their work among this community is
limited.
India Church Growth Mission, founded by Rev. Gnanaiah in 1980 at Madurai concentrates much on this community. It proves to be very successful since its founder as well as majority of the staff - 128 out of 205 - belong to this community. Perhaps communal affinity is acting as the driving force among these people. Because invariably evangelists belonging to their community are welcome heartily and listened to attentively. As far as their ministry is concerned they at first find out the receptive area and follow up work is done leading people to take decision. Gospel is preached through Bible stories, Biblical films and testimony of converts. Through house to house evangelisation, they carry on personal evangelism. In the receptive villages, open air meetings are conducted in the evenings. After finding out responses through an altar call a core group is formed and these possible converts are followed up regularly and systematically by a field worker. When the number of believers swells to 15-20 they are all baptised and a regular congregation is formed. Sunday worship is conducted either in a house or under a tree or in the local school. When they are sure of the on going growth of the congregation, a church is built in the village and a pastor is appointed to guide them in the Biblical path. The best of the new converts are trained to be soul-winners. They also carry on many programmes such as Bible study, women’s fellowship, village church conventions, fasting prayer and elders' meeting. They also cater to the earthly need of the believers with the help of ‘World Vision of India’.

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78. Personal interview with Rev. Titus Kadappaichamy, aged 45, General Secretary, ICGM, Madurai, on 5th May, 2006, at Madurai.
Through the sponsorship of that organisation nearly 2000 Kallar children have been educated and many developmental projects are carried on under Usilampatti Rural Development project such as sinking of bore-wells, provision for drinking water facilities, providing loans for self employment etc. during their plan period of 1988-2007. This project has gone a long way among the Kallars to enable them to repose their confidence in this mission and to reduce opposition to ministry.

According to their statistics there are 300 Christian families of the Kallars in Usilampatti and Thirumangalam taluks put together and CGMM has successfully established 22 churches in Usilampatti taluk and 7 churches in Thirumangalam taluk.

Thus the spread of Christianity among the Piramalai Kallars is an on-going process.
### Early Missionary Organisations’ Service in Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Mission</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Roman Catholic Mission (From The Year 1700)</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>American Madura Mission (From the Year 1834)</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (From the Year 1928)</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The Early Missionary Organisations’ Service in Years Among the Piramalai Kallars

- **Roman Catholic Mission (From The Year 1700)**: 300 Years
- **American Madura Mission (From the Year 1834)**: 172 Years
- **Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (From the Year 1928)**: 72 Years

**Churches**
The number of Kallar Christians in the Churches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Mission</th>
<th>No. of Piramalai Kallar Christians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Roman Catholic Mission</td>
<td>2752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>American Madura Mission</td>
<td>3980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(From the Year 1834)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Church of Sweden of 1874</td>
<td>1536</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of Piramalai Kallar Christians in the Churches

Name of Missions

![Bar chart showing the number of Piramalai Kallar Christians in different missions. The missions are Roman Catholic Mission, American Madura Mission (From the Year 1834), and Church of Sweden of 1874. The numbers are 2752, 3980, and 1536 respectively.]
### Total Number of Churches Among Piramalai Kallars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Mission</th>
<th>Usilampatti</th>
<th>Thirumangalam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Roman Catholic Mission (from The Year 1700)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>American Madura Mission (From the Year 1834)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (From the Year 1928)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Bar chart showing the number of churches among Piramalai Kallars for Usilampatti and Thirumangalam.

- **Roman Catholic Mission (from The Year 1700)**
  - Usilampatti: 7
  - Thirumangalam: 12
- **American Madura Mission (From the Year 1834)**
  - Usilampatti: 6
  - Thirumangalam: 16
- **Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (From the Year 1928)**
  - Usilampatti: 8
  - Thirumangalam: 7

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The Modern Missionary Organisations’ service in Years Among the Piramalai Kallars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Church</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The Pentecostal Mission</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Assemblies of God</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Maranatha</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Layman's Evangelical Fellowship</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Seventh Day Adventist</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Indian Church Growth Mission</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Zion Church</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Belivers Prayer Fellowship</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Modern Missionary Organisations' Service in Years Among the Piramalai Kallars

![Pie chart showing the years of service for each church]