

Fight For Social Identity In Travancore

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Abstract

Travancore, one of the princely State of South India and it is one of the most beautiful territory in this world. Many kings ruled these states .One dynasty called Cheras was ruled by them and it was called Chera Nadu or Vanchidesam. In these times, the people of that area realized the social degradation under which they were groaning for many decades. After that, the western education, that they received, opened their eyes for this civilized world and they learnt the free life of the people of the common world. . When they compared their life style, they could understand the abhor able ways in which they were treated under the feudal set up and obnoxious taxes under which they were groaning for a long time. Now they understand their social identity as a question. They decided to fight for social identity for their development and to their future life.

Keywords: *Travancore, social degradation, beautiful, feudal, education, advancement, Identity.*

INTRODUCTION

Travancore, one of the princely states was situated in the Southern part of India. Travancore is one of the most beautiful and richly endowed territories in the world, a country rich in scenery, in natural resources, water ways, a country in which, both land and sea are smiling agreeably. Travancore had different names in different periods. Generally it is known as Kerala because this country is enriched with coconut groves. It is called “Thiruvazhumcode” which means the abode of wealth. As it is filled with mountains and hills, it is called “Malayalam”. It is also called “Dharmarajyam” because it was presented to the Brahmins by Parasurama. Once it was ruled by the Cheras and hence it is called Cheranadu or Vanchidesam. There are other names such as Parasurama Shethram, Malabar, Malai Nadu and Venad. It is bounded on the north by the state of Cochin and the British district of Coimbatore. Coimbatore and Tirunelvely constitute its eastern boundary and on the West and South lies the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. The extreme length of the country from the North to the South was 175 miles and the extreme breadth from the West to

the East was 75 miles. However, by the year 1815 ,it had an area of 7661 square miles. Because of her natural beauty it is called the Kashmir of the South. Travancore as a state is not in existence at present. After attained independence many changes took place in the geographical structure and constitutional status. Only in July 1949, Travancore and Cochin states were integrated into one unit called the United States of Travancore.

The educational programmes that were started by the Protestant missionaries to create social and political awakening in Travancore began to bear fruit. The people realized the social degradation under which they were groaning for centuries together. The English education, that they received opened their eyes to the civilized world learnt the free life of the people of the Western world. When they compared their life style, they could understand the abhor able ways in which they were treated under the feudal set up and obnoxious taxes under which they were groaning for a long time. The women could understand the shameful and abhor able ways of their dressing and the ill-treatment of the high caste people. Now they could understand that their social identity was a question. They decided to fight for social identity for which they looked up to the missionaries to take the lead. The Protestant missionaries like Rev. Mead and the fight for social identity.

Fight against Feudal Exaction

The vexatious exactions and various kinds of free services to the temple festivals, to the Brahmins and the feudal Lords drove the peasants to the verge of poverty. The oppressive taxes that the feudal Lords exacted made the Virutikars extremely poor. The oppression and the interference of the feudal lords affected the freedom of the country. Another painful incident occurred at Kothanavilai, when the headman and other villagers of Kulathuvilai Pakuthi ordered the Christians of Kothanavilai near Colachel to contribute money for the purpose of celebrating festival in their village temple. The Christians refused to pay the customary offerings to the temple. Thereupon the headman and his followers demanded them to pay some money to the newly appointed Kalavisarippukaran who was managing the above festival. They further urged that such a present to the Visaripukaran would secure them special favour by exempting them from their services to the idols. The Christians however did not yield to this demand and the headman took them to the Kalavisarippukaran. He tied a Christian by name Yovan on a tree and inflicted on him severe blows. He also forced him to write a Kaicittu or receipt to pay tax for toddy or padani or sweet toddy. Yovan could not bear the torture of the Visarippukaran, paid him the tax and the bribe just to be free from the torments. Though he was released, the other Christians by name Narayana and Maraperumal had “the fire-locks hanging on their ears for two days”. Thus the merciless treatment of the feudal officers forced the peasants to rise in revolt.

The Peasants Revolt

The resentful activities and the obnoxious extraction of taxes created discontent and disappointment among the peasants to an alarming extent. They vehemently protested against

forced labour on several occasions. In connection with the Meenumutsavam in the Temple at Ambalapula, the Viruttukars refused to conduct Velakali and hence the Temple authorities were compelled to entrust the Velakali to the Provertikars. The Viruttikars allotted to various officials also refused to perform their duty even after several warnings. Her Highness the last senior Rani of Attingal, was to visit the Virutti holders at Chennithala but the Viruti holders absented themselves from duty. In one of the annual ceremonies of Sri Padmanabha Swami Temple, the cooks of the Temple struck work. Those who attended Oozhiam service in the Parur Sarkar. Temple and other minor temples refrained from attending to the work. They even filed a suit against the sarkar contesting liability of the Sambuham [association] to work and question the Sarkar demand.

Government Reaction

Still the Government was adamant and proved to be very cruel in proceeding against those who were not willing to perform Oozhiam services, and said that it was a compulsory duty and failure to do so means forfeiture of their lands. In one instance when the Viruthikars of Nettamon village did not come forward to do Oozhiam services, they were expelled from their lands and such lands were sold outright by Government. The Oozhiavirutti holders at Chirayinkil taluk were ejected from their lands since they were not willing to attend the Oozhiam services. It was proclaimed by the Government that those who wished to retain possession of their viruti lands would pay a fine known as Vilayatharam. If the land was in the possession of the family of the original holder for over fifty years, the Vilayatharam was twenty five times of the assessment value. It was to be paid by the peasants.

These exorbitant demands on the Viruthikkars caused great resentment and began to realize their degrading position. A petition was prepared and presented to the Dewan Peishkar by the Viruthikars of Chirayinkal and Neyyattinkara. About five thousand Nadars from Travancore met Col. Munro, the Resident of Travancore, and represented their grievances against the poll tax and other compulsory services and taxes. Commenting on the evils of the Vilayatharam, Nagam Aiya, the settlement Dewan Peishkar wrote to Dewan that it was universally complained of a serious grievance and causes dissatisfaction and resentment of the ryots all over the country." He also severely criticized the views of the Government and again wrote to the Dewan that it was "highly necessary to amend the law and avoid unnecessary pain and heartburning to the peasants. But the Government was adamant and ordered that all Viruthikkars who wanted to retain possession of their lands should pay Vilayatharam, otherwise they would be evicted from their lands.

Conclusion

Travancore one of the princely states of India is a richly endowed with natural sceneries and water resources. During this period, Travancore presented a bundle of problems. In the social life of the people caste and communal hierarchy played a significant role. The feudal system in the social life became more oppressive. The Oozhiam or free

service was one of the feudal system. Viruthi service was another element of feudal obligation. Those who were under the Viruthi services were compelled to supply to the temples what were needed for daily poojas. Supplying all the needs during temple festivals was thrust upon the Viruthikars. Thus the feudal obligations and numerable land taxes drove the peasants to poverty. At the outset the fight was started against the denial of social identity under the grab of feudalism. The people and the Viruthi realized their degrading position. There were protests throughout Travancore. The Kakinada session of the Indian National Congress, 1923, espoused their cause. Propaganda meetings were conducted. In 1924 Vaikam Sathyagraha was organized. E.V.R. took part with volunteers. Suchindrum Satyagraha took a serious turn. Owing to the popular agitation the Government appointed a committee, with Subramania Aiyer as the Chairman. Thus the popular agitation and the enlightenment brought a success. The fight for social identity and equal rights have achieved social, and economic changes in Travancore as a whole. Socially the people were relieved from the psychological effects of humiliation and torture. The oppressed could obtain social identity equal to that of the high castes. Economically the people made far greater advancement in life than before. Thus the fight for social identity converted the neglected rustic people into enlightened angular human beings.

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