

Economical progress under the Christian missionaries in the Kanyakumari District

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Abstract:-- Economical progress under the Christian missionaries in the Kanyakumari district was notable one in the history of economic progress especially among the women of the Kanyakumari District. Lace industry was the cottage industry which was introduced by missionaries who care for the economic enrichment of the people of Kanyakumari District. It had its own significance in the promotion of economy in the society. Any how it is worthy to see that the LMS was the pioneer in the Kanyakumari District. Its advent marked the turning point in the economic history. The work of the lace was made up of many varieties of fine thread.

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It is a transparent network, in which the threads of the weft are twisted round those of the warp. It may be made of silk or cotton or even of gold and silver thread. It is usually a pattern worked upon either during the process of making the lace, or with a needle, after this has been completed. The lace consisted of two elements-the pattern and the ground. The pattern is called the toile and the ground that holds the pattern is called the reseau, which means noose or snare. The two main types of lace are bobbin and needle point. Other types of lace are crocheting made of knotting threads with a needle and fating. The progress of lace making starts by passing the bobbins to and fro. It is followed by interlacing the thread in a particular manner. The twist and crossing made are fastened by means of small pins.

Mrs. Mault popularly known as Martha in the early year of 1821 who had some knowledge of lace making began to attach lace work in a few girls schools. The girls in the boarding school soon showed themselves to be apt pupils and in addition to all the elements of a primary education, needle work was taught. In these institutions they taught the academic subjects and Scripture in the forenoon hours. In the

afternoon hours, the girls were taught spinning, plain needle work and sewing. Mrs. Mault wanted to bring the girls, women and widows, those who lived in the secluded life to a meaningful life in the society through the introduction of English hand – made lace for their benefit. The lace industry functioned as a religious and cultural centre as well an “Umbrella” where the people could find a new leadership in the missionaries. It could give economic, mental and spiritual uplift to hundreds of workers in the district. The income from the industry became a very good source of revenue for the missionaries to promote education in this region especially among the girls.

All the lace workers were Christians of various congregations in the Nagercoil District, and no woman was given work without a letter of recommendation from the mission agent. They were baptized women of good character, who could read the Bible. The missionary ladies gave priority to the girls who studied in the Boarding school for employment in the industry. It is reported by I.H. Hacker, in his report of Neyyoor Mission District for the year 1899 as “All my 70 workers are old girls of the school and then I have the pleasure of keeping in touch with them for many years after they leave the school.” They also gave much consideration to mothers of Boarding school girls. It is very clear from the T.D.C Report that “Most of the mothers of the Boarding School girls being lace workers”.

Mrs. Mault with the support of Mrs. Mead lace making and embroidery were taught in almost all the schools for girls of the repressed sections. Hence the girls of the downtrodden sections to whom education was denied so far came to receive general education and training in a trade to earn their daily bread. The lace they made became a source to buy back their freedom. They imparted religious education to the

girls and instilled in them the habits of cleanliness and industry. It is clear from the extract of a letter of Mrs. Mault dated 18, 1841. She writes, "Our aim is to impart to them in reading, writing and useful employment, including at the time habit of cleanliness and industry". They gave admission to orphans and those who suffered from poverty in the Christian families. It is very clear from Mrs. Foster's report about lace industry of 1912. She writes, "Only baptized women of good character, who can read the Bible are admitted, in this way we strive to make the industry as a whole a refining and uplifting influence throughout the Mission. In Nagercoil the lace industry developed to such an extent that many hundreds of workers were employed in it. The administration also showed interest in the promotion of this industry. It is said that some specimens of Nagercoil Lace were purchased by His Highness the Maharajah's Government to be displayed in the Calcutta Exhibition, for which a Gold Medal was awarded. In December 1929 His Excellency, the Viceroy Lord Irwin accompanied by Lady Irwin visited Travancore. In the course of their travels they visited the office of the Kanyakumari District Lace Industry and greatly admired the displayed works. Her Excellency was pleased to accept beautiful pieces of Lace. The Viceroy signed the visitors' book of the industry following His Excellency signature, together with the following words. "I was also very much interested to see the school of Lace and thought the work very good interest. It must be a great boon to the women workers interest.

The lace workers were paid according to the work they completed and each could earn from Rs.7 to 10 per day. When the girls left the institution to marry they received a dowry in the form of a box containing clothing and all necessary materials to make lace and embroidery for themselves.

Women missionaries and missionary's wives headed the lace and embroidery industries. These ladies did not occupy any official position or salaried post. Without that they devoted a good deal of their time to the supervision of institutions started for the welfare of the women. How the missionaries managed that is a big question. But they managed it amazingly well. The Mission Council regarded its industrial work as a task of high missionary value. At the same time it did not agree that such work was suitable for "Paid Missionaries" of the society. It appeared necessary on the part of the Mission Council from time to time, to ask one or other of the single women missionaries to take care of the industries for shorter or longer period.

The missionaries took care of various matters connected with the lace school. They spent their major time towards giving

out materials inspecting the work, paying the worker, attending to the orders, receiving payments etc. They worked in favour of the continuance of the industry against all odds all times. The matron and other native helpers willingly gave their valuable assistance and kept the mechanical work as much as possible in their hands. The supervision had taken a good deal of time, but they liked to work as it gave them great pleasure.

The superintendents had adopted the practice of visiting the centres and meeting the women. The visit enabled the superintendent to associate themselves with the normal surroundings of the workers and dismiss workers of immoral conduct. Hence the convener was authorized to arrange a meeting of the supervisors of the industries. A sub committee constituting of the Convener of the Industries Committee and the Treasurer was constituted to study the situation. They had to visit the industry offices, if it was found necessary. After the completion of the sub-committee report the convener called for a conference of those who supervised the industries.

The workers made the kind of lace that the consumer required. They also maintained a high standard of design and workmanship which appeared essential for the success of the industry. Many ladies in various parts of India assisted the scheme by purchasing the lace and aiding in its sale. In the year 1890 over Rs. 1600/- worth of work had been sold to ladies in different parts of India.

The Government concentrated to develop the Industries. By which the State recognition to various ventures of the mission shows that the Government and the Missions were equally interested in the welfare of the people. The Industrial schools of South Kanyakumari District received a Government grant of Rs. 156/- per annum from 1869. These schools also continued to do some useful work and gave a grant of Rs. 12/- per mensem to the Kanyakumari District lace industry and this came to about 50 per cent of the tuition fees.

The government also gave sanction for the Technical Schools for Girls Little Flower's School at Mela Manakudy, Mary Immaculate Technical School at Cape Comorin and St. Michael's Technical School at Asaripallam of the Kanyakumari District. These schools gave training in the more feminine subjects such as embroidery, and lace work. The government encouraged the lace industry by conducting exhibitions and purchasing materials to exhibit in several exhibitions. His Highness ordered the best specimens of "Pillow lace" to be displayed in the "Great Exhibition". Some specimens of Nagercoil Lace were purchased by His Highness Maharaja's Government for the Calcutta Exhibition

for which the Gold Medal had been awarded. The local price for the various kinds of laces exhibited by the Government in this exhibition was Rs. 587.8. In 1899 His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore placed an order for lovely embroidery on satin and on fine white muslin to be displayed at the Paris Exhibition. The workers worked day and night for it. The work was most beautiful when finished and received a letter of commendation for the excellence of the work and the promptitude of its execution. In the Glasgow Exhibition of Industry, Science and Arts of 1909, the Maharaja of Travancore participated and sanctioned a sum of Rs. 5000/- for the collection of the exhibits and a committee was appointed to select appropriate articles.

The London Art Exhibition was held in London in May 1931. About this information was sent to the Director of Industries of Travancore from the Agent to the Governor General, Madras State dated 2nd January 1931. Her Highness was pleased to approve the proposal to send to the exhibition, samples of lace, gold thread or filigree work. The Director of Industries addressed the Infant Jesus Orphanage, Mulagumoodu to send suitable samples of lace and embroidery. The lady supervisor sent a tea cloth in Venetian lace worth Rs. 105/-

All India Exhibition of Indian Architectural Arts and Crafts at Calcutta was held in 1963. Some specimens of arts and crafts were sent from the Department of Industries. The ladies embroidery section with its charming Indian design received much attention. An All India Exhibition was conducted in Trivandrum in connection with the celebration of the Birthday of His Highness of Maharajah on 19th November 1936. It was intended to propagate and popularize the existing industries, encourage all active and prospective industrialists, manufacturers etc. Thus the state patronage in different ways helped the lace industry to prosper. The workers of the industry in Kanyakumari District were poor people in the society. The promotion of this industry helped them to develop their social states, self-respect, economic condition, liberation from the ignorance and mental makeup. It was also very helpful to the widows who were secluded from the society. All the time of starvation and poverty it helps the women to save their children from the hungry. During the time they completely depended upon the lace industry. Thus native women of Kanyakumari District got profitable job opportunities through the lace industry. The report of LMS in 1902 and 1920 clearly marked that it gives job opportunities of 200 and 1700 women and 1700 women respectively by which the women of Kanyakumari District lived in dignity.