

NADARS UPPER CLOTH REVOLT IN SOUTH TRAVANCORE**C.R. SELVAN****Reg.No. 18113151081006**

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ABSTRACT

In the beginning of the nineteenth century the Nadars of South Travancore who had migrated from the Pandiya country had been agitating for the right to cover the bosom of their women. After the spread of Protestant Christianity in South Travancore, Colonel Munroe, and the Resident of Travancore in 1812 issued an order permitting the Christian Nadar women's to cover their bosoms. So the caste Hindus involved in violence against the Nadar women's. The introduction of Christianity and their conversion raised their social standard and the women began to cover their bosoms. On the basis of complaint made by pidakkaras orders were issued by Munroe. The nadars of Madras and Tirunelveli wore the breast clothes freely and the Nadars o Travancore wanted the same privilege. On 1st February 1853 Rev.Mault and Rev.Lewis were assaulted on their way back home. In July 1855 the missionaries presented a joint petition to the Government of Madras detailing the facts of oppression and cruelty to Christians.

SUMMARY

In the beginning of 19th century the desire for reform was deep rooted in the hearts of the lower classes of Travancore. The Nadars who were converted to Christianity demanded equality with the privileged classes like the Brahmins, Nairs and Vellalas. The Nadars of South Travancore who had migrated from the Pandiya country had been agitating for the right to cover the bosom of their women. After the establishment of the London Missionary Society and the spread of Protestant Christianity in South Travancore, Colonel Munroe, the Resident of Travancore in 1812 issued an order permitting the Christian Nadar womens to cover their bosoms like the womens of other countries.

The Government of Travancore issued an order in May 1814 permitting the women who were converted to Christianity to cover their bodies with jacket, like the women's of Syrian Christians and Mappilas. They had not been permitted to wear the upper cloth in the manner of upper caste Hindus.

Mrs.Mault, the founder of the lace-making industry in Travancore, and other missionary ladies who did not like the Christian women to move about with their bosom exposed like their Hindu neighbors, had devised a loose jacket for the Christian converts, which perhaps satisfied the modesty of the European ladies but did not meet the social aspirations of the Nadar women. The same Nadar women community in Tirunelveli wore the breast cloth freely and the women of Travancore would have nothing less, for they considered the wearing of upper-cloth as a symbol of their enhanced position. Thus in addition to the prescribed jacket the Nadar women used an additional cloth or scarf over the shoulders as worn by the women of the caste Hindus. So the caste Hindus involved in violence against the Nadar womens. The introduction of Christianity and their conversion raised their social standard and the women began to cover their bosoms. In the days of Munroe the first order was issued permitting the women of unprivileged class to cover their bosoms. With the capacity of Resident Dewan he issued an order in the year 1814.

Inspite of clear order of Munroe, the officers oppressed the Christians for wearing clothes over their bosoms and asked them to discontinue it. But the people ignored the opposition and continued to wear clothes above the waist. Munroe was angry at the oppressions and issued another order warning with punishments for such behaviour on the part of the officers and of

failure in enforcing the order. The Pidakkakars pointed out that, in consequence of the dress assumed by unprivileged class women, the difference between the one and the other caste could not be known and everything was allowed to be polluted. On the basis of the complaint of the Pidakkakars, Munroe as Dewan issued another order on 7th Edavam 989 (1814) preventing the Christians from wearing the loose scarf over their bosom like the Nair women, but permitted to wear jackets called Kuppayams like the women of Syrian Christians and Mappilas. When Mrs. Mault found the women exposing their breasts, she considered it indecent and taught the Christian Nadar women to wear a kind of plain loose jacket with short sleeves. In addition to this jacket not worn by Shudra women, the Christian Nadar women began to wear an upper-cloth laid over the shoulders as worn by the Shudra women. The council of the Nanchilnad Shudras or the national Council of the Pidakkaras was the actual ruling body of Nanchilnad who controlled the people. Very often they marched in grand processions with drums sounding in front, led by the Pidakai representatives holding their caste banners, medals and different emblematic staffs. They spread such terror into the minds of the unprivileged classes that they bowed and worshiped those senators.

When Munroe was the British Resident he ordered his escort to fall upon Pidakkakars and seize all their paraphernalia and break their drums and staffs. They were made as prisoners and fettered. He also put a stop to the village assemblies and caste assemblies and curtailed their pores, privileges and immunities. He introduced many reforms curtailing the power of the officers. The educated Christians began to question the gross abuses prevailing in society and attributed them to the dominance of the caste Hindus. They also began to revolt against oppressive customs, regulations and practices. This questioning and sudden social change that came as a result of the work of the missionaries and spread Christianity led to intellectual stir. The women of the Nadar, like the lowest castes were forbidden to cover their breasts. The manner of dress prescribed for them consisted of a single cloth of coarse texture, to be worn by men and women alike, not lower than the knee and not higher than the waist. This style of dress was of course incompatible with the modesty and decorum of Christian women. The Nadars of Madras and Tirunelveli wore the breast clothes rely and the Nadars of Travancore wanted the same privilege. In May 1822 the caste Hindus re-acted against this and stripped the clothes worn by the Nadar women and committed many atrocities. Nadars who had the support of the Backward classes and Missionaries entered the battle field against the caste Hindus.

In March 1822, Mandram, Nadankutty and others, who were the headmen of the villages of Kulattuvilai and Palankeery went to Kottanvilai congregation of Kadiapattinam in Kolachel and authoritatively asked the Christians there to contribute money for the purpose of celebrating a festival to their village idols. Nidiyudian and Yesudiyan were beaten to death and compelled to pay taxes for toddy. They were imprisoned for several weeks. The disturbances had spread in May 1822 in the Kalkulam taluk. The Christian Nadar women who appeared in decent dress were mocked, abused and ill treated in various ways in markets and waysides by the Shudras. They stripped the upper clothes and jackets worn by the Nadar women. Rev.Mead complained of these outrages to the Padmanabhapuram court. He also questioned the validity of imposing fines for wearing dress. The Christian judges of Nagercoil and Padmanabhapuram were required to report on the subject of the ill-treatment of the Christians, generally in the southern regions as represented by Rev.Mead. As a result of Rev.Mead's appeal and agitations the Padmanabhapuram court re-investigated the complaints and issued a decree favourable to the Christians. Rev.Mead while gaining a great point in the decree remained cautious in introducing revolutionary changes, as it was against the will and pleasure of the opposite parties. But the Christian Nadar women's on the strength of the decree boldly continued to wear jackets and upper-clothes, though they were hated the more by their enemies. The Rani was very much opposed to the freedom taken by the Christian Nadars of Nanchilnad who obey to disobey orders issued by the officers which went against their prestige. Rev.Mead after his success in the fight with the Government to gain a favourable decree for the Christians, recommended them to obey the orders of the Government and to avoid giving unnecessary offense to the prejudices of the native population. But the Christian Nadar women appeared always with the upper clothes. So the feelings of the caste Hindus against rose high. The hostility that prevailed among them burst out after a period of five years in 1828. In 1829 another proclamation was issued in the courses of the second upper cloth revolts, was with a view to prevent the further spread of Christianity.

When converts to Christianity began to increase in Trivandrum a good deal of opposition was felt. A Christian named Perumal was beaten and tortured in the heat of the sun until he vomited blood. The Revenue officer further set fire to the houses of some of the Christians of the Trivandrum Mission. In 1846 a convert to the protestant church from Ezhava caste name plundered. The case was represented to Travancore Government.

On 1st February 1853 Rev.Mault and rev.Lewis were assaulted on their way back home after paying a visit to Rev.Russel by Brahmins, who were conducting a religious procession in the vicinity of suchindrum temple. The Christians were persecuted even for slight mistakes. The cases of Arumainayagom of Trivandrum Mission are an instance. In October 1854 the Christian Nadars refused to perform their usual services to the Rani's Sripadam palace. The Karyakar who conducted the enquiry seized Devasahayam which his wife Cinnai. Devasahayam was so shockingly ill-treated that he vomited blood and died. The real cause of ill-treatment was his profession of Christianity. After Charles Mead the Missionary who took up the cause of persecuted Christians came Rev.John Cox. He appealed to the Madras Government by a petition dated 12th February, 1855 specifying the violence committed by local officials. He also forwarded several individual petitions from Christians like Cinnai, Joseph Paul and others, who were persecuted by authorities. In July 1855 the missionaries presented a joint petition to the Government of Madras detailing the facts of oppression. The high officials were of bad character. Criminals and inefficient men were appointed to high offices. The courts were also corrupt.

A cold war between the missionaries and General Cullen followed. John Cox tried his best to prove the charges against the Travancore Government. The fight of the missionaries to put a stop to the persecution of the Christians was not cared by the authorities. The Dewan instead of taking action against the Tahsildar complained that the Christians were rebellious and disobeying the local authorities.

On 19th February 1858 Visvasam Vedanayagam catechist and others of Agasteeswaram village complained to the Resident of the ill-treatment of the Christians by the Tahsilders and Parvathikkar of Agasteeswaram. But the officers acted with great injustice and cruelty. Tirumalai Samuel and some other Christians of Ellansantivilai Kudiyiruppu in Agasteeswaram village were opposed by local authorities. Josayya catechist of Kulattuvilai was unjustly beaten and imprisoned by the Parvathikkar of Parakkai. Although the charges against the officer were proved no action was taken for a long time. Madhavo rao observed the unsatisfactory feelings prevailed between Nadars and the Shudhras. Finding it very difficult to prevent a collision between two groups he issued a proclamation in December 27, 1858. The outbreak of Parasalai, Neyyoor, Nagercoil, Kottar, Kumarapuram, Alagappuram and Aramboli was very severe after

the force was strengthened in the places in which disturbances started. The revolt spread to almost all parts of South Travancore by January 10, 1859. A number of caste Hindus joined together and with the assistance of police tied up a number of Christian Nadars who were pursuing their ordinary avocations in Monday market. The captives were presented before the Iraniel Tana naick and false charges were made against them. The caste Hindus stripped the jackets of women and abused them. On 11th January 1859 two women on their way to Aralumoodu market near Neyyatinkara were assaulted and were taken before tana Naick of Neyyatinkara, who violently stripped the jacket of one of them and hung upon a tree. When the revolt reached its highest point the Nadars of all places received new spirit and enthusiasm. At Agasteeswaram the Nadars decided to raise men and money. The Nadars of Tirunelveli also joined with the Nadars of Travancore to plunder the villages of caste Hindus. When the British Government came to know this an order was issued by the Chief secretary T.Pycroft instructing General Cullen to carefully deal in this matter. The Dewan wrote his report on 12 February 1859 regarding the origin development and suppression of the revolt and was forwarded to the Government. The Madras Government requested General Cullen to take necessary steps as per the order issued by the chief-secretary on 27th January 1859. On 28th March 1859 the Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras T.Psycroft, called for a reply from the Resident of Travancore. Though the reply was not satisfactory the whole matter was communicated to Lord Stanley, the secretary of the state for India and the Supreme Court. He ordered Sir Charles Trevelyan the Governor of Madras to institute a prompt inquiry. The Governor and his council members after inquiry wrote a strong letter to the resident of Travancore on 6th May 1859.

The Dewan consulted the maters with the Raja who was in favor of the abolition of all rules prohibiting the wearing of clothes. The modifications suggested in the existing rules regarding dress were happily approved of by the Resident. As per the request of the Resident the Government of Madras accepted the concession. Accordingly a proclamation was issued by the Rajah of Travancore on 26 July 1859 to cover their bosom in any manner.

Thus the upper cloth Revolt was a great land mark in the history of Travancore.

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