



OOTACAMUND TAMIL MISSION DURING REV. BERNHARD SCHMID AND POST REV. BERNHARD SCHMID PERIOD

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of the Europeans, Christianity also began to spread in Tamil Country in the Colonial Period. Many Christian organizations played a key role in spreading Christianity in different regions of the Tamil Country. Each organization concentrated in a particular region where the missionaries dedicated their lives. In this regard, organizations like CMS, LMS, SPCK, SPG , OTM rendered services among the people of Tamil Country. The role of German missionaries was remarkable as pioneers in spreading Christianity , next to the Jesuit Missionaries. The Paper attempts to highlight the role of Rev. Bernhard Schmid, a German missionary in preaching Christianity by founding Ootacamund Tamil Mission in Nilgiris and the spread of Christianity after his exit on health ground from Nilgiris. Even though the Ootacamund Tamil Mission failed to spread Christianity among the aborigines , it succeeded in spreading Christianity among the immigrants. This paper also prove that the Ootacamnd Tamil Mission was neither orgained by St. Stephen's Church nor by the CMS. It was the brain child of Rev. Bernhard Schmid, a dedicated Germany missionary who filed to convert much aborigines but converted the immigrants especially the Depressed Class people in the Nilgiris.

KEYWORDS: CMS, Ootacamund Tamil Mission, Rev. Bernhard Schmid, G.U.Pope, Nilgiris, Christianity, Gospel, Todas, Natives, aborigines, immigrants, Missionary.

REV. BERNHARD SCHMID AND HIS MISSION

The Christian historiographers of the today believe in certain things regarding their Church history which are not historically true. The St. Stephen's Church, a Government creature, in its later years was temporarily in charge of a native Tamil Mission, namely, Ootacamund Tamil Mission. The today Christians of Nilgiris believe that the Ootacamund Tamil Mission was created or organized by St. Stephen's Church or the CMS.¹ However the records of the Ootacamund Tamil Mission preserved at the UTC Archives, Bangalore disprove it. The St. Stephen's Church Committee had no role in organizing the Ootacamund Tamil Mission . It was incharge of Ootacamund Tamil Mission for some period, before it came under the control of CMS. The Ootacamund Tamil Mission was the solely the work of Rev. Bernhard Schmid. Hence it is important to trace the origin of the Ootacamund Tamil Mission and what led to its takeover in 1867.

Rev. Bernhard Schmid was a German missionary scholar. He was the first ever Missionary to preach the gospel among the natives of the Nilgiris. He had successfully organized Ootacamund Tamil Mission. As he was in the service of the CMS, he assisted C.T.E..Rhenius a fellow German and CMS missionary , who had the credit of criticizing the domination of the Brahmins and converting 7,500 persons in Tirunelveli region within a short period of ten years.² According to Rhenius, the Raj spent 20,000 pounds annually for the support of the British.³ In the 1840s Robert Caldwell himself witnessed open British support for the Brahmins.⁴

A temporary ill -health of Rev.Schmid proved to be blessing for Christianity in the Nilgiris. He was well versed in Tamil and he acquainted with Tamils during his years in Tirunelveli . His poor health forced him to seek asylum in the Nilgiris for which the local committee of the CMS granted permission.⁵ For a while , the rule was that at non-British Missionaries desiring to visit Coimbatore District should get prior permission from the Government, whereas they could freely visit every other part of the Madras Presidency. Hence , Schmid applied

to the Governor-in-Council and subsequently was permitted to reside in the Nilgiris.⁶ He and his wife who was qualified to run girl's school stayed there from 1830 to 1836. This period was significant in the annals of Ootacamund Tamil Mission .

BITTER EXPERIENCE OF SCHMID

Schmid was a dedicated missionary who aimed at spreading gospel among the natives of the Ootacamund. When Schmid arrived in Nilgiris, a grammar school of the CMS was functioning. He did not show interest in it. Instead, he began to observe the native aborigines interestingly. He attempted to spread the gospel among them. Accompanying with Rev. Cooper, a Scottish Missionary who always used the services of an interpreter, he made preaching tours among the Todas and Badagas. The Todas were glad to hear the Christian gospel for the first time. They invited Schmid to come again so that they might collect other villagers from the neighbourhood to hear gospel preaching. Hence he went there on the fixed day. But the Todas did not come in much on that day. After a lengthy time, one of the Todas came and informed him that when other Europeans came there, they gave lot of money. The Toda, probably, also expected money from Schmid. Schmid realized that the money which the early European visitors had continually given the Todas had much destroyed their simplicity and character and none could visit their 'munds' without being surrounded by old and young begging for money.⁷ He was not prepared to distribute money to the Todas and turned his attention towards the Kotas. He viewed that "the Kotas united the meanness of the low caste men, the simplicity of the ignorance of the mountaineer with the lying spirit of the Hindu in a high degree".⁸ Schmid concluded that it was unwise on his part to continue missionary labour among them. Frustrated by the aborigines, he now turned to the immigrants. He found it expedient to labour among the Tamil immigrants who had come up to the Hills from the valley and were largely the depressed class and the response was encouraging. His hard preparatory work put paid in 1832 when he successfully organized a Tamil Congregation on the Hills. The Mission was christened as 'Ootacamund Tamil Mission'.

Schmid's health was gradually. During this brief interregnum, he was well realized with the prevailing situation in Nilgiris. However his health again deteriorated, he was forced to apply for leave to go to Europe for recovery. While awaiting reply from England, two families of Todas settled near his house in order to learn Tamil from him.⁹ It is a reality that a vibrant Indian language had to be transmitted to the most ancient dwellers of the Nilgiris by a European Missionary. One of the two was given a fine exposure to Christian tenets. While teaching them Tamil, Schmid compiled a vocabulary of Toda language - about 400 words.¹⁰ When his leave to Germany was sanctioned in 1836, it came too late, for his three sons had died within four months. Broken-hearted, Schmid gave up the work among the Tamils and went to Germany. In the absence of Schmid, the Tamil congregation was administered by a native catechist from Kotagiri whose expenditure was met by the Secretary, Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.¹¹ In 1844, a small chapel was built. It was for the increasing Tamil worshippers to hold service by Archdeacon Harper, the Chaplain of St. Stephen's Church just opposite to it.¹² The St. Stephen's Church was entirely reserved for the Europeans and the converted native Christians were not given entry.

After gaining good health, Rev. Bernhard Schmid came back to the Nilgiris again towards the end of 1845 and he practically took charge of the Ootacamund Tamil Mission. There were altogether 120 native Tamil Christians.¹³ Besides giving pastoral care, Schmid endeavored to promote knowledge among them. He established three schools: one in the chapel, another in the market and the third at Kandal, a settlement of Depressed Class.¹⁴ The health of Schmid affected once again in 1851 and he was unable to continue his missionary work of Ootacamund Tamil Mission. In spite of this, he then devoted his time to the study of cryptogrammic plants, which work earned him a Doctorate.¹⁵

Indeed, Rev. Bernhard Schmid laboured hard among the Tamil immigrants and organized a Tamil congregation. Even though he failed among the aborigines where response to gospel was negative, he succeeded in spreading gospel among the immigrants. Among the Tamils, he spent almost several years of hard labour. He preached gospel, distributed tracts, published a dozen books and administered three schools. Even though his poor health often interfered much with his work, he showed a clear case of willing spirit with weak flesh. However, the CMS Authorities did not realize his difficulty and served him with a charge sheet for lower performance in missionary works.¹⁶

POST-SCHMID OOTACAMUND TAMIL MISSION

After the departure of Schmid on health grounds, the Mission did not stop its works for long time. In order to look after the affairs of the Ootacamund Tamil Mission, soon a public meeting was held on 8th September 1851. A Committee was formed with the Bishop of Madras as President. The Chaplain of the St. Stephen's Church became the Ex-officio Secretary to the Committee.¹⁷ Alf Fennel was its first Secretary. The two committee members were well-known and respected missionary Tamil scholars - Rev. R. Caldwell, the author of *Comparative Tamil Grammar of Dravidian Languages*¹⁸ and Rev. Dr. G.U. Pope who was commentator for Thirukkural.¹⁹ In the first meeting of the committee, it was decided that the Ootacamund Tamil Mission should confine its activities to the people of the low country, as German Missionaries were now working among the original inhabitants.

After such clear demarcation of area of operation, the Committee opted for a permanent evangelical missionary of the CMS in the place of Schmid for the purpose of labouring among the Tamil immigrants.²⁰ Instead, no serious attempt was made in this regard. Hence the Committee raised the salary to Rs. 12,587 and enlarged the chapel known as Holy Trinity Church (Church for converts) and the school room. In 1852, there were 200 strong worshippers. Between 1859 and 1869 there took place 146 baptisms.²¹ The numerical strength of the congregation was not much increased. Many of them were servants of Europeans visiting the Hills temporarily. A Missionary and catechist were employed in connection with the Ootacamund Tamil Mission. Besides superintending the schools established by Schmid, the Missionaries worked hard among 'the heathens' and administered a numerically fluctuating congregation. Rev. Pope preached once a month and even organized the communion.

ASSUMPTION OF OTM BY CMS

As time went on, the management of Ootacamund Tamil Mission came under the control of G. U. Pope and Thomas Dealtry, the Chaplain of St. Stephen's Church. But the varied responsibilities and the numerous avocations of G.U. Pope prevented him from actively engaging in the affairs of the Ootacamund Tamil Mission. Hence Dealtry, in 1867 intently appealed to the CMS, Madras, to take over the management of Ootacamund Tamil Mission. It was a first official invitation. The Local Committee of the Ootacamund Tamil Mission had been addressing the Secretaries of the CMS, Madras regarding the assumption.²² But the Madras CMS did not respond, probably, because of the long distance.²³

But the CMS refusal could not be carried any further, as pressure was building up. At last, the Bishop of Madras and the Archdeacon of the Diocese insisted the CMS not to lose any opportunity to take up the Mission work at Ootacamund. The CMS decided to meet the demand halfway by sending an ordained agent—a native convert—who might be in need of the benefits afforded by the Hill station. Having thus made up its mind, the Corresponding Committee of the CMS, Madras, expressed its willingness to adopt and maintain the Ootacamund Tamil Mission provided the offer of transfer was duly made to them by the Local Committee and that no additional expense should accrue to the funds of the CMS.²⁴ These conditions were accepted and in 1867 the CMS staged a comeback to the Hills at the invitation of the St. Stephen's Church, in whose running the CMS was denied any say, three decades back.

A CMS Missionary Rev. R.C. Macdonald was despatched to Ootacamund to assume charge of Ootacamund Tamil Mission. Hence a meeting of the whole property of the Local Committee was held in St. Stephen's Church on 9th July 1867. On the same day the management of the whole property of the a CMS Missionary was transferred to the CMS unconditionally and the committee of a CMS Missionary was dissolved.²⁵ The newly acquired Mission was to be carried on for the benefit of the people of the plains who had been attracted by one cause or another to the Hill-station.²⁶ Since 1867 the management of the Mission remained with the Corresponding Committee of the CMS, Madras, till 1947 when the Church of South India was formed by amalgamating all Protestant Churches. Thus the role of Rev. Bernhard Schmid was remarkable disseminating the knowledge of gospel in the region of the Nigiris was remarkable and he was the founder of the Ootacamund Tamil Mission and his service was continued by the CMS after his departure. As a Germany missionary, he initiated protestant Christianity in Nigiris. Thus the role of Rev. Bernhard Schmid was remarkable disseminating the knowledge of gospel in the region of the Nigiris was remarkable and he was the founder of the Ootacamund Tamil Mission and his service was continued by the CMS after his departure. As a Germany missionary, he initiated protestant Christianity in Nigiris.

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