

Religious Policy Of The Maratha Rulers Of Thanjavur

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The principal of a good state namely freedom in the exercise of religion, was realized in the Maratha kingdom of Thanjavur. A notable feature of the Maratha period in Thanjavur was that people belonging to different religious denominations such as Hindus, Muslims and Christians were found living together in the Maratha Kingdom. The Maratha rulers of Thanjavur right from the beginning were generous in their attitude towards the followers of different faiths and were uniformly tolerant in their religious policy. They went further, and though themselves pious Hindus, they gave their State bounty to Muslim Saints Hindu Saints without destination and respected the Quran.

Chatities to Hindus

The Maratha rulers respected the holy places of all creeds and made endowments for Hindu temples and Muslim saints. Tombs, Mosques and Churches alike. They have given several agraharams to Brahmins for their scholarship or skill in music, astrology, medicine or other arts. The Christian missionaries were allowed to carry on their work without trouble. They enjoyed the confidence of the rulers and no harm was done to them.

The expedition of Shivaji into the Karnatic was the most arresting event of Ekoji's reign which paralysed the activities of the rulers of the South and of the European settlements on the coast. Historian considers that the expedition was intended to punish Ekoji in order to obtain a share in the ancestral jagirs left by shahji. A few think that to unify the Hindu Powers of the Deccan and of South India, Shivaji made grand attempt to create Hindu Pad Padashahi. Moreover Shivaji's object was to create a Hindu State.¹

According to Martin “The author of this expedition.”² He invited Shivaji “to render some service to his religion”³ his object being to put a part of Karnatic “under Hindu domination and to make himself a powerful protector of Shivaji by virtue of the facilities that he gave him (Shivaji) to make himself master of it and perhaps they had still more for reaching designs”⁴ Shivaji appeared as a star of a new hope to the Hindu world in that age of removed persecution, the protector of the ritualistic paint mark (Tilak) on the forehead of the Hindus, and the Saviour of the Brahmins.

“The Religious Revival was not Brahmanical in its orthodoxy; it was heterodox in its spirit of protest against forms and ceremonies and class distinctions based on birth and ethical in its preference of a pure heart. This Religious Revival was the work also of the people of the masses and not of the classes.”⁵

The life of religious and spiritual routine followed by Shahji (1684-1712) C.E was remarkable. The central event of this active interest was the promotion of learning. He gave gifts in 1693 C.E. to the Ayraha (group of scholar) of Tiruvisanallur, renamed after himself as Sahajirajapuram, to a group of 45 scholars as ‘Sarvamanya’, a tax free settlements allotting to each as many portions as the Sastras he had mastered. The scholars were drawn from different localities; Kandaramanikkam in Nannilam taluk and Village already famous as a centre of learning, contributing to the most leading scholars. Venkatakrishnas was drawn from South Arcot and some Telugu and a few Kannada families were invited.⁶ In 1676 C.E his father Ekoji granted 7 acres of land as servamanya to the Rajagopala Iyengar.⁷ He also granted land grants to Vaidhyanath Sastrigal who lived in Vaideswarankoil.⁸

During Shahji’s reign the Brahmin Agraharams were: Pandanallur, Tharmasanum, Milatur, Veppattur, Komalpattu, Thadalungkoil, Pallur, Vaduvur, Therkkusemai, Pattamangalappattu, Valangaiman, Perumalakaruppattu, Athambapurappattu and Mannarkoilpattu,⁹ In 1707 he had given land grants to 12 Brahmins namely Kuruswamigal, Raya Dikshiter, Prohitha Ramaiyar, Srinivas Dikshiter, Periya Thirukkams Sastriyal, Sinnathirakkama Sastriyal, Anunthanarayana Sastriyal, Mahadeva Sivan, Narayana Sastriyal, Thimmans Bahavadar, Ayyavaru Panditar and Venkataiyan.¹⁰

During the reign of Tuljaji a Muslim man, Malliam Sahib built a mosque in the bazaar near Mohammadpuram in 1773. To run that mosque and to give food and protection to the Jakkirs, he donated 49 acres of land from the villages of Kudathampat and Vallarpat. He erected a town and named it as Mohammadpuram.¹¹ In Sulamangalam he paid 700 chakrams, to buy 12 acres of land to build a Dharka.¹²

During the Allah function, the Raja would visit almost all the Dharkas. While paying such visits, he used to give donations.¹³ Even the queens had religious tolerance and also gave donations to Allah festivals. Every year the Maratha rulers gave dress materials during the festival time to the Nagore Dharka.¹⁴ On the ninth day of the Allah festival they gave five big and small chariots made of gold silver, and tusk.¹⁵ Thus the Maratha rulers earned the good will and Co-operation of the Muslim community by contributing liberally.

Charities to Christians

The history of Christian missions in Thanjavur speaks highly of the tolerant spirit that characterized the Maratha rulers of Thanjavur. But Mannucci definitely says that shahji ill-treated the Christians, levied a poll-tax on them and subjected them to grave hardships. The Hindus, Manucci Continues, roused the anger of their brethren, as a result of which the Christians in Thanjavur, Pondicherry and in the neighboring places were persecuted. Their churches were pulled down, and many were imprisoned.¹⁶ Owing to the representations made by the missionaries, Nawab Daud Khan, the faujdar of the Karnatic, wrote a letter to the Thanjavur Raja condemning his attitude and asking him to stop the persecution. On account of this intercession, Shahji had to stop his vindictive attitude towards the missionaries and to releases those who were imprisoned and allow them to freely follow their religion.¹⁷

The fact of the matter was the Christians created class hatred among the rulers subjects. The Portuguese missionaries put on Indian dress and called themselves Roman Brahmine to delude the unwary.¹⁸ At Pondicherry two houses were built for Christians in a Brahmin street and the missionaries preached near Hindu temples. At Cuddalore the

Christians enacted a drama in which the Hindu Gods were treated in an unenviable manner. This was enacted in Thanjavur before the Raja. These incidents which happened outside the kingdom of Thanjavur roused the people and the Raja. Hence perhaps an occasional lapse into intolerance. Generally, the rulers of Thanjavur were very tolerant and did not interfere with the religion of the Danes and the Dutch. Only when these traders failed to pay their dues, the Raja had to take stern action.¹⁹

In 1620 C.E. Heinrich Plutschau and Ziegenbalg, two German Pastors, sent by King Frederick IV of Denmark to Tranquebar who founded here the first Protestant Mission in India. Ziegenbalg mastered the Tamil language and began his preachings in the same in order to make the natives understand the scriptures. His knowledge of Tamil enabled him to translate the new Testament, compile a Tamil dictionary consisting of 40,000 words and expressions to compose a Tamil grammar, besides a number of books on Divinity in that language.²⁰

From Tranquebar, the mission slowly spread along the coast to Cuddalore, Madras, Calcutta and in the interior of Thanjavur, Trichirapalli and Palayamkottai. Before Schwartz became attached to the Mission Ziegenbalg was succeeded by Grundler, Schultze, and Wiedebrock in 1751 C.E. Schultze was given permission in 1721 C.E. to see the Raja of Thanjavur, Serfoji, but could not utilise the opportunity. But Wiedebrock succeeded and Pratap Singh graciously received him in 1753 C.E.

The name of Schwartz (1726-1798) C.E. a German missionary was closely connected with the Thanjavur history and the extinction of the Thanjavur. Raja from 1779 C.E. the missionary remained at Thanjavur. At his request, lands were given for the building and upkeep of churches in the Maratha Kingdom. The missionary influence had gradually affected the social and religious fabric of India and helped in its reconstruction on an equal and rational basis.

In 1769 C.E. Neuart visited Thanjavur and had an interview with Raja Thuljaji. The Missionary explained the doctrines of Christianity to the Raja and asked him to embrace the

religion. But the presence of Brahmins greatly handicapped Schwartz's attempts. At the Raja's request he learnt the Marathi language.

The warm interest of Schwartz evinced in the education and welfare of prince Serfoji II made his father Tuljaji to entrust his son to his care while on his death-bed in 1787. The missionary was mainly instrumental in convincing the Madras government about the validity of Serfoji's claim to the throne and in destroying the pretensions of Amar Singh. But Schwartz did not live to see his pupil ascend the throne, but Serfoji's love and affection for him were so great that he made liberal grants for the schools founded by his departed instructor and benefactor. As an enduring mark of his gratitude the prince erected a marble statue of the missionary and placed it in the church on the side of the Sivaganga tank.²¹

Serfoji II was a pious and religious-minded man. Bishop Heber calls him a deadly shot, and appreciates his employment of Christians.²² During his period Schwartz established a charitable institution at Kannandangudi which was inhabited by a number of Christians for giving education to them. He had given orders that his Christian servants, Civil and military, should not be denied by their officers liberty to attend divine service on Sundays and festival days, and that they should be excused from all other duty on such occasions. The Raja entirely supported the Christian school there, as a branch of the chattram from which it was kept separate from the agharams.²³

The Schwartz church stands in the North east corner of the fort of Thanjavur. It was founded in 1779 by Schwartz who resided principally in Thanjavur from 1778 until his death.²⁴ Serfoji II gave certain villages in and around Thanjavur to the Missionaries for the maintenance of boarding schools and churches. During the war between the British and French the Maratha Raja of Thanjavur supported the British. After the victory of British in this battle, he had imbibed a great regard for Englishmen and officers. As a sign of gratitude towards the British he had two columns erected, one at Sethubava-Chattram with the inscription.

Conclusion:-

During the period of the monora with eight storeys on the sea-shore Rules and the Bhramins performed many yogas for the purpose of the performance serfoji II built a hall on the eastern and westem side of the Muktabapuram village and give help to the Bharamins.

END NOTES

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