



SHANAR BREAST CLOTH CONTROVERSY

Low caste Shanar women in many parts of south India were prohibited from covering their breasts in public by upper caste regulations. In late eighteenth century and again in early nineteenth century, missionaries helped Shanar women to defy this ban in Tinevelly and Travancore. The Hindu kingdom of Travancore was extremely hostile to this gesture of assertion, while the colonial government of Madras and the government of India also directed the missionaries to respect Hindu customs. Eventually only the Christian converts among Shanars were allowed to wear the breast cloth, although missionaries continued to encourage other low caste women to exercise this right.

ANTI-EUROPEAN INDIGO PLANTER AGITATION

In the 1850s and 1860s European indigo planters were forcing tenants of Bengal to cultivate indigo and perpetrating terrible acts of oppression on peasant men and women. About 25 missionary orders in Bengal took up the peasant cause in various ways. They wrote and petitioned against planter oppression, provided evidence

against the planters to the Indigo Commission, lobbied senior government officials and politicians in Bengal and England. The Reverend James Long got a Bengali anti-indigo play translated into English, for which the court sentenced him. He is still remembered with affection and immense respect in Bengal.

AGAINST LANDLORDISM

Through the Permanent Settlement Act in 1793, the British gave near complete powers to the landlords to evict tenants and control their rent. Christian missionaries lobbied with the British Parliament and the colonial government for pro-tenant legal reforms. Their efforts were very important in shaping the Bengal Tenancy Amendment of 1859, while the Tenancy Act of 1908 in Chhotanagpur was largely due to their initiative. Missionaries in Pondicherry helped agricultural labourers who were beaten up by landlords in a court case. For their part, landlords were deeply suspicious of converts since they felt that converts were less amenable to their exactions. In the late 1820s cultivators and fishermen of a village south of Calcutta were fined ten rupees each and beaten with shoes by their landlord for turning Christian.

