

Rev. James Emlyn

Rev. J. Emlyn (1838-1917) was born on 7th April, 1838 at Cardigaanshire, Wales in the New Castle district of England. He studied Theology in the Western College and High Gate. He was ordained as a Pastor in Craven Church on 9th June, 1867. He married Miss. Emily Seymeir in June, 1867 in the Bristol Haycraft Baptist Church. The Church of England greatly encouraged evangelisation efforts of the individuals as well as the organisations. London Missionary Society (LMS) was one among them. It was formed in 1795 by a few members of the Congregational, Anglican, Presbyterian and Wesleyan Churches. LMS Missionaries soon spanned out to different parts of the world including India. LMS was the first mission to start work in all four language areas in South India and in Sri Lanka. LMS sent Rev. James Emlyn to India for the propagation of Protestant faith in India and he left for India on September 11th 1867. He arrived in Nagercoil on 11th June 1868 and took charge of Parachalai Mission District and continued upto 1892. Many churches were established under his guidance. His work had also spread to the Marthandam area. He is the founder of the town, now called Martandam.

Ministry at Parachalai

Parachalai was established by Rev. Abbs John (1838-1860), a co-worker of Rev. Charles Mead. He built a bungalow in a high level hill in Cheruvarakonam and resided there from 1845. The land for the Bungalow and the church was purchased with the help of Rev. Mead and the British Resident, General Cullen. A new church was established and it was named as Parachalai congregations and the place was called Parachalai and upgraded it into a district. Nearly fifty churches were erected by him. All the churches west of Neyyoor came under Parachalai Mission District. Rev. J. Emlyn took the responsibilities of the Parachalai mission in 1869 after Rev. Abbs. As District Chairman of Parachalai, the main work of Rev. Emlyn was ministry among the people of other religions. For ministry among the people of other faiths, he constituted the "United Evangelical Council", first of its kind in South Travancore. He convened the council once in every year. Following Rev. Emlyn's model, the "South Travancore Church Mission Council" was formed at the LMS headquarters at Nagercoil.

Rev. Emlyn started his work among the Roman Catholic fishermen of Vallavilai coast and Kollencode and many joined the LMS mission. He bought an extensive plot by the sea shore at Vallavilai and Kollencode and started two schools. Kollencode Mission Compound was called "Sathia Vetha Pattinam". Rev. Emlyn deputed Mr. David Sylem of

Parachalai with Mr. Samuel to Kollencode and Rev. S. Jacob to Vallavilai to work among the fisherfolk there. Two young men among them were selected and sent to the Seminary at Nagercoil. He established more than fifty churches including the Maruthencode Church. He founded the Christucoil Church, Palliyadi and the church at Amaravilai. He also established six congregations in 1871. He merged small churches into bigger churches and laboured to build new churches.

Mrs. Emily Seymoor Emlyn managed the Boarding School for girls, established by Rev. John Abbs at Parachalai. She took this opportunity to work among the women of Parachalai and nearby localities. She supervised the sewing classes very effectively. Many women became educated and civilised. Rev. Emlyn tried to eradicate caste system. He invited the members of each caste to mix at his house over a dinner. In each caste, two people along with their wives were invited. Three castes of Harijans, two castes of Shanars and people bearing caste names then prevalent such as Sudras, Pulayar, Vannar, Eezhavar, Chettiar and Vedar totalling 29 people attended the feast. Often he said that elimination of caste was possible when people intermarry. He was against slavery. Most of the castes below the Nadars and Eezhavas, such as Pulayas, Parayas, Paravars, Kuravars, Vettuvans etc. were generally regarded as slaves. When Rev. Emlyn consoled and extended a helping hand towards the slaves, nearly nine thousand people embraced Christianity and became members of the churches under Parachalai Mission within two years.

Ministry at Palliyadi

Palliyadi Christucoil Church was the fruit of the relentless efforts of Rev. James Emlyn. Palliyadi Church functioned under Parachalai Mission District when Rev. Emlyn took over the charge of Parachalay Mission on 1st May 1869. Rev. Charles Miller in association with Rev. Mead, erected five small churches namely Murungavilai, Kadu, Vallaitthottam, Thittumelkonam and Mullankinavilai between 1835 and 1840. Rev. Emlyn planned to unite the five small churches located in and around Palliyadi into a big self-supporting Pastorate at a centrally located place. Therefore he reported it to the LMS headquarters at London in 1874 and 1875. Rev. Emlyn bought major portion of land surrounding the present day Christucoil Palliyadi Church, Parsonage and the School premises in 1881. A Girls school was started on 1st October 1881 with 97 girls. Eesachu catechist was appointed as the Headmaster. Rev. Emlyn appointed Mrs. Pachiamuthu, mother of Rev.

T.H. Harris and the daughter of Mr. Kaalan evangelist, Miss. Esudial as assistants.

LMS deputed Mr. Albert Spicer and R. Wardlaw Thompson for the spot study and to report about the progress of LMS at South Travancore, particularly Parachalai mission. Rev. Emlyn invited Mr. Albert Spicer to lay the foundation of the Palliyadi big church in 1882 with the enlightened name "Christucoil Church". All the members of five small churches attended the function. To supervise the building work and to run the five small churches around Christucoil, Mr. S. Mathias evangelist from Martandam was appointed. With the ceaseless efforts of Rev. Emlyn and encouragement by evangelist Mathias, the church building work was completed in 1888. Rev. Emlyn presided over the opening ceremony of the church on 27th June, 1888.

Ministry at Marthandam

Rev. James Emlyn established a new mission field, Marthandam, a place near Kuzhithurai. An important achievement in Rev. Emlyn period of service was his endeavour to make Marthandam as headquarters of Parachalai district. In early days, Martandam was known by the name 'Thoduvetti'. In ancient days, people gathered at an elevated rocky place for buying and selling commodities. To climb the rock steps were cut to reach the hillock used as a market place. The word "Thodi" in Malayalam refers to steps and this small village acquired its name 'Thodivetti'. Later it was named as "Marthandavarmapuram" when the Maharaja of Travancore, Marthandavarma visited this place in 1729. As the postal authorities finding it difficult to accommodate this long name in the postal date seal, cut short into 'Martandapuram'. In course of time, the name became shorter and came to be known as 'Marthandam'.

Rev. Emlyn paid special attention in the development of Martandam. He cleared the forests and made three roads, one from Martandam to Unnamalaikadai, another from Martandam to Pacode and third one from Martandam to Viricode. People from various places began to get contact with Martandam and settled in Martandam. Rev. Emlyn wanted to purchase more land for the mission in pursuance of the decision of the Mission Council to develop Martandam into a Mission Centre with a resident missionary. He felt that until enough land was procured for the mission, there could not be any progress. More land could not be purchased as major part of the land at this place was owned by a wealthy Hindu family who did not like to sell the land to missionaries. However, after twelve years of persuasion and patient waiting, Rev. Emlyn succeeded in purchasing the land stretching from the present day North Street to YMCA premises, covering an area of more

than hundred acres. This vast stretch of land later came to be known as Mission Compound. Rev. Emlyn allotted plots in the newly bought land to outside Christians and encouraged Christian settlements. Major portion of the land was sold out or donated to the first generation Christian settlers. He donated ten acres of land to the Martandam YMCA. Finally, leaving only 38 acres of land in the hands of the Mission. Due to his untiring efforts, the number of Christians increased manifold.

The early missionaries established Village Schools along with the Church for the educational development of Martandam region. All the children irrespective of caste, colour and creed were taught to read and write in the vernacular language. The Parachalai Mission Report, 1861 gives the information of the existence of two village schools in Nalloor and Thoduvetti. In these schools, Scripture, History Geography, Tamil, Grammar and Human Physiology were taught. Mr. Patrick Thomson was incharge of these schools. There were no educational avenues at Marthandam when Rev. Emlyn recognised the need for basic education to the people. With this view in mind, he started two schools, Vernacular School and the English school, the first educational institutions in Vilavancode Taluk. He started English School at Kuzhithurai for Brahmin Hindus which was opened to Christian children in 1871. He started Anglo-Vernacular School at Martandam on 15th April, 1882. This school was named as Emlyn School. It was a Middle School for boys. English, Malayalam and Tamil were taught. The already existed Village Schools became the Vernacular Elementary School for the boys.

In order to educate female children, Rev. James Emlyn started the Girls Elementary School in 1882. To enable the girls to stay and learn in these schools away from home, he built a Boarding Home at Parachalai. Women from upper caste families also availed this opportunity and enrolled in the girls school and started staying in boarding home. Large number of students from Vilavancode and nearby taluk Eraniel (Present Kalkulam) started attending the schools established by Rev. Emlyn. Mr. Timothy Daniel was in charge of the Middle School. Mr. Paul was in charge of Vernacular School and Rev. Emlyn employed a Nair woman for Girls School. At first in 1895, five girls were sent for Madras Lower Secondary Examination held at Nagercoil. Scholarship was given to the needy students. As it was very difficult to the girls to attend the school regularly due to poverty and other difficulties in their houses, Mrs. Joshua Knowls transferred the Girls Boarding School to Martandam from Parasalai in 1896. Rev. Joshua Knowls succeeded in obtaining Grant-in-aid from Travancore Maharaja for both the schools in 1898. The Martandam English Lower Secondary School had 250 students in 1898, and English Girls Lower Secondary School had 80 students.

In 1901, twenty-seven teachers worked in these schools and all of them were Christians. In 1919, the mission boys school started by Rev. Emlyn in 1882 at Martandam were handed over to the Travancore government and came to be called as Government English School. In 1964-1965, this school was split into a Government High School for boys and Government High School for Girls by the Tamilnadu Government and upgraded them into Higher secondary Schools in 1978. However, the Girls School started by Rev. Emlyn continued to be in the hand of the mission. In 1905, Rev. H. Hacker improved this school and now it stands as the LMS Girls Higher Secondary School Martandam. Rev. Emlyn bought the land adjacent to the church in Martandam from Roman Pillai of Pandaravilai in Kodumkulam. The mission started a new boys school at the new campus at Martandam church in 1919 during Rev. R. Sinclair's period to compensate the loss due to handing over the school to the government. This school stands as the LMS Boys Higher Secondary School, Marthandam Mr. Devasahayam B.A. was the Headmaster of the Mission English School established by Rev. Emlyn at the time of its surrender to Travancore government.

Realising that the people encountered untold suffering due to lack of health care and medical facilities at Martandam, Rev. Emlyn recommended to the Medical Mission at Neyyoor to start a hospital. When the people suffered due to malaria and cholera, he helped a lot. For the malaria patients, the medicine 'quinine' was distributed by the medical missionaries. In the 17th century, Europeans discovered a medicine for Malaria. They extracted the medicine from the bark of a South American plant, 'Cinchona'. It is popularly known as 'quinine'. It came to be known among the natives as 'Mission Powder'. The malaria patients from the hilly areas were treated by Dr. Thomas Smith Thomson. The missionaries went to the affected villages and met the patients in their huts. They supplied rice and clothes to the affected families and the medicine 'quinine' to the affected persons.

Rev. Emlyn strived hard to start a branch hospital at Martandam with the help of Dr. Thomas Smith Thomson, the Medical missionary at Neyyoor in 1883. At first it functioned in a small building, near the Marthandam market with the help of Dr. P. Vethamanickam who studied under Dr. Thompson. As the number of in-patients and out-patients increased, Rev. Emlyn constructed a building with thatched roof in the present site and shifted the hospital to the new building in 1892. There was a heavy need for female nurses to treat the women patients. Hence Miss. Margrete Macdonal conducted a four-week nursing training to the women in 1897 at Martandam. The thatched roof of the hospital building was replaced by the tiled roof in 1899. It was the first hospital

in Vilavancode Taluk which got the aid of Rs.50/- from the Government of Travancore.

Rev. Emlyn was a very good social worker. When a severe famine broke out in this region, no agency or organisation was there to help the people directly. At this juncture Rev. Emlyn received grant-in-aid from the government and re-distributed it among the poor. He was mainly responsible for the opening of the British Post and Telegraphic Office at Martandam in 1888. Then only the Travancore Government started an "Anchal Office". Rev. Emlyn also established for the first time a library and a reading room in the mission compound and threw it open to the public. Nesamony Memorial Christian College was established later in 1964 in the thirty acres of land which was bought by Rev. Emlyn. People of Vilavancode taluk, particularly people of Martandam are greatly indebted to Rev. Emlyn for the present day educational institutions, hospitals and CSI Martandam Church.

Before his retirement, the churches located in and around Parachalai, Martandam, Palliyadi and Irenipuram functioning under Parachalai Mission District, registered their maximum growth. Rev. Emlyn recommended to the Mission Council at Nagercoil that these three churches be elevated as District Churches. Rev. I. H. Hacker was assigned the duty of temporarily supervising the Parachalai Mission at the retirement of Rev. Emlyn. In 1891, Rev. Joshua Knowls took charge of the Parachalai Mission District and about this time, Mission Council accepted the recommendation of Rev. Emlyn and upgraded the churches at Parachalai, Martandam, Palliyadi and Irenipuram as District Churches. As a prelude, the Mission Council resolved to ordinate four Indian Church workers as Pastors. The ordination of four Indian Pastors was conducted at Christucoil Church, Palliyadi on 12th December 1893. Rev. S. Mathias, an evangelist at Palliyadi got ordained and appointed as the first Indian Pastor of Martandam. Mr. Samuel got ordained and appointed as the first Indian Pastor of Christucoil. Mr. David Xylem as the first Indian Pastor of Parachalai and Mr. N. Joseph as the first Indian Pastor of Irenirpuam.

At the time of retirement of Rev. Emlyn in May, 1890, Parachalai Mission consisted of the churches of South Travancore comprising the taluks of Vilavancode, Neyyattinkarai and Eraniel (the present Kalkulam). The numbers of Christians were estimated to be twice as many as Nagercoil District. After retirement, he lived at Ainivilai in North Street in small house with thatched roof. His wife Mrs. Emily Seymoor Emlyn already died on the sixth day of the birth of a girl child on 5th November 1882 at Trivandrum and was buried at Parachalai cemetery.

The child died of small-pox at the age of five at Kanchiracode in Kanyakumari district. Rev. Emlyn remained in his adopted country India and accepted it as his motherland till he breathed his last. Emlyn died on 26th June, 1917 at the age of 79 in his residence at North Street, Marthandam. The house he lived was given to a person who looked after him in his last days. His body was taken to Parachalai church campus and buried besides his wife's grave. Nearby to these graves, there is a small grave marked as "child". This is the grave of the only daughter of Rev. Emlyn. The Emlyn street in Martandam is named after him.

To foster the memory and the ministry of Rev. Emlyn, it was decided to name the newly built library in the Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Martandam with the aid of U.G.C. and the management funds to the tune of 12 lakh rupees, after him as "Rev. James Emlyn Memorial Library". A plaque detailing his achievements and also a photo were installed in the library so that the young scholars can recall the past history of Martandam. His grave was renovated with marble slabs by the staff of N.M. Christian College, Martandam. No doubt Emlyn deserves to be called as the 'Maker of Modern Martandam'.