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Contact and Care: Bertha Tuck and Namasudra Widows

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Abstract

Following the partitioning of Bengal by colonial British powers in 1905 vulnerable Hindu low caste Namasudras approached nearby South Australian Baptist missionaries for help in their quest for social uplift. Their major interests were educational medical and social recognition but they were even willing to consider remarriage for their widows. Bertha Starkey Tuck, a participant in some of the discussions with Namasudras leaders, moved to reside among them in the swampy village of Orakandi of Faridpur District, India. She was responsible for setting up a widows' home, alongside educational and medical work established by Dr Cecil and Mrs Alice Mead. She lived among them for about 20 years. This paper will seek to look at the role of Bertha Tuck, zenana missionary who set up the Home of Light for widows. The paper will look at her roles from her own writings, that of the Namasudras, of her supporters, and the ruling establishment. The paper will seek to contribute to the current discussion of "Mama Theology", the role of single women missionaries.