



Research Article

THE CONTRIBUTION OF GERMAN MISSIONARIES TO TAMILNADU

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ABSTRACT

The Protestant missionary activity in south India was first started in the Danish settlement at Tranquebar. The first missionaries of the Royal Danish mission, Ziegenbalg and plutschau both Germans, arrived in Tranquebar in 1706 and started their work. Ziezenbalg built the beautiful Jerusalem Church in Tranqubar. Towards the end of the 17th-century Anglican missionary society took great interest in the Danish Royal mission and information about it was published in English from time to time. The S.P.C.K. decided to support the new mission at Madras started by Schultz. The most famous of the S.P.C.K. missionaries was Christian Frederick Schwartz, who worked at first with the Danish Royal mission at Tranquebar and then with the S.P.C.K. at Trichirappalli and Tanjore.

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INTRODUCTION

Religion has been an integral part of human life since early times. It has played a vital role as an integrating force of the society through the ages. Religion has its significance in the socio-economic fields. Being inseparable from human life it has rendered a great part in the refinement of human characters and culture. The various religious texts which evolved in the course of time taught not only their tenets but also the ways and means for the attainment of spirituality. The religious propagation awakened people from a long slumber and created a revolt in the minds of the people of Tamil land. This led to many changes in the socio- economic fields in society. History reveals that religion and its wars have brought a lot of changes in the society. No doubt, it is the chief deciding factor of the government in the present political set up. The 16th and 17th centuries witnessed the advent of Europeans in the land of the Tamils. As a sequel, the Christian missionaries of different denominations appeared in the Tamilian history.

Their reformative and reactionary activities in the proselytizing activities in the led to the development of Tamil language, of these various missionary groups, the services of German missionaries to Tamil receive historical significance. Christianity is one among the popular religions of the world and it began to spread through out the universe after the demise of Jesus Christ. India was not exempted from keeping herself away from the influence of Christianity and it is subjected to it's influence to a greater extent. St.Thomas, one of the disciples of Jesus Christ came to India in the first century of the Christian era. Since then India has been in touch with the Christianity and Europe. Missionaries of different orders arrived Tamil land. Among them, the Methodist Society of England had rendered a great service

both in the field of religion and education in the district of South Arcot. Enlightening their activities in an elaborate manner and summarising the reactions of the Hindus to missionaries are the aims of this Research article.

In 1612, the Danish landed Chola Mandalam and settled at Tranquebar on the coromandel coast. The Danish crown acquired this place from the ruler of Reghunatha Nayaka (1600-1633) of Thanjavur by an annual rent of Rs. 3111 since 1620A.D.¹ The Danish king Frederick IV (1699-1730) desired to spread the protestant religion in foreign countries, especially among the Tamils of Tranquebar or Tarangambadi. He sent missionaries to "handle nothing besides the holy doctrine" and write down in their diaries, letters, and proposals to promote the missionary activity in Tranquebar. The Danish missionary group mainly included Germans. Rather it can be called Garman missionary.

Forty-eight German missionaries came to India to propagate the Protestant religion under the Danish patronage. The most remarkable among them were Bartholomeus Ziegenbalg, Heinrich pluetschau, Benjamine Schulz, John Philip Fabricius, walther and Schewartz, The first protestant missionary enterprise began with the arrival of Bartholomew's .Ziegenbalg and Heinrich plutschau on 9 July 1706 at the Danish settlement of Tranquebar.² Soon the Tranquebar mission also known as Royal Danish mission. Was established in the same year. (After that a number of protestant missions such as LMS, CMS, WMMS, AMM and FCS commenced their activities in different parts of Tamilnadu.³

Since they happened to be the pioneers of the Protestant missions, they didn't have any missionary tradition to fall back upon nor a pattern of work to fellow among the natives so they took a position midway between that of the Roman

Catholics and the practice of the reformed who came later. They, like the Jesuits of the Madura Mission, adopted the method of 'accommodation' permitting their converts to retain caste and thus endeavoured to establish an indigenous church.⁴ The missionaries landed with preconceived notions that "Tamilians are barbarians. But they found it otherwise and wrote letters about Tamils to their superiors. They requested pastor August Herman Franke in Hille (Germany) to publish these letters. But Franke unable to tolerate Ziegenbalg's praise of Tamil language and culture did not publish them. He even remarked that "the missionaries went to exterminate heathenism in India, not to spread heathen nonsense all over Europe."⁵ The Tamils, their language, grammar, law, justice, philosophy and writing on palm leaves were all great attractions to many German missionaries. Ziegenbalg learnt Tamil from a pandit called Ellappan. He took a special care in understanding the meaning of many Tamil words with the help of a great scholar namely Alagappan. (He spent) For nearly three years he interacted with the Tamil students and society and learnt the greatness of Tamil language and literature one of his remarkable achievements in the field for Tamilology was the introduction of Tamil Dictionary. This formed the basis and source for other dictionaries which appeared later, particularly the Tranquebar Dictionary. He wrote a grammar Tamil poems. He had established a Tamil manuscripts library and collected palm leaves from the neighboring places.⁶

He also prepared and index for them, and spread the importance of Tamil language into Europe. He prepared 48 sacred songs on Christian theology and published them under the title Gnanapadalkal. His other important works included Geneology of Malabar Gods, Malabar Heathenism, and miscellaneous writings, Konrai vendand and Ulaga neethi. He also wrote few books on Indology. In his book titled "Malabarisches Heidentum" throws light on secured aspects, It includes the celebration s Hindu festivals ie. Deepavali and Pongal, building frame wok of Siva and Vishnu temples, the architectural layout of Hindu temples and 28 main ragas found in Carnatic music.⁷

Another book 'Conferences' deals with conferences between the Danish missionaries and Malabar Brahmanas. It focuses on the truth of the Christian religion and letters received by the said missionaries. During this stay, he engaged himself in the active translation of New Testament into Tamil and making a comparative study of Christianity and Hinduism. In fact, Ziegenbalg has been named as an 'Icebreaker' and regarded as the first European to translate a Tamil text into European language'. He sent New Year greetings in Tamil to officials and others. He has translated into German many Tamil kinds of literature such as Needivenba, Nalvazhi, Arthichopdi, Kondrai vendan and Ulaga need.⁸

Another of his great achievement was the establishment of a printing press at Tranquebar in the year 1712. It was brought from England with English and Tamil letters later. Ziegenbalg's Grammatica Timulica was printed in the following year and this was used guide book by later missionaries like Fabricius, Gravel, and others. He nearly published 213 religious books in Tamil. He established schools for the poor at Tranquebar and Cuddalore. He took a Tamil student with him when he returned to his native land, so as to remember Tamils forever.

The other German missionaries who came after Ziegenbalg simply followed the footsteps of him. Benjamine Schultze (1689-1760) landed Madras in 1719 and learnt Tamil. He took care in training 40 native students and visited all villages with them. He also visited schools at Tranquebar, Cuddalore, Devanampattinam and Parangipettai. At Muthaiyalpettai he rented a house for running a Tamil school. In 1749, he returned to his native land where he taught Tamil to Rev. Christian Frederick Schwartz.⁹

Walther (1699-1741) was a great scholar and linguistic in Tamil. He made additions to the Tamil Grammar of Veerama munivar. In 1733, his translation of New Testament into Tamil reveal that the art of translation had attained perfection during this period. He was very much impressed by the writings of Thayumanavar.

John Philip Fabrius arrived Cuddalore in 1740. He did his first German work in Tamil. He was called as sanyasi Ayyer, because of his simplicity and celibacy he prepared the English-Tamil dictionary based on the works of Constantine Beshi. It was during this period colloquial Tamil attained importance Further, Tamil was influenced by Sanskrit.

So he distinguished the Sanskrit terms from Tamil. He read his translations in front of the people of different castes and simplified the difficult terms. He translated whole Bible into Tamil. Yet another remarkable German missionary was Rev. Christian Frederick Schwartz there a brightest star in the constellation of Danish-Halle missionaries. He stayed for eleven years at Tranquebar. During his period the Tranquebar mission entered a new phase of growth.¹⁰

Extension work was made in Trichirappalli and Tirunelveli in the south. Educational institutional, which became well-known in the later days, were started at Trichirappalli. His services to Tamils were placed on a new footing. Hence he was rightly called as 'Father of Tamil Christianity'. He learnt the Portuguese and Tamil. He had a good friendship with the Maratha rulers of Thanjavur ie. Tulajaji and Sara fo Ji II. He translated many works into Marathi. It was because of his efforts, Sarfoji II asserted his right over the throne of Thanjavur. In one of his letters, he had emphasized very much the early schooling of children. All the Christian schools, south of the River Kaveri were under his supervision. Many schools were established in his name at Ramnad and Thanjavur.¹¹

It is known from the above, that German missionaries come to Tamil land for the propagation of Gospel based on the (methodical) pattern of German pietism. Tamil became the instrument of their proselytizing activities. However, their propagation of protestant religion consequently led to the development of Tamil language.¹²

Though printing and publication of Tamil works were a sequel to their missionary work, the language got enrichment in their hands A major collection of the Francken's Archives in the Library of Halle includes the observation of German missionaries on Tamil Nadu. A deep insight into the collection will shed more light on the Tamils, their language, and their way.¹³

CONCLUSION

The Christian missionaries played a vital role in the spread of Christianity in Nagapattinam in 1543. St. Xavier visited

Nagapattinam twice in 1545 A.D. At that time Franciscans, Augustinians and Jesuits were all engaged in missionary work. Nagapattinam became their headquarter. During the Dutch occupation of Nagapattinam in 1660 A.D., most of the documents of the Catholic missionaries were destroyed. During the time of Portuguese Nagapattinam flourished almost like a Christian colony. Then the Danish mission was established in Tranquebar in the beginning of the 18th century which also had its impact on Nagapattinam. The Lutheran missionaries played a remarkable role in the socio-economic life of the people. Their service in the field of education is noteworthy.

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