



## **THE DYNAMICS OF TRANQUEBAR, CHRISTIAN MISSION FOR THE CHALLENGES OF TAMIL LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

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### **Abstract:**

*The Apostle Thomas came to Malabar Coast in the year 52 A.D. and founded the first Christian church in India. The Christian missionaries played a vital role for the spread of Christianity in Nagappattinam district in A.D.1543. In 1612, the Danish landed Coromental Coastal region particularly and settled at Tranquebar. The Danish missionary group mainly included Germans. Rather it can be called German missionary. The Tamils, their language, grammar, law, justice, philosophy and writing on palm leaves, were all great attractions to many German missionaries. 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 Tamil logy was the introduction of Tamil Dictionary. This paper is focus on contribution of German missionary for the development of Tamil Language and Tamil Literature.*

**Key Words:** Franciscans, Augustinians, Jesuits, Heathenism, *Gnanapadalkal*, Celibacy, Colloquial, Gospel, Pietism and Proselytizing

### **Methodology:**

Of these various Christian missionaries Records and the services of German missionary Church Records to Tamil language and literature receive historical significance, which can be supported by various primary and secondary sources. It is also supplemented by recent archaeological Excavations and various books. The methodology adopted in this study is descriptive and analytical.

### **Introduction:**

Christianity is one among the ancient religions of India. The Apostle Thomas was invited to India by an Indian king Gandophares. He came to Malabar Coast in the year 52 A.D. and founded the first Christian church in India. Nagappattinam district particularly Tharangambadi, which is popularly known by the Europeans as Tranquebar has its own significance in this regard from early times. The Christian missionaries played a vital role for the spread of Christianity in Nagappattinam district in A.D.1543. St. Xavier visited Nagappattinam twice in 1545 A.D. At that time Franciscans, Augustinians and Jesuits were all engaged in missionary work. Nagappattinam become their headquarter.

The 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries witnessed the advent of Europeans in the land of the Tamils. As a sequel, the Christian missionaries of different denominations appeared in the Tamil history. This paper is focus on contribution of German missionaries for the development of Tamil Language and Tamil literature.

In 1612, the Danish landed Coromental Coastal region particularly and settled at Tranquebar. The Danish crown acquired this place from the rule of Reghunatha Nayaka (1600-1633) of Thanjavur by an annual rent of Rs.3111 since 1620 A.D<sup>1</sup>. 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 German missionary.

Forty eight German missionaries came to India to propagate the Protestant religion<sup>2</sup> under the Danish Patronage. The most remarkable among them were Bartholomeus Ziezenbalg, Heinrich pluetschau, Benjamine Schulz, John Philip Fabricius, Walther and Schewartz. The first protestant missionary enterprise began with the arrival of B. Ziezenbaslg and H. Plutschau on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1706 the Danish settlement of Tranquebar<sup>3</sup>. 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<sup>4</sup>. 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<sup>5</sup>.

The missionaries landed with preconceived notions that "Tamilians are barbarians. They found it otherwise, and wrote letters about Tamils to their superiors. They requested pastor August Herman Franke in Hlle (Germany) to publish these letters. Franke unable tolerate Ziegenbalg's praise of Tamil language and culture did not publish them. He even remarked that "the missionaries were went to exterminate heathenism in India, not to spread heathen non sense all over Europe"<sup>6</sup>. The Tamils, their language, grammar, law, justice, philosophy and writing on palm leaves<sup>7</sup>, were all great attractions to many German missionaries. Ziezenbalg 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 Tamil logy 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 or Tamil poems. He had established a Tamil manuscripts library and collected palm leaves from the neighbouring places.

He also prepared and index for them, and spread and 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 Genealogy of Malabar Gods., Malabar, heathenism, and miscellaneous writings, Konrai vendan and Ulaga neethi. He also wrote few books on Indology. In his book titled "Malabarisches Heidenthum" throws light on secured aspects it includes the celebration at Hindu festivals i.e. *Deepavali* and *Pongal*, building frame work of Siva and Vishnu temples, the architectural layout of Hindu temples and 28 main ragas found in Carnatic music. Another book 'Conferences' deals with, conferences between the Danish missionaries and Malabarian Brahmins. It focuses on the truth of the Christian religion and letters received by the said missionaries.

During this stay he engaged himself in active translation of New Testament into Tamil and making comparative study of Christianity and Hinduism. Ziegenbalg, who has been named as an Ice breaker, and regarded as the first European translator of Tamil text into European language. He sent New Year greetings in Tamil to officials and others. He has translated into German many Tamil literatures such as Needivenba, Nalvenba, Aathichoodi, Kondrai Vendan and Ulaga Needi.<sup>8</sup>

Another of his great achievement was the establishment of a printing press at Tranquebar in the year 1712<sup>9</sup>. It was brought from England with English and Tamil letter. Zinzenbalgh's grammitica Timulica was printed in the following year and this was used guide book by later missionaries like Fabricious, Gravel and others. He nearly published 213 religious books in Tamil. He established schools for the poor at Tranquebar and Cuddalore<sup>10</sup>, He took a Tamil student with him when he turned to his native land, so as to remember Tamils forever.

The other German missionaries who came after Zinzenbalgh simply followed the footsteps of him. Benjamine Schultz (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<sup>11</sup>.

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 reveals that threat of translation had attained perfection during this period. He was very much impressed by the writings of Thayumanavar.<sup>12</sup> John Philip Fabrious arrived Cuddalore in 1740<sup>13</sup>. He did his first German work in Tamil. He was called as *Sanyasi Ayyer*<sup>14</sup>, 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<sup>15</sup>. He read his translations in front of the people of different castes and simplified the difficult terms. He translated the whole Bible into Tamil<sup>16</sup>.

Yet another remarkable German missionary was Rev. Christain Fredercik Schwartz there 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<sup>17</sup>. Extension work was made in Thiruchirapalli and Thirunelveli in the south. Educational institutional, which became well known in the later days, were started in Thiruchirapalli. 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 Tanjavur i.e.Tulajaji and Saraboji II. He translated many works into Maratti. It was because of his efforts, Saraboji II asserted his right over the throne of Tanjavur. In one of his letters he had emphasized very much the early schooling of children. All the Christain schools, south of the River Cauveri were under his supervision. Many schools were established in his name at Ramnad and Tanjavur. It is known from the above, the German missionaries came 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. Though printing and publication of Tamil works were 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.

### **Conclusion**

In fine missionaries carried out their proselytizing activities and converted a large number of people from the lower strata of the society, simultaneously, they introduced many reforms in the society by removing social evils that confronted the

Tamil society. The Christian missionaries played a vital role in the development at Tamil society in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. They rendered all kinds at services to people while propagating their religion. Illiteracy, infanticide, untouchability, superstitions etc. were slowly got rid of from the society. Besides reformist activities, missionary contribution to Tamil was very remarkable one. For their valuable services to Tamil, Father Schwartz was called as father of Tamil Christianity. He learned Portuguese and Tamil. In one of his letter he had emphasized the early schooling of children. All the schools south of river Cauveri were established in his name at Ramnad, Thanjavur. It is known from the above that Tamil became an instrument of propagating their religion in the land of Tamils. Though printing and publication of Tamil work was sequel to their missionary work, the language got enrichment in the hands of missionaries.

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