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## **Church culture in Tamil Nadu with a special reference to the protestant mission from 1706-1947 A.D**

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**Abstract**--The Tamil Society has been influenced by the presence of Christian Churches in Tamil Nadu. The Protestant mission had played a vital role in transforming the lifestyle of the poor and downtrodden people of Tiruchirapalli, Thanjavur, and Nagapattinam by imparting education, catering to their medical needs, and other social service programs apart from teaching the Gospel of Jesus. Even though it was a religious institution, its contribution to society based on its faith in the teachings of Jesus Christ is immense. It is also known that the early missionaries who associated with the origin of this church participated actively in the course of the history of Tiruchirapalli, Thanjavur, and Nagapattinam districts also prompted the scholar to embark on this study. The administration of Thanjavur was given over to the English fully under the Treaty of 1799. The ruler of the Thanjavur was allowed to retain the fort of Thanjavur only with limited power of administration. When the ruler died in 1841 without an heir, the Thanjavur fort was also annexed by the British and it became part of the then Madras, Thanjavur remained under the British until 1947 when India attained freedom. In and around Thanjavur places were mentioned here as the present-day Thiruvarur District. When Thanjavur was under the control of the British there was no chance to propagate the gospel among people. The British never support the gospel. The protestant mission only changed the culture of the native people through the Gospel. But the researcher could not find any foreseeable conversion. The people of the native themselves only came forward to change themselves. Later it is considered as cultural change. This research paper is an attempt to study Church Culture in Tamil Nadu with a Special Reference to the Protestant Mission from 1706- 1947 A.D

**Keywords**--church cultur, protestant, mission.

## Introduction

The Tamil Society has been influenced by the presence of Christian Churches in Tamil Nadu. The Protestant mission had played a vital role in transforming the lifestyle of the poor and downtrodden people of Tiruchrapalli, Thanjavur, and Nagapattinam by imparting education, catering to their medical needs, and other social service programs apart from teaching the Gospel of Jesus. Even though it was a religious institution, its contribution to society based on its faith in the teachings of Jesus Christ is immense. It is also known that the early missionaries who associated with the origin of this church participated actively in the course of the history of Tiruchirapalli, Thanjavur, and Nagapattinam districts also prompted the scholar to embark on this study. The administration of Thanjavur was given over to the English fully under the Treaty of 1799. The ruler of the Thanjavur was allowed to retain the fort of Thanjavur only with limited power of administration. When the ruler died in 1841 without an heir, the Thanjavur fort was also annexed by the British and it became part of the then Madras, Thanjavur remained under the British until 1947 when India attained freedom. When Thanjavur was under the control of the British there was no chance to propagate the gospel among people. The British never support the gospel. The protestant mission only changed the culture of the native people through the Gospel. But the researcher could not find any foreseeable conversion throughout her research. . The people of the native themselves only came forward to change themselves. Later it is considered as cultural change.

Evangelism, planting churches to build a Christian community production of Christian literature, the running of missionary auxiliaries of church-related agencies like schools, colleges, medical mission, industrial missions, rehabilitation centers etc., are the social programs that they have undertaken keeping their goal as mentioned in their holy book named Bible as follows, “To break the chains of wickedness and to write the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to tear off every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the poor and homeless into your house, to clothe the naked when you see him, and to not ignore your own flesh and blood? Then your light will appear like the dawn, and your recovery will come quickly. Your righteousness will go before you, and the lord ‘s Glory will be your rear guard....” [Isaiah 58:7] The Protestant Mission is engaging in those lines of work from its inception in the year 1706 in the Trichirapalli, Thanjavur, Karur, and some parts of the Coimbatore districts. This research paper is an attempt to study Church Culture in Tamil Nadu with a Special Reference to the Protestant Mission from 1706- 1947 A.D

## Protestant Mission in Tamil Nadu

The Protestant activity began with the founding of the Lutheran Missionary Centre at Tranquebar in 1706.\*BartholomaeusZiegenbalgand Heinrich Pluetschau, (1682-1719) two Germans of the Halle University who were the products of the pietist movement,† became the spiritual envoys of the then Danish

\* E. Lehmann Arno, *It Began At Tranquebar.- A History of the First Protestant Mission in India*, CLS, Madras, 1956, p.12.

† Pietism was a revival movement in the Lutheran Church in Germany and the University of Halle became its important centre. S. Manickam, *Studies in Missionary History*, CLS, Madras, 1988, p.135.

king Frederick IV who desired to preach the Gospel in the Danish possessions in India.<sup>‡</sup>They landed at Tranquebar on July 7, 1706, with a clear and well-thought-out plan to learn the local language and launch an evangelical movement. But the Danish officials due to the misconception that missionary enterprise would endanger their commercial activities opposed their missionary enterprise.<sup>§</sup> Despite these hurdles, they carried on their missionary work and were joined by a noble group of missionaries later on.

The Tranquebar Mission which was working in TamilNadu for a little more than hundred years extended its work to a number of places such as Tiruchirappalli, Thanjavur, Cuddalore, Madras and in the south to Tirunelveli<sup>\*\*</sup>. At Tiruchirappalli and Thanjavur C.F. Schwartz and in Madras Benjamin Schultze and F.Ph. Fabricius and their colleagues learnt Tamil and did yeomen service to Christianity in Tamil language. Since these Lutheran missionaries received encouragement and financial sustenance from the royal family of Denmark this Danish-Halle Mission was called the Royal Mission.<sup>††</sup>At the end of the eighteenth century, the Christians at Tranquebar were around 20,000 souls of native land..<sup>‡‡</sup>

Tranquebar which is situated in the Hindu Kingdom of Thanjavur, being the commercial city and seaport had been a multicultural melting pot for centuries. While the Middle Ages saw the arrival of mainly Arab merchants who settled down here, from the 16th Century onwards the Portuguese also came. The Portuguese language became an important means of communication in his region during the 17 th and 18 th centuries<sup>§§</sup>. From 1620 onwards the history of the city Tranquebar was defined by the presence of Danish merchants who not only built a fort but also a city according to the European model. Still, the European style of buildings stands there. As in other European settlements in India parts of the city of Tranquebar were meant mainly for the Europeans while the Tamil Population lived in other parts of the city. The first missionaries, who arrived nearly 100 years later, in 1706, thus encountered a population that was multifarious in national, religious social, and linguistic respects.

### **The Structure of the mission**

The Danish – Halle mission was an intercontinental and ecumenical organization. The Institution supporting and promoting the mission of the Danish royal house as founder and initiator, the Mission Board in Copenhagen, the Francke Foundation in Halle, the society for promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) in London, the trading companies, individual and group donors belonged to different nationalities and religious groups. In South India, the work of the mission was carried out by European and local native Indian employees. Along with missionaries, the mission employed doctors, printers type setters-type founders, Country pastors, catechists, assistants, teachers, prayer –leaders, Bible Women, writers, copyists, and technical personnel. The European missionaries were at the top of this hierarchy, they were supported by a staff of Indian Co-

<sup>‡</sup> E.R. Hambye, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. III, CHAI, Bangalore, 1997, p.118.

<sup>§</sup> *Ibid.*, p.119

<sup>\*\*</sup> E. Lehmann Arno, *Op. cit.*, pp. 171-179.

<sup>††</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31-39.

<sup>‡‡</sup> Richter, Julius, *A History of Missions in India*, trans., Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, London, 1908, p. 127.

<sup>§§</sup> S.Jeyaseelan Stephen, "The Coramandal Coast and its Hinterland" 1997; Manohar Publishers, Delhi., p 115

Workers, the so-called “Native workers”\*\*\*\* The mission people never urge the native people to learn their language and customs to follow, they themselves came forward and accept the missionaries.

The Indian Country Pastors headed the hierarchy among the Indian Co-workers. Between 1733 and 1817 the Tranquebar missionaries ordained 14 Tamilians beginning with the ordination of one person named Aaron<sup>†††</sup>. The country pastors carried out their tasks mainly in the so-called districts and this meant extensive travel. During their visits to different places, they were supposed to teach, to Baptism to conduct divine services on festivals and to administer the sacraments. In times of war they were also expected to visit army camps, field hospitals, and prisons, In the structure of the mission, However, the country pastors were placed under the European missionaries. The instructions given to the Country pastor Diogo (1704 – 1781) on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1714 provide an example of the extensive traveling done by the country pastors, Diogo was expected to visit the Christian Congregations in the Districts four times a year – at Christmas, Easter, Whitsuntide [first three days in a week] and once in September – whereby each journey lasted at least 15 days.

### **Printing press**

The rise of the printing press created new possibilities for propagating Christianity, which was also used by the Danish –Halle Mission. In 1712, organized by the SPCK, a printing press arrived in Tranquebar for printing European languages and a Tamil printing press sent by the Halle Orphan House was put into operation in 1713.<sup>†††</sup> These dates marked not only the beginning of the most important printing press in south Asia between 1700 and 1780 but also the beginning of printing in the Tamil Languages.

### **Christian Fredrick Schwartz and his service**

The Protestant Mission came to South India at the instance of the Danish King, Frederick IV and its first missionaries, Bartholomew Ziegenbaig and Heinrich Pluetschau landed in Tranquebar in Tanjore District in 1706. They established the Tranquebar Mission; which was engaged in evangelic work in Trichy, Tanjore, Madras, Cuddalore and Tranquebar. About the middle of the eighteenth century, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K) helped the Tranquebar Mission with money and materials and brought the work in Trichy and Tanjore under its direct control. Danish Halle Mission sent a German Lutheran Protestant missionary, Christian Fredrick Schwartz to India and arrived at Tranquebar on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 1750.<sup>§§§</sup> He was born on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1726 at Sonnenburg, Prussia and took interest in missionary and charitable work as he grew up. He worked from Tranquebar initially and during this time he paid frequent visits to Tanjore and Tiruchirapalli. On 30<sup>th</sup> July, 1766, he moved over to Tiruchirapalli to act as Chaplain to the military force stationed there. During this time, he stayed there and established a small church and also a home on the same premises where Christ Church stands now. He started this home to shelter the children of

\*\*\* Ibid., p.12

††† Ferd Fenger., op.cit., p.125

††† Erich Beyreuther, “Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg- A Biography of the first Protestant missionary in India, C.L.S. Madras, p 34

§§§ Ibid., p.35

military officers killed in an accidental explosion of some military arsenals. He also started a school in the vestry of Christ church which was a single-story house built on a higher basement with under chambers. From 1766, the school functioned from the Vestry of Christ Church, Tiruchirapalli. Later in 1812, it moved over to St. John's church in the cantonment area of Tiruchirapalli. In 1768, he also received a formal appointment from the East India Company, gazetted him chaplain for Tiruchirapalli, on a salary of £100. Schwartz's regular working station, both as a missionary and a chaplain, was to be in Tiruchirapalli. In his new assignment, the German missionary from Halle and Tranquebar proved to be singularly effective and successful \*\*\*\*1.

At the same time, his missionary activity continued to expand, the "helpers" he had trained went out into towns and villages, two by two, returning to meet with him for self-analysis and prayer. As pastor-teachers, they sought to provide basic literacy for believers in each congregation. Each morning and evening, helpers were meeting and strengthening them in prayer. Schwartz also accompanied them on missionary visits to more distant places\*\*\*\*. After spending twelve years in Tiruchirapalli, he moved to Thanjavur to continue his missionary activities. In 1769, he was able to get the support of King Serfoji in his missionary activities at Thanjavur. The ruler Serfoji built a church to show his affection to Schwartz. Shortly before his death, he committed to Schwartz the education of his adopted son and successor. Schwartz taught the Prince serfoji and slightly older students Vedanayagam using the Gurukula approach where teacher and student live together. It is interesting to note that Schwartz undertook a private embassy to Hyder Ali, the then ruler of Mysore at the request of British authorities in Madras.

Even though he was a foreign missionary, he had maintained a good relationship with the local Indian rulers, particularly with Raja Sefoji II, a Maratha ruler of Thanjavur and direct descendent of Shivaji, the great Maratha warrior, to whom he was the mentor from his early stage. Schwartz also had a good relationship with Hyder Ali, the Muslim ruler of Mysore. Though he was a Protestant Missionary, he won the support of people of other religions. His efforts to help the poor and suffering, Christian and non-Christian alike, brought him recognition, and his fame spread. When Tulau, the rajah of Thanjavur, was restored to his throne in 1776, he begged Schwartz to remain permanently. Two years later, Schwartz left his junior colleague, Christian Joseph Pohle, to carry on as missionary and chaplain in Tiruchirapalli and moved to Thanjavur\*\*\*\*.

Hyder Ali, ruler of Mysore, had specifically requested that Schwartz be sent. No other emissary was deemed more trustworthy. No one could command such trust; and no one could command such fluency of the relevant languages (Urdu, Persian, Marathi, Tamil, and others). No translator or interpreter would be required doubt, "to prevent a further effusion of blood," Schwartz agreed to go, but only as long as it was clearly understood that he went only as a missionary and not only as an emissary of peace.\*\*\*\*\*He handed over the prize purse of three

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\*\*\*\* Ibid p.6

\*\*\*\* Robert Eric Frykenberg, "The Legacy of Christian Fridrick Schwartz", International bulletin of missionary Research, published on July 1999, p. 131.

\*\*\*\* Ibid. p.no. 10

\*\*\*\*\* Christian Biography "The Life of Rev. Christian F. Schwartz, Missionary of Trichinopoly, and Tanjore in India", Religious Tract Society, Instituted 1799; published by The Depository, London, and printed by J. Rider, Little Britain, London. p.no.6

hundred rupees that Hyder Ali had given him, and when this was then handed back to him, he made it the initial base of an endowment for the establishment of an Orphan school in Thanjavur<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>.

It made a new culture of boarding schools. In the suburb of Vallam, a house and compound were converted into a prayer-school hall and other *pukka* buildings also began to rise. But again, the war interrupted activities. Hyder's armies broke upon the Carnatic. Once more Schwartz found his hands full, tending the hungry, sick, wounded, and dying. Finally, Schwartz contributed significantly to the strengthening of an indigenous church in India. He made every effort to find and train young Indians for the ministry, often supporting them from his own pocket.<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> He also encouraged the spontaneous expansion of small groups of Christians, such as those discovered during a visit to Palamcottah in 1778, the nucleus of what later became the large and vigorous Tinnevely church. He was also responsible for the education of Vedanayagam, son of a catechist who trained under Schwartz; Vedanayagam was to become one of the greatest Tamil poets and hymn composers.<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>

Poor widows also came in, for a share of the attention of this benevolent man. The young Raja of Tanjore, however, visiting that part of the country, Mr. Schwartz pleaded with him, on behalf of the widows, and succeeding in his application, completed a row of small houses for comfortable reception of these destitute women. Like this Schwartz was involved in society and good things were done by him. His extensions were not confined to the instruction and conversion of the adult natives and Europeans; He opened English and Malabar schools at various places and was affectionate and unwearied in his attention to children. At the same time, he never opposed the caste feelings. He adjusted with them. He also revealed his feelings like this. "Here the man and woman of higher caste on one side and other that of the lower. I have carefully avoided Coercive measures and thus have met with fewer difficulties. But in the country, such conversion is not easy. They would facilitate the connection between the European and natives and would open a door to the missionaries by which means divine knowledge will be conveyed to the natives in the earliest manner.

It was about the turn of the century when the modern missionary movement began in England and the U.S.A., and the East India Company had also removed its veto by the charter of 1813 and the way was now clear for the missions. When the Wesleyan Methodist took up the field in 1820, in Nagapattinam several of protestant Missions were already at work in the area, now covered by the Tiruchirapalli and Tanjore Diocese. When the Church of South India was inaugurated on 27th September 1947, it was acclaimed as the greatest miracle ever performed by God in the first half of the 20th century. As it was for the first time after centuries of historic divisions, churches with Episcopal and non-Episcopal traditions were brought together in a united Episcopal church.

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\*\*\*\* Ibid P.11

\*\*\*\* Ibid.,p11

\*\*\*\* Ibid.,p12

## Conclusion

The Protestant mission gave more importance to education, health care, and social welfare. They started training schools and homes for the physically challenged to provide service to the Tamil Society. It may be the motive of the mission to attract the people to Christianity. However, the whole population irrespective of religion and caste benefited from the education and health care program initiated by the diocese. This program has now given way to many private schools and hospitals. Therefore, it can be clear, that the Diocese's contribution to education lit the light to downtrodden life. The Dalit who had embraced Christianity by conversions treated as equal to any individual in society by the Diocese and its congregation churches. Thus, currently, they may be highly educated and esteemed in society by acquiring good positions and good jobs. Also, it was the diocese, that taught them to become economically successful.

The missionaries from foreign countries came to Tranqubar and spread Christianity in Tamil Nadu. Their clear intention is to convert people. But they understood that without upliftment they could not approach the natives and did a great job. After the union of congregations Diocese also had done changes in native people of Nagapattinam, Thanjavur, Trichy, Karur, Dharapuram, and some parts of Coimbatore. Still now, Trichy – Tanjore Diocese is continuing the contribution to the Tamil Society, through education, hospital ministry, and Social work. The Protestant mission has done meritorious service through evangelism, educational contribution, medical Service, and Social service to the downtrodden and to the Tamil Society. Schedule caste people and common society have gained education, social upliftment, employment, economic and social development through churches and their institutions. Karur and Dharapuram people were well developed because of Diocese Contribution.

The small Christian community which sprang up in Nagapattinam after 1820 branched out at Melanatham, Mannargudi, Thiruvarur, Trichy, Karur, Dharapuram and Annaimalies. This spreading of the Gospel is well explained in the parable of the Mustard seed. This flow of the living water is different from the natural river. This flow started from the port passed through rocks as hard as the Trichy Rock fort and watered land as dry as Dharapuram and climbed up mountains as high as the Annaimalies. The parable of the mustard seed growing endlessly as a huge tree accommodating birds and giving shade to many is a wonderful picture of the growth of the Tamil society and it is a typical illustration of the great Christian missionaries who their young days in these districts, but the faithful seed sown in the Tamil society, grew and grew and the society see its fruits in abundance. Thus, the Protestant Mission had been contributed to the Tamil society through his service and won the hearts of Tamil Society. The contribution of the mission played a vital role in Tamil Society. According to the researcher, the church culture is benign.

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