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Research Article

THE PROTESTANT LUTHERAN MISSION AND MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES IN TRANQUEBAR REGION

Sivakandan T*

Department of History, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar.608 002. Tamil Nadu

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ABSTRACT

This history of the spread of Christianity in the Tranquebar region during the 18th century was the history of the Protestant Mission in India by German Missionaries, sponsored by the King of Denmark and supported by the society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K) of London. The Halle University of Germany played a vital role in sending proper persons and instruction to carry out the Missionary work in India. Right from Ziegenbalg and Plush, 54 took part in the Missionary work. Under Francke, 10 Missionaries were sent out, of which 9 were Germans and one was Dane. After Francke, 44 Missionaries were sent out to India of which 38 were Germans, 5 Danes, and one Swede.

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INTRODUCTION

The prince Frederick IV wondered why nobody in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of his country had thought of bringing the Gospel to non-christian in other parts of the world. When he became a king, he commanded the dignitaries of his church to find out the Missionaries but only in his German court chaplain Dr.Lutkene, did find the men who with joy brought the fuel to set in a blaze this flame. Unfortunately, no pastor in Denmark was found ready to become a missionary, hence Dr.Lutkens through the exertions of his German friends procured two young pious, theological students for the purpose. Hence, the first "Royal Danish Missionaries" were not Danes, but Germans. Of these two, the senior was Heinrich Pluetschau, who was born in 1677 at walsenburg in Mecklenburg. To him belongs the honor of being the co-founder of the Tranquebar Mission. Even though his great colleague takes precedence over him because of his out standing achievements and tenacity in his work.

Both Pluetschau and Ziegenbalg had been under Dr.Lange as students of Friedrich warder Gymnasium in Berlin. They had known each other while at the University of Halle, had common friends, and sat at the feet of the same institution. On 11th November 1705 at the Cape of Good Hope they halted from April 23rd to May 8th, 1706. On 9th July 1706, Zingenbalg and Pluetschau landed in Tranquebar. Long before 1706AD the Church of Rome was active in India. Ziegenbalg and

Pluetschau were not even the first Protestant Christians or Pastors on Indian soil. Dutch, English and Danish merchants first represented Evangelical Christianity in India and especially in South India. However, they were not a good representative of the Christian Faith. Most of them were certainly not the people to win non-christians namely Hindus and Muslims. Thus in the 17th century, up to the arrival of Ziegenbalg and Pluetschau in Tranquebar, nothing was done which could be even charitably called the beginning of mission work.¹

Church history, therefore, holds fast to the date 9th July 1706 as the noteworthy event. When the missionaries Ziegenbalg and Pluetschau came to India as the first evangelical missionaries and that with them and only they did the mission work of evangelical church begin on Indian soil. On this day 9th July 1706, the Evangelical Indian mission came into being.²

Bartholmaeus Ziegenbalg's Missionary Activities at Tranquebar

Learning the Language

Ziegenbalg when landed at Tranquebar who realized from the start that the knowledge of the local language was the key to the situation, and mastery of Tamil became the primary objective of Ziegenbalg. They were needed help from local person, who volunteered them to teach the Tamil language. Ziegenbalg was able to speak Tamil fluently within a year. He had a gift of learning languages and had made fast studies. As

*Corresponding author: **Sivakandan T**

Department of History, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar.608 002. Tamil Nadu

his progress was much more rapid than Pluetschau's it was natural that he should concentrate more on the Tamil work and Pluetschau on the Portuguese³. Undoubtedly, his painstaking learning of Tamil under the scorching sun on the sand of Tranquebar, his long hours of private study have enabled him not only to leave footprints on the sands of time but also inspire the modern missionaries to learn linguistically and the local dialects as a necessary preparation. Ziegenbalg's knowledge of Tamil and the Hindu religion enabled him to converse not only with the pundits but also with ordinary people. He was accessible and ever willing to dialogue with others. Lehman writes that "He used every opportunity; when visitors came in conversation at home and outside, through extensive reading, through a large correspondence on his journeys and through street preaching"⁴.

Lehman also quotes that Ziegenbalg had many visitors, besides this many Malabarees and Moors came daily whom he never refuse when they want to speak with him, because of which he was now everywhere so that often Malabar poets came to have a discussion with him and make his acquaintance. Lehman refers the missionary work of Ziegenbalg as "no wonder Ziegenbalg is called the patriarch of the Evangelical missionaries to the Tamilians, an example for all future missionaries everywhere". Ziegenbalg's intention was not only to learn the Tamil language intensively but also to contribute something more to the development of the language.

Ziegenbalg Contribution towards Literature

What makes one particular book to be considered as literature? Some books may be sold in millions at the time of publication and they may be called as literature. But after some time no one would be remembering such books at all. Certain books may not have such popularity at the time of publication, but due to its excellence and permanent value of scholarship, would be pondering over this book for centuries continuously. Since Ziegenbalg produced such literature, he is called "Man of Letters"⁵.

Ziegenbalg's First Book

Ziegenbalg wrote his first book during his voyage from Europe to India. The name of the Ship was 'Sophia', which inspired him to write a book on the divine wisdom. The Greek word 'Sophia' means Wisdom. He wrote 26 chapters on the ship and completed the book in Tranquebar. The aim and content of this book were, "General school of the true wisdom, in which wisdom in this world, find out and reach it, which can bless us human being timely and eternally". Ziegenbalg dedicated this book to Princesses Sophia Hedwig, the sister of King Frederick IV. She paid for its printing in 1710 and when he wrote this manuscript at the age of 23 only.

Ziegenbalg and Printing Press

The Tranquebar Mission can also take the credit of being the first to set up a printing press of the Evangelica Church in India. But the Tranquebar press was as the world 'Evangelica' above is supposed to show, not the first mission press, and also not the first Tamil to print books in India. This honor goes to the Jesuits. Professor Von Glasenapp says that a Jesuit set up a press in Goa in 1556, while the T.N.Siqueira writes that the first printing press in

India was set up in Ambalacat near Cochin in 1577 by a Jesuit. The Jesuit also opened the first Tamil printing press in India.

Ziegenbalg wrote and translated spiritual and cultural articles both in German and Tamil. His major work was Genealogy of the Malabar Gods and Goddess in 1713. He translated Luther's Small Catechism in 1715, and a portion of the Old Testament from Genesis to Ruth which was completed by Benjamin Schultz. On the same year, he compiled Tamil Hymn book. He also prepared Tamil Grammar book called Grammatica Damulica in 1716.⁶

Ziegenbalg's Contribution towards the Bible Translation

The first person ever to take up the translation of any portion of the Bible into Tamil was Philip Baldaeus, a Chaplain who traveled with the Dutch personnel to Ceylon in the seventeenth century. He had translated the gospel of St. Mathew into Tamil for the benefit of the inhabitants of North Ceylon in 1655; it was never printed but circulated in a manuscript written on Palmyra leaves. But it was in this situation Ziegenbalg expressed his resolution to translate the Bible on Aug 22, 1708 and mainly to put the Gospel into the hands of his converts so that they might be able to read, interpret and meditate on it for themselves. He started earnestly this historical attempt on 17th October 1708 and completed on 21st March 1711. This attempt of translation the Scripture in the local tongue was indeed a breakthrough for the community where the accessibility to read the Scripture was rare and remote. Thus he obtained the unique privilege of translating and publishing the first Tamil New Testament.

Translation in Tamil

Ziegenbalg also translated Tamil literature into other languages. He translated the Danish order of Divine Service in Tamil and Portuguese for the use in the service. He also translated 26 German hymns, which were sung in the Jerusalem Church from 1707 onwards. For the instruction of the candidates for baptism and school children, he translated Luther's Small Catechism and Philip Jaccop Spener's 'Catechetical Explanations'. Another important translation in Tamil was Johann Anastasius Frylinghausen's 'Systematic Theology' and it was printed in the Mission Press in Tranquebar in 1707. AD.⁷

Dictionaries and Grammatica Damulica

Ziegenbalg contributed to literature by providing books for Non-Tamilians, especially Missionaries who wanted to study this ancient language. Soon after his arrival, he started to collect words for a dictionary. He collected the words from around hundred books of theology, philosophy, history, medicine, and economics, till in 1708 he had collected 20000 words. In 1712 he wrote that the dictionary for prose with 40000 words was completed. On 14th September 1708 he wrote that he had also collected 17000 words for a dictionary for poetical books. He used for this work a Tamil dictionary, Chudemani Nigandu and got the help of experienced Tamil poets.

Ziegenbalg was not the first European who wrote a Tamil grammar book. H.Henriques (1520-1600), a Jesuit priest from Goa, had written a Tamil grammar book and used it. Ziegenbalg wrote Grammatica Damulica on request from

Europe could use it. The Tamil letters were made in Halle and Ziegenbalg did the corrections. Fifty copies were sent to him during his stay in London. The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge sent copies to various academic institutions and the book was appreciated. Among the books written by Ziegenbalg, the "Grammatica Damulica" is the most known book.

The Malabarian Correspondence

The missionaries could not travel to the kingdom of Thanjavur. Therefore they started to correspond with various people. They sent a question to them on religion, culture, ethics, customs, education etc. With the request to send their answers. They collected these letters and Gruendler translated them into German. The collection of 58 letters was sent to Europe and dedicated to Crown Prince Christian of Denmark who replied to the missionaries that he accepted it with pleasure. Since the Crown Prince had accepted the manuscript, A.H.Francke had to print it against his own scruples. The 'Malabarian Correspondence' with remarks of the missionaries was well received by the readers.

The second publication of different letters followed in 1717. The 'Malabarian Correspondence' was an exchange of information between the missionaries and Tamil scholars and it was unique in its form in those days. In 1998 a selection of those letters had been published in Germany, contains 341 pages with good old pictures of the 18th century.

Tracts and Books for Non-Christians

For Non-Christians whom he could not approach directly, Ziegenbalg wrote tract and booklets so that they could understand Christ. I mention four of them;

1. In 1709 he wrote a letter in the form of a prophetic speech as if God himself is the author who addresses the Tamilians. The letter was written in a lively style but Francke to whom Ziegenbalg sent a translation admonished the young missionary not to follow the Old Testament prophets but the apostles of Jesus Christ. Ziegenbalg accepted this criticism and did not write letters in such style again.
2. One tract has the title 'Way to Salvation'. It was first written on palm leaves and later printed into Tamil.
3. When the Tamil press arrived at Tranquebar in 1712 the first publication was a Tract on Paganism (heathenism). Ziegenbalg states in this tract that the civil life of the Tamilians is not to be criticized, but only religion is wrong.
4. Ziegenbalg wrote in 1713 one more booklet in Tamil, 'Damnable Paganism (Heathenism)'
5. Some Tamilians thought the booklet describes their religion correctly, but Hindu priests forbade the reading of it.

Translation of Tamil Ethical Writings

Ziegenbalg not only translated books from German into Tamil but also Tamil to German. His wish was that the Europeans should get a better knowledge of Tamil culture and religion. He made research on Tamil was of life and translated 'Niethivenba, Ulakaniethi, and Konraiventhan,' three important books on ethics. But the manuscripts were not printed by

A.H.G. Francke. They were published only in 1930 in Holland; 219 years after Ziegenbalg had translated them.⁸

Ziegenblag as Evangelizer

Ziegenbalg was significantly different in the eyes of native Indian in terms of his love, commitment and holiness as compared to Europeans who were there for business. The mastery over the Tamil language helped him tremendously to come close and communicate the Gospel to the native people of Tamil Nadu. He used to go to streets or fields and hundreds of people gathered around him and preached Gospel in Tamil. The native Tamilians listened to his preaching in Tamil with wonder. 'By one means and another little congregation was formed and as early as August 1707 a small mission church was built outside the Fort. The first Tamil converts nine in number were baptized in the following months.

He believed in genuine life transforming conversion and dispensation of grace which could be gained only through a process of reading, learning, meditation, thought and prayers. The pattern of the mission work designed by Ziegenbalg was called 'Tranquebar Pattern'. This pattern aimed at personal conversion through schools, orphanage, Bible translation, printing, training of preacher and catechizing the young.

Non-Christian Conversion of Ziegenbalg's Ministry

Ziegenbalg did his evangelistic work by preaching, teaching, and writing. Ziegenbalg was able to convert 63 persons by 12th September 1706. Ziegenbalg converted a native person, Kananbadi Wathiar who was baptized in 1709 but he was persecuted by his own people. Unfortunately, he backslid and returned to Hinduism. Another person Aaron was a son of a Hindu merchant of Cuddalore and he was baptized by Ziegenbalg and then became a catechist. He was the first Indian pastor ordained in 1733. Ziegenbalg baptized another youth called Ganapathy on 16th October 1709. He was given a new name called Christian Fredrick for the remembrance of Frederick IV, king of Denmark who gave his consent to be his Godfather. This convert helped Ziegenbalg in his mission work. However, he embraced Hinduism later.

Ziegenbalg visited the following villages Poraiyar, Tilliar, Sundrapari, Kottupallam, Erukittancheri, Chattniguri, Dewanallur, Oruwanmangalam, Chinkitankarei, Pommeanpottei, Killinchimeudu, Killinkaraipoettei, Singnupottei, Akkamenpottei and Ellamenpottei. Ziegenbalg traveled through these villages regularly and preached the Gospel. There were only 280 members of the congregation at the time of Ziegenbalg's death which shows the numerical growth of the Church at that time.⁹

Funding of Schools and Hostels

The missionaries used to adopt orphan children by purchasing them from their guardians. In this way, the nucleus of a small orphanage was formed by Ziegenbalg because during his time in Halle he had recognized the value of Christian education. Ziegenbalg's letter to Rev. George Lewies throws light on the Educational Ministry of Ziegenbalg. God abundantly blessed Ziegenbalg's effort in the field of education. In the year 1713 AD, there were five schools run by Ziegenbalg. There were, two Tamil Schools started on December 28th, 1707 AD, one

Portuguese School, one Danish School (November 21st, 1707), one school for Girls.

Building the Church at Tranquebar

Ziegenbalg and Pluetschau gathered with their first converts in their house. Also missionaries, Indian converts, and catechumens were not meaningfully worshipping God in the Zion Church along with Europeans due to the language hurdle. Ziegenbalg explained to King Frederick IV in a letter dated 19th September 1707 that according to the people one of the hindrances to join the Christian faith was the non-existence of a church, which they could use without the presence of officers. Ziegenbalg wrote to A.H.Francke on 1st October 1706 that he would arrange a small church in their house where he could give instructions to the non-Christians. Ziegenbalg and Pluetschau began the construction of the new church building on 6th June 1707. When the missionaries ventured to build the church, many mocked at them. The reason was that the missionaries did not have enough resources to do such work. However, the new church building was completed in two months and was dedicated as 'Jerusalem Church' and it costs 250 persons. In this dedication service Ziegenbalg preached in Tamil on the text Psalm 122:9 'For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good'. Eucharist and Baptism were administered for the first time in this church in May 1707. Due to the intensive work of Ziegenbalg and Pluetschau, this church grew rapidly. In the year 1707, there were 35 Tamil converts and in the year 1708, there were 101 members increased in this church.¹⁰

The Missionaries were able to complete this new church building construction with the cost of Rupees eighteen thousand. Ziegenbalg inscribed the following matter at the Altar of this New Church Building,

"People to gather by God's Grace
To hear God's Word
To wait upon the Lord in Prayer
This New Jerusalem Church was
Built by God alone and
Dedicated to the Glory of God
On 11th October 1718. Amen"¹¹

Music and Pastoral work of Ziegenbalg at Tranquebar

Ziegenbalg played a vital part in introducing 'Christian Music' for the infant Church for the spiritual nourishment. He translated Christian hymns into Tamil. He began this translation work on 26th March 1707 and completed the work by 1708. Some of the hymns were taken from Roman Catholic Services. The catechumens were taught these songs and on 24th January 1715 a Hymn Book consisting of 48 Hymns was printed. He had a number of hymns as European melodies, 'according to the Malabar way of singing and used by the school children'.

Further, he taught Psalms to be sung in Indian music. He also composed Tamil Songs in Tamil music and released it as a book. Teacher in his schools taught their children to this Tamil song for the morning and noon devotions. His first whole compiled Hymn Book, printed in 1774 in Madras, contains 336 hymns.¹²

Ziegenbalg met the pastoral needs of the New Jerusalem Church. Through his institutions, he took care of the needs of both Children and Adults under his care. Even before the Jerusalem Church, missionaries arranged worship service for the new converts in the Zion Church. However, sometimes the missionaries were not given permission immediately to conduct the worship in the Zion Church. The missionaries did not lose their hearts and they arranged for worship services in the mission home on Sunday. He had frequent interaction with his parishes and ministered accordingly.

Through his street preaching, visitation, and dialogue, he was in constant touch with the people during afternoons. Ziegenbalg was not only a lover of music but also use the music for the Almighty's ministry and he was not only a missionary but also as a good model, pioneers pastor in Tranquebar mission.¹³

CONCLUSION

The history of the spread of Christianity in the Tranquebar region during the 18th century was the history of the Protestant Mission in India by German Missionaries, sponsored by the king of Denmark and supported by the society for promoting christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K) of London. The Halle University of Germany played a vital role in sending Proper persons and instruction to carry out the Missionary work in India. Though these achievements and effective Lutheran missionary activities were not a single person effort but many people worked for the Christ and to the establishment kingdom of God in India. It was not only the Lutheran Missionary effort but also the Catholics who worked before the Lutherans in the Tranquebar region.

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