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**FROM OUTSIDE THE GATE  
INTO THE GATE:  
AN INDIAN PROTESTANT EXPERIENCE**

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**Introduction**

The Anglican Archbishop Trevor Huddleston (1913–1998), who served for sometime in Johannesburg in South Africa, visited once the slum dwellers in “black” settlements. He intended to comfort them because at that time they lived “outside the gate,” and thus they were unable to determine their own destiny. But the inhabitants were not satisfied with his comforting words; instead they requested him to help them to get out of their misery, and get “into the gates” of normal life of their fellow South Africans. These and other events shaped Bishop’s Huddleston’s anti-apartheid ministry.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Christian missionaries have been bringing people from “outside the gates” of their society into the mainstream of the same society. The following essay provides a brief historical example of how Protestant Christians helped several sections of South Indians to leave their place outside the gates (e.g., caste segregation, social and economic exploitations, and the like) and to gain an important place right within the mainstream of their society.<sup>2</sup>

**1 CONTEXTS IN WHICH EARLY CHRISTIANS LIVED AND SERVED**

**1.1 India in early eighteenth century**

India embodied (and still embodies) a variety of people groups along with

their specific languages, cultures, and religions. In the course of time many groups of people — traders, travelers, immigrants, pilgrims, itinerant monks and nuns of various religious orders, soldiers of conquering armies, teachers, and others — came to India and settled there. Each group kept its own identity and protected against prevailing political rivalries and confusions. All Indian inhabitants somehow came under the sway of the caste system, and they continued to negotiate their legitimate place within the larger Indian social setting.<sup>3</sup>

Some of those who came from outside of India established themselves as rulers, and they had constant conflicts and other troubles with native rulers. The most powerful Sultans of Delhi (1220–1526 CE) and the Emperors of the *Mughal Empire* (1526–1707) were Muslims.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the rulers of the *Vijanagara Empire* (1336–1565 CE),<sup>5</sup> the *Maratha Empire* (1674–1761 CE),<sup>6</sup> and of the various smaller kingdoms in South India<sup>7</sup> guarded not only their geographical territories, but also their ancestral faith traditions which would later be called “Hinduism.” The seemingly unending conflicts among these various rulers affected the life of ordinary Indians badly. Some Muslim rulers imposed their understandings of Islam on non-Muslim Indians, and thus the conflicts grew deeper and more complex. Aurangzeb, who died in 1707 CE, was the last *Mughal Emperor* who disliked non-Muslim Indians and imposed heavy taxes on them.

After Aurangzeb’s death the *Mughal Empire* began to crumble; and it coincided with the arrival of Europeans in India for trade. But soon they established themselves as rulers in India. The Portuguese sailor Vasco da Gama, who visited Calicut in Kerala in May 1498 and February 1502, inaugurated the huge influx of European merchants, settlers, armies, and colonists, especially in the form of East India Companies. The *British East India Company* (1600–1858) established its trading and military centers along the eastern and western seacoasts of India of which the following three were significant: Surat (1612), Madras (1639) and Calcutta (1690). Other European trading companies such as the *Dutch East India Company* (1602–1798 with colonies in *Nagapatnam*, *Sadras*, and *Chinsura*), the *French East India Company* (1664–1769 with colonies in *Pondicherry*, *Karaikkal* and *Mahe*) and the *Danish East India Company* (1618–1845 with colonies in *Tranquebar* and *Serampore*)<sup>8</sup> had their own settlements, trading centers, and military and naval establishments. They thrived on the weaknesses and conflicts between various Indian princes by selling ammunition and guns, by deepening the wounds through skillful diplomatic enterprise, and by bribing the powerful parties. From the beginning European merchants and colonists could succeed because able Indians who were not satisfied

with Indian rulers readily supported the Europeans.

Those Indians who supported the Europeans with unwavering loyalty were mostly from upper castes. These Indians served the Europeans as their translators, police personnel, intelligence gatherers, tax collectors, administrators, and mediators. They defended Europeans who with the help of Indians and through Indian means plundered Indian wealth and oppressed fellow Indians. Most of them were non-Christians who had little or no regard for Christians. While the Indians of upper castes worked in administrative or other supervisory jobs, the East India Companies employed the people of lower castes to perform menial or ritually polluting jobs (e.g., public scavengers, tanners, and the like). The decisive influence of these Indians who worked for the welfare of the East India Companies was so great that the Europeans, who professed to be Christians, devised rules and policies that were anti-Christian. They preferred to work with non-Christians, and sought ways to avoid Christians, especially European missionaries and Indian Christian converts.

Economic concerns of the Europeans forced them to depend on the favor and active collaboration of the non-Christian Indians. These Indians, as already mentioned, had least respect for Christianity and Christians. Their businesses with the Europeans ushered in so much wealth that they endowed several "Hindu" temples. They renovated old temples or built new ones. As a result, a new type of spirituality emerged that stressed widespread religious activities. The intensity of caste consciousness increased among Indians living in European colonies because Indians of different caste categories came to these colonies and tried to find a place for themselves. Caste-specific duties and purity-pollution concepts were imposed with renewed vigor.

Contact with Europeans enabled Indians to increasingly become conscious of their religious faiths and practices. Most Indians worshipped pan-Indian (vegetarian) deities such as *Shiva*, *Vishnu*, *Brahma*, and their consorts such as *Parvati*, *Lakshmi* and *Sarasvati*. Other Indians cherished the worship of various local (village-based, non-vegetarian) deities who were/are known as the guardian deities. Most of these guardian deities were/are goddesses. Their devotees of these guardian deities believed that these deities protected them, their crops, cattle, and villages from evil spirits and natural catastrophes such as drought and flood. The worshippers of pan-Indian deities and the devotees of local deities shared the same social space; but they did not interact with each other intimately. For the same of common good, they needed alternative ways: they should learn first to leave their "gates" behind and to mingle with others. In this regard, Christians

provided them an opportunity to cross social, cultural, religious, economic and other boundaries, and to establish alternate communities.

### **1.2 State of Christianities in eighteenth century India**

When the first Protestant missionaries reached India in July 1706, they came to a land where three different groups of Christians lived: The first group is known as the St. Thomas Christians. They were not a homogenous group, but consisted of several subgroups. Yet all of them believed that Thomas, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, came to Cranganore near Cochin in 52 AD and died a martyr's death in Mylapore in 72 AD. Several churches in places such as Cranganore and Nirnayam trace their origin back to Thomas. Memories of Thomas' ministry in India are found in the folksongs and legends. Later waves of Persian Christian immigrants came to India of which two were important: in 345 AD, Thomas of Cana, probably a wealthy merchant, led about 400 Persian Christians to the southern parts of Kerala. These Christians were skilled in various arts; hence they easily found a new home among the native people of Kerala. Another wave of Christian immigration into India occurred in 823 AD: two Syrian bishops, Mar Sapor and Mar Piruz, led a few Persian Christian immigrants to northern parts of Kerala. There they received sufficient land to live in. They continued to use Syriac liturgy in their churches. In the course of time, they constituted an integral part of Indian society by largely assuming to be an (inward looking) caste. These Christians lived undisturbed until the arrival of the Portuguese in India.<sup>9</sup>

The second group of Christians consisted of the Roman Catholics: in 1494, Pope Alexander VI entrusted through his *Padroado* ("patronage") all the countries on the East of Rome to the spiritual care of the king of Portugal. Accordingly, the Portuguese king should establish mission centers and churches, appoint clergy and support them in all possible ways. The Portuguese in India were zealous colonizers. On the west coast they captured important coastal cities such as *Cranganore* (1500), *Cochin* (1506), *Goa* (1510), and *Diu* (1535), and established their political and religious headquarters in *Goa*. Slowly, they controlled other coastal cities such as *Mylapore* and *Nagapatanam* on the east coast. Soon several Dominicans, Carmelites, Augustinians, and members of other Roman Catholic Orders founded their institutions in several parts of India. With the arrival of the Jesuits in 1542 Roman Catholic Christianity began to spread not only along the east and west coasts, but also into the heartland of India. In 1599, at the *Synod of Diamper* the Portuguese forced the St. Thomas Christians to change their loyalties and declared them Roman Catholics. This new iden-

tity created several problems and divisions.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, the Roman Catholic Christians in India had to deal with another internal problem: in 1622, Pope Gregory XV founded the *Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith*, commonly known as the *Propaganda Fide*. He tried to bring all overseas missionary activity under his control, and sent his *Vicar Apostolics* into the areas where the Portuguese and several Roman Catholic missionary orders had established themselves. Consequently, numerous conflicts occurred between the *Padroado*-missionaries and the *Vicar Apostolics* that drained their energy and hindered their work. Some of the famous Roman Catholic missionaries in India were Francis Xavier (1506–1552),<sup>11</sup> Henrique Henriques (1520–1600),<sup>12</sup> Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656),<sup>13</sup> and the like.

The third group consisted of the Dutch Reformed Christians. The main policies and goals of the *Dutch East India Company* did not differ much from that of the East India Companies from Great Britain and Denmark. The merchants and administrators of these companies entertained anti-Christian, hence also anti-missionary policies. Their major concern was economic gain; they did not plan to help the local people in any positive manner. At the same time, certain individuals ventured to engage in personal missionary activity: a few Dutch *predicants* (“preachers”) who were meant to serve the spiritual needs of their fellow Dutch citizens dared to find ways of engaging in missionary work. Abraham Roger (died 1649)<sup>14</sup> and Philippus Baldaeus (1632–1671 in South India)<sup>15</sup> introduced their version of Christianity to the Dutch colonies such as *Palaverkadu* and *Nagapatnam* on the *Coromandel Coast* in southeastern India. Most of their Indian converts hailed from lower castes. When the *Dutch East India Company* overcame the Portuguese in many places, some Roman Catholic Christians also joined the Dutch Reformed Church. The number of Indian converts to the Dutch Reformed Christianity remained small, yet they were there.<sup>16</sup>

## **2 Origins and principles of Protestant Christianities**

The Danish King Friedrich IV (1671–1730, absolute monarch from 1699) dared to accomplish something which no other Protestant kings in Europe before him ever envisaged: in 1705 he instituted the first foreign Protestant mission by sending to his colony of Tranquebar on the *Coromandel Coast* in southeastern India two young German students of theology, namely Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg (1682–1719)<sup>17</sup> and Heinrich Plütschau (c. 1675–1752), as missionaries.<sup>18</sup> He charged them to work among the Indian in-

habitants in Tranquebar and find out whether any of them would ever turn to Jesus Christ and become a Christian. When they landed in Tranquebar on July 9, 1706, they remained unaccepted because the Directors of the *Danish East India Company* had already instructed Governor Johann Sigismund Hassius (1704–1716), their chief representative in Tranquebar, to hinder every work of the missionaries. The authorities of the *Danish East India Company* in Copenhagen, and the European merchants in Tranquebar and their non-Christian Indian employees seem to have believed that the missionaries came to Tranquebar to spy on them, and to hinder the economic prospects of the company. As a result, the governor who embodied the principles and attitudes of the company remained unhelpful.

In spite of constant troubles, including a four month long imprisonment for Ziegenbalg in 1708/9, the missionaries persevered. The *Tranquebar Mission*, also known as the *Royal Danish-Halle Mission*, lasted until 1845.<sup>19</sup> Then it was taken over by the *Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission*.<sup>20</sup> But that time, however, fifty-four missionaries worked in southern parts of India; fourteen Indian Tamil Lutheran pastors were ordained and sent to different places for evangelistic and ecclesial work. Numerous catechists, school teachers, and others were trained to shoulder the responsibility of the churches. The emphasis on lay mission involvement lay at the heart of the missionaries in Tranquebar. They translated the Bible into Tamil and Telugu; they wrote grammars and dictionaries for their European successors. Indians at that time did not need these language tools. Nevertheless these dictionaries became the constituting elements for the great dictionaries such as the *Tamil Lexicon*, published by the University of Madras (1924–1936; 2nd ed., 1982). Tamil Lutheran congregations emerged not only in Tranquebar, but also, thanks to the work of many ordinary Tamil Lutherans, in several other cities of southern India. The missionaries played a great role in introducing modern printing press (1712) and several other science subjects (e.g., European mathematics, astronomy, botany, zoology, and the like). The mission reports, written by the missionaries and their converts and published in Halle (Saale), Germany, informed the readers in Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, Great Britain, and even in the New England about Indian Protestant Christians in southern India.

The story of the missionaries in Tranquebar, the growth of their Protestant congregations, the *First and Second Great Awakenings* in Great Britain and the United States of America, the revised charters of the *British East India Company* in 1813 and 1833, rising nationalism in several non-western countries, the growth of technology, industries, and transportation

and communication facilities mostly in the western parts of the world, and the implementation of higher education through the medium of English in India increased the aspiration of several western missionary agencies. Some of them wanted to evangelize the entire world in their own generation. They believed that Christian message was the much awaited answer to the world plagued by poverty, sickness, misuse of power and facilities, disproportionate distribution of wealth, ecological disasters, growing secularism, and the like. They also imagined that the spread of the Gospel would end the vigor of several non-Christian religions and ideologies, and usher in Christianity as the fulfillment of all human aspirations.

The leaders of western missionary agencies did not guess that the two World Wars would devastate their hopes. They did not expect that their so-called Christian countries would eventually fall into the trap of into long-lasting guilt, despair, distrust, fear, relativism, and enduring secularism that deeply suspected the validity of any truth claims, cross-cultural missionary work and local Christian witness. As a result even the churches in the so-called Christian countries largely neglected to educate their congregations to grapple with the content of the Bible. Their glaring biblical illiteracy, paradoxically in the midst of abounding Christian literature and multimedia materials, made them to be susceptible to every wind of change so that western societies would slowly and subtly reject their former associations with Christian values.

But the situation with missionaries in the non-western parts of the world was different. They soon realized that effective mission work should be incarnated into the complexities of every local context in such a way that Christian message remained clear, but was not domesticated by any culture. This approach also meant that Christian missionaries in India should face the multiple challenges posed by pre-Christian religions (e.g., Buddhism), atheist *nastika*-philosophies, and dualistic schools of thought (e.g., *samkya* and *Madhava* schools). Moreover, the depth of religious consciousness of the people in India, especially in the face of rapid social changes and insecurities produced by colonialism, exploitation and the like. Christian missionaries in India could not succeed with any trace of the *tabula rasa* ("blank slate") approach which denied the possible existence of good qualities and competencies in human beings created in God's image. Instead they remained sensitive to the felt-needs and long-term aspirations of Indians. While the people of upper castes resisted Christianity on various grounds, some Indians from lower social strata responded to Christian claims. They desired to leave behind their life outside the gate and wanted to be included into the mainstream of their society. They believed that Chris-

tianity would provide them spiritual strength to face all challenges.

In Tranquebar, for example, some Indians courageously became Christians. They chose to interact with European missionaries Ziegenbalg and Plütschau by teaching them their language and revealing to them the insider knowledge of their societies, religions and cultures. These seemingly insignificant Indians accompanied the missionaries on their faith journey and showed them sustained hospitality. These Indians knew well how the missionaries were unaccepted by their own colonial authorities. They were also fully aware that the missionaries did not have enough money to spend lavishly. They were familiar that the material resources of the missionaries were so limited that humanly speaking their mission work seemed without any successful prospects. They were also fully aware of the dire socio-economic consequences of their conversion to Christianity because, at that time, most Indians thought of Christianity as the religion of those who ate beef, drank alcohol and led an immoral lifestyle. They also imagined that Christian converts were required to renounce their caste identity, rights, and privileges including social ties with their families, relatives, and friends. As a result only a few courageous people became Christians. Many of them continued to remain Christians in the midst of many opposing socio-economic forces.

Bringing those people who were otherwise destined to live outside the gates of their society was indeed a difficult and challenging job. It required devotion, consistency and perseverance over a long period of time. The people should be educated to gain a new set of attitudes and worldviews that would convince them to break with those aspects of their traditions and societies that prevented their holistic growth and flourishing. With the changed and transformed attitudes they would eventually develop particular modes of thoughts that would result in particular type of behavior and character thought would be consistent with the values of the Bible and their own culture. As old habitual things do not disappear immediately, it was imperative for the missionaries and their converts to keep on finding and experimenting with alternate forms of thinking, behaving, living, and serving.

### **3 Steps to getting into the mainstream**

Moving from former life outside the gates of a society into its mainstream requires a long process of socialization because Indians, deeply influenced by millennia-old presuppositions, attitudes, thought patterns, traditions, and practices of relating to and simultaneously abstaining from peoples of dif-

ferent castes, languages and geographical regions, needed to acquire a new set of worldviews and values; they should also be able to interpret their heritage from biblical perspectives; in the course of time their conscious knowledge and subconscious responses should match with another; at the same time their claims and lifestyle should be relevant to the wider community in which they lived. The tension between being one with and being different from the larger community should result in creative possibilities that would lead Indian Christians to gain a new sense of self-worth, dignity, meaning, identity, and orientation; and they should extend these possibilities to other members of the larger communities. The missionaries in Tranquebar devised certain principles and processes of which the following can be explored below.

### **3.1 Christian Gospel in the Tamil language**

It is a great comfort to know that God understands all aspects of human languages, including their limitations! As a result no one language can have singular monopoly over the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. But every language is capable of incorporating and expressing the Gospel. Just as the mother tongue serves as the best medium of socialization, the Gospel presented in the mother tongue of the people produces better results. The reason of a better success depends on the fact that human beings assign meaning to the messages that they receive from external sources. The process of assigning meaning is conditioned by the selective memories of past events, different kinds of experiences with historical and religious traditions, social customs, economic situations, and aspirations of the people. Even in a multilingual society, such as Tranquebar where eighteen different languages were spoken, people respond to religious values through the patterns taught and acquired through their mother tongue.

In this regard, Ziegenbalg decided to learn the Tamil language which is actually a diglossia: the Tamil people have an unbroken written history of their language for more than 2,000 years. The style of their colloquial language, however, differs greatly from the style, diction, nuanced meanings of the formally spoken or written language. It was not easy for the missionaries to decide on the exact form of the language as a vehicle of Christian communication. While the Jesuit missionary Constanzo Giuseppe [Constantin Josef] Beschi (1680–1747)<sup>21</sup> chose to communicate his understanding of Roman Catholic Christianity through chaste forms of Tamil poetry, his contemporary Ziegenbalg settled for the colloquial form of the language. Ziegenbalg opined that he learned the Tamil language not to impress his hearers of his linguistic skills, but to help them to understand the

meaning and significance of the Christian message. Within two years after his arrival in Tranquebar, he managed to read and review 119 writings in Tamil that were written in metrical poetry. He tried to interact with the Tamil people as if he was already an insider. His Tamil converts in general, and Tamil friends such as Mudaliappan, Cepperumal, Ganapati Vattiyar, and Alagappan in particular enabled him to comprehend the depth of Tamil. Ganapai Vattiyar was a poet who was well versed in all forms of Tamil diction. Alagappan was a former interpreter of the Danish East India Company in Tranquebar, and he was fluent at Tamil, German, Portuguese, Dutch and Danish. As a polyglot he explained to Ziegenbalg the obvious and hidden meanings of Tamil words, phrases, idioms, and stories and the emotional attachment of the Tamil people to these stories. Without the patient and enduring help of these Tamil people, Ziegenbalg may not have learned Tamil in a proper manner. The more he and his Tamil friends discussed together the contents of Christian beliefs and practices the better they understood each other. This deep level of dialogue was necessary for them to produce a body of Christian literature that would survive for a long time.

### **3.2 Creating a body of Christian literature**

While the mother tongue opens the door to the understanding of the current psychology of a people group, their literature – both oral and written – facilitate a deeper look into the gradual development of their histories, values, identities, traditions, customs, and heritages. A group of people who wishes to leave their former life outside of the gates of their society should produce an alternate body of literature that would somehow codify the norms and expectations of their beliefs, expectations, and predictable patterns of responses to issues pertaining to the meaning of their life, work, worship, and service. This new body of Christian literature would invariably incorporate many aspects and categories of the already available pre-Christian literature; it will also include characteristically Christian elements so that the readers will gain relevant competencies in understanding Christian teachings within the categories of their familiar literary genera. Furthermore, every attempt of inculturation will contain the tension between continuity and discontinuity of contents, identities, and values.

Ziegenbalg was a master translator. As a believing and practicing Lutheran he declared that his main purpose of learning the Tamil language and reading Tamil literature was to translate the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into Tamil. He was pleasantly surprised to find that Tamil was a fitting language that could express biblical contents in such a way that the translated text would exert similar influence on its readers and hearers as it on

its original hearers and readers. By 1711 he finished translating the entire New Testament, composed appropriate church hymns, wrote a catechism, a manuscript on Christian ethical principles, and prepared texts on Lutheran liturgy and systematic theology. His successors Benjamin Schultze (1689–1760),<sup>22</sup> Christoph Theodosius Walther (1699–1741),<sup>23</sup> and Johann Philipp Fabricius (1711–1791)<sup>24</sup> improved the quality of Ziegenbalg's translation of various biblical books. In the course of time, other Protestant missionaries such as C.T. Rhenius, M. Winsow, P. Percival, and H. Bower refined the Tamil texts of the Bible.

Once the Bible was available in Tamil, the Tamil people could read it for themselves and listened to God speaking to them through the Hebrew prophets and Jewish apostles. They were surprised to find that unlike their own scriptures such as the Sanskrit *Vedas* and *Agamas* the Bible could be translated into their mother tongue. As time passed by, Tamil Christians gained enough linguistic “tools” so that they could relate to their pre-Christian religious literary heritage in an informed way. Thus the body of Tamil Christian literature prepared the people coming from outside the gates of their society to meet the linguistic, literary and other challenges of the people.

Translating the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Tamil had its own limitations. Most Tamil people, for example, understood the personal manifestation of Brahman (“the Ultimate Reality”) as inferior to the unmanifest form of Brahman who as *neti-neti* (“not this-not that”) could not be adequately described in human terms. Most of the Tamil Bible translators chose the word *deva* (“God as a heavenly being”) as a synonym for God. A *deva* would also have a *devi* (“goddess” in the sense of a divine consort) which is unacceptable for Christians. Similarly, Bible translators found/find it difficult to translate into Tamil biblical concepts of human beings, sin, atonement, and forgiveness, life after death, the church, and the like. As a result, Tamil Christians still cope with imperfect translations of the Bible; and recently new attempts have been made to further improve the text of the Bible. Christian church hymns and music, catechisms and systematic theology have similar developments. It is all the more surprising that a number of people who read available Tamil Christian texts, however imperfect they are, and yet become Christians.

### **3.3 Help for self-help**

It is one thing to encourage the people to leave behind their former life outside the gates of their society. But it is a different think to enable them to live within the mainstream of the society. Once people leave their former life setting, they need alternative life settings that functions and grants them

a sense of belonging, worth, and meaning. In a new place they need to learn and continue to re-learn the rules of socio-cultural thoughts and behavior patterns. The older the people are the more difficult it becomes to move them from life setting to another. If they are willing to cooperate in this process, they would still find it hard to accept the new environment. Whenever difficulties and misunderstandings arise or their life in the new environment seems to be more demanding, they tend to develop nostalgia for their former life outside the gates of their society. They need time, perseverance, resources, and role models for gaining new sets of attitudes and worldviews that in turn will animate them to work toward their participatory role in shaping their destiny within the mainstream society.

Ziegenbalg and his Tamil partners seem to have known these and other basic principles for developing self-help strategies. Tamil Christians, mostly from the poorest sections of the low caste people groups, realized that their social upward mobility depended almost entirely on gaining a new kind of education and vocational skills that would help them to mightily transcend the barriers set by their cultural, social and vocational expectations and practices. Therefore they requested Ziegenbalg to found a school for their children. As a result, considering the importance of gender segregation in Tamil society, Ziegenbalg and his colleagues established in 1707 a school for boys and a separate school for girls.

At that time a public school for girls was unheard of. The *devadasis* (“female servants of deities”) who were the temple dancers or musicians were required to know the art of reading, memorizing and singing religious legends and devotional songs. Moreover nuns belonging to various religious groups studied scriptures, poetry, music, and the art of counseling. Other women in general and the women of low castes had no opportunity for formal education. They depended on informal education, mostly about caste-specific marriages and food preparation, household management, maintaining functional relationships among the members of an extended family, showing hospitality to wandering mendicants, guests and strangers, bearing and rearing children, and preserving family values and social identities, and passing them on to future generations. These women bore the brunt of social and economic hardships imposed by a male dominated society. The stigma associated with the *devadasis* as unchaste and loose women was strong that no decent Tamils wanted to have their daughters educated in a school. In this context, it was revolutionary for the Protestant Christians in Tranquebar to establish a school exclusively for girls and teach them almost the same subjects that were imparted to boys.

In addition to schools, the missionaries and their Tamil partners con-

centrated on the formation of a Protestant congregation that would regularly meet for worship and social gatherings in a particular building. In 1707, they built the first Jerusalem Church; eleven years later they erected another church building because repeated tsunami waves and sea uproars threatened to erode the seashore including all nearby villages. In October 1718 the *New Jerusalem Church* was consecrated. The presence of a church building as an alternate place of worship for those who were excluded from worshipping in Indian temples strengthened the identity of the people who had earlier left their dwelling places outside the gates. The schools prepared well informed and highly articulating girls and boys who could find relevant jobs not only in Tranquebar but in several places.

Ziegenbalg and his partners soon recognized the need for the need of economic development of their fellow Christians stricken with poverty, sickness and the stigma of being outside the caste hierarchy. In order to help them to get out of poverty and to develop a healthier lifestyle, Ziegenbalg and his colleagues decided to provide small amounts of money that would enable the sick to buy medicine, and the skilled to establish a business. Thus they hoped to promote the economic welfare of their fellow Christians. They did not get adequate financial support from Europe. They fully knew that Christian Wendt, the executive secretary of the Mission Board in Copenhagen, did not want Danish money to be spent in supporting Indians. He argued that if the missionaries kept on giving money, Indian Christians might not learn to be independent. While Wendt's argument did contain a ray of truth, he did not know the socio-economic condition of the early Tamil converts. Ziegenbalg replied that he understood mission as not only a "service to the soul," but also a "service to the body" because people's soul could not be separated from their bodies. The missionaries and their Indian partners had to persevere and overcome adverse situations. In the course of time, their school curriculum included additional subjects such as medicine, astronomy, rhetoric, letter writing, and the like. All these skills increased significantly the self-confidence and self-reliance of the Tamil Christians so that they would learn to help themselves in the future.

Sometimes Tamil Christians were trusted more than government officials because the former knew the importance of gaining rights and simultaneously executing responsibilities in a civil society. Towards the middle of the eighteenth century, the political power of the *British East India Company* increased in southern India. They wanted to defeat Tulaji, the Hindu ruler of the Kingdom of Tanjore, and Hyder Ali, the Muslim ruler of Mysore, and annex their revenue-rich territories. In the ensuing military conflicts several groups of Tamil people were displaced. Farmers and merchants did

not want to sell rice because they expected the civil wars would last for a long time. But in the meantime, inhabitants of cities could not get rice, and began to starve. When no one came forward to help the inhabitants of the cities, missionary Christian Friedrich Schwartz (1726–1798)[25] and his catechists came forward, convinced farmers and merchants to sell some of their rice, and distributed it to the starving inhabitants. Additionally, they encouraged the farmers to clean the irrigation channels and to cultivate their rice fields so that people could be protected from poverty, thievery, and other injurious activities. In order to cultivate wet rice fields, the land-owners needed laborers who had fled to different places. Therefore Schwartz and his catechists sent out envoys to find these people groups and to bring them back to their original villages. Thus, Christians worked for the health of all peoples irrespective of their caste or economic background. They learned that self-help was a good, but an insufficient principle. They should share their blessings with others. It was a remarkable achievement of a group of people who almost a generation ago lived outside the gates of their society.

#### **4 Indian Christians with Indian clergy**

India is a society where religious aspects determine the life of a person from conception to cremation. Gaining new sets of attitudes, cultivating new patterns of thoughts and behaviors, and acquiring practical skills to overcome poverty and sickness were important steps; but Indian Christians without their own clergy persons felt somehow incomplete. However the European missionaries tried to identify with Indians, they remained Europeans not only in their appearance, but also sometimes in their attitudes, mannerisms, and lifestyle. The missionaries too thought that if only they could ordain an Indian Christian to attend to all ecclesial matters of the congregations in villages and other places, more Indians might become Christians. As a result, they approached their European friends living in Copenhagen, Halle, and London. They informed them about the Puritan missionary John Eliot (1604–1690) of Roxbury in New England, how he had ordained leaders of the Native American Christians to pastor their congregations, and how praying churches began to emerge. They also informed their friends in Europe that ordination to the office of a clergy would be essential to boost the spiritual morale of the Tamil people; these people needed their own clergy to officiate various rites related to the passage of life (e.g., birth, initiation, marriage, pregnancy, child birth, and death). Moreover, the missionaries were involved in administration of the city churches;

the social and political atmosphere in the Kingdom of Tanjore to which Tranquebar once belonged was not conducive for non-Indians.

The officers and friends of the missionaries in Europe were very cautious about the suggestion of ordaining an Indian Christian to the office of a pastor. They wondered how the ordination might alter European opinion about Indian Christians and their pastors. They were also aware that great people like Francis Xavier, who was associated with India from 1542 to 1552, did not endorse the ordination of Indian Roman Catholic Christians to the office of priesthood. In spite of these and other hesitations, the officers of the missionaries in Europe permitted them to choose appropriate candidate for a pastoral work and then to ordain them. Finally, after much negotiations and preparations Aaron was ordained on December 28, 1733 as the first Tamil Lutheran pastor.<sup>26</sup> Later fourteen Tamil Christian leaders were ordained as pastors. With the ordination of these Tamil pastors, the Indian Christians who once lived outside of the gates of their society, learned to live within the mainstream of their society.

## **5 Connecting and transcending “the gates”**

Christian mission is about the art of establishing multi-way relationships that transcend all human barriers. Christian relationship begins with a person’s repentance and reconciliation with God whom Jesus Christ has revealed and of whom the Bible bears witness. The God-ward vertical relationship gains its meaning and relevance in its horizontal relationships with fellow human beings. Slowly, a kind of family bond emerges within the “Body of Christ” that connects transcends ethnocentric, nationalistic, linguistic, geographical, cultural, and other gates and barriers. In this sense, as mentioned earlier, the European missionaries and Indian Protestant Christians living in and around Tranquebar learned to transcend different kinds of local and international barriers. Their letters, diaries, and reports on the success and limitations of their work impressed their readers in several countries Western Europe, eastern Russia, and a few British colonies on the East Coast of New England.<sup>27</sup>

Ordinary Christians began to pray for their fellow “sisters and brothers” in India whom they had never seen; yet they knew them! Similarly, children studying in the orphanages of the Francke Foundations started to pray for the school children in Tranquebar. They exchanged letters and shared their ideas about spirituality, climate, academic subjects, and the like. Thus their interaction across continents prepared them to transcend “the gates” of their societies.

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Learned scholars in Europe received fresh ideas to digest: Ziegenbalg reported that the Tamil people would laugh at the way European scholars taught their students and conducted academic discussions. Additionally, those Tamil students who had the privilege of learning were trained in several academic disciplines such as “theology, ethics, public debate, rhetoric, poetry, philosophy, physics, medicine, politics, mathematics, astronomy, geometry, music, and the like.”<sup>28</sup> Slowly, some European scholars who studied Greek and Roman classics and mythologies devoted time and energy to study Indian religions and social structures.<sup>29</sup> The *Tranquebar Mission* continues to excite the minds of several Europeans even to this day.

## Conclusion

Christian missionaries who sincerely wish to identify themselves with those people who live at the verge or outside of the gates of their society have good intentions and a sacrificial mindset. But the people whom there are ministering unto do not want to be romanticized just because they are poor, uneducated, and ill-equipped for leading a worthy life within the mainstream of their society. Instead they want to get out of their misery. They also wish to regain their lost humanity and dignity. They desire to determine their own destiny. In a similar situation the Lutheran missionaries in eighteenth century India, riddled with political chaos, endemic poverty, systemic evil, and other unjust practices, accomplished great things. Through their ministry a small group of Tamil people, who used to live outside the gates of their own society, became Christians. These Indian Christians and their missionary leaders worked together. They developed a Tamil Christian congregation that blended together the various aspects of Lutheran form of Christianity and Tamil ethos.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries other European missionaries came to India. In their own way they aimed to bring in other Indians who lived outside of their societies. Some of them responded positively to the invitation extended by the missionaries. In the twentieth century India was freed from British colonial domination and achieved its political independence. Rising nationalism affected Indian Christians also. As they looked for meaningful ways to participate in nation building activity, they also founded several indigenous mission agencies (the *Indian Missionary Society* in 1903, the *National Missionary Society* in 1905, and the *Friends Missionary Prayer Band* in 1959, and the like). Indian missionaries belonging to these and other mission agencies are now involved in bringing out their fellow citi-

zens from their pathetic settlements outside the gate of their society, and training them to lead a worthy life. It is hoped that in the course of time more Indians will learn to participate in the mainstream of their society and thus help others to lead a worthy life.

The cross-cultural effect of the *Tranquebar Mission* is now real and multifaceted. In July 2006 several Protestant church bodies in southern India, numerous theological colleges affiliated to the Senate of Serampore near Calcutta, the Bible Societies in many Indian cities, indigenous Indian mission agencies such as the *Friends Missionary Prayer Band*, many “secular” bodies in India participated in celebrating the legacy of Ziegenbalg and his successors. Danish, German and Indian government dignitaries graced several conferences in India. In Germany several conferences were held that enlivened the historical memory of the *Tranquebar Mission*. In 2006 the Francke Foundations in Halle arranged for a year long exhibition entitled *Beloved Europe and East India: 300 years of intercultural dialogue in the light of the Danish-Halle Mission*.<sup>30</sup> This exhibition draws visitors from different parts of the world and teaches them how Christian Protestant missionaries from Europe interacted with Indians, their cultures, religions, and societies. The visitors are invited to understand how Indian Christians, through their humble beginnings and willing intercultural learning processes connected and transcended their “gates.” Their perseverance enabled the Europeans to rediscover their European history and missionary involvements in Tranquebar. These intercultural lessons and relationships illustrate how people of various backgrounds who lived outside the gates of their societies are connected and how they transcend human boundaries. Their exemplary principles can be adapted in many contemporary cultures.

#### **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Note: Bibliographical entries given in the footnotes are meant to help the readers to find further materials on a major theme found in this essay. No attempt has been made to interpret the contents of the works mentioned in these footnotes. The author of this essay is grateful to Ms Henriette L Montjone, a South African, who narrated the abovementioned incident in a class discussion in spring 2004. For further details see Michael Lapsley: “Huddleston, Trevor, Archbishop, 1913–1998,” *Anglican Theological Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1999, 3–5. His book entitled *Naught For Your Comfort* (1956) informed the public about the evils of apartheid.

<sup>2</sup> For information about Christian contribution in other parts of India see Downs, F.S.: *Christianity in North East India: Historical Perspectives*, New Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1983; Downs, F.S.: *North*

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- <sup>29</sup> Some of the European scholars who studied the reports of the missionaries and Indian Christians in Tranquebar included Mathurin Veyssièrre de La Croze (1661–1739), Johann Lucas Niekamp (ca. 1740s), Conrad Daniel Kleinknecht (1691–1753), and others.
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