INTRODUCTION

Chapter I

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A. Introduction

The Basel German Evangelical Missionary Society (B.G.E.M.S) was the first Protestant Christian Mission in Malabar. The Basel Missionaries were the pioneers in every aspect of modern Malabar. Most of the Missionaries belonged to German nativity. The Basel German Evangelical Missionary Society introduced the modern system of education, published the first journal in Malayalam, established tiles and textile factories; promoted trade and industrial technologies, enriched vernacular language and literature; started schools, churches and hospitals and various types of charitable institutions etc in order to emancipate the people from their socio-religious problems and to build up a Christian Versatile Community in the deeper sense of global ecumenism. In fact it was a new epoch in the history of Malabar.

B. Purpose of the Study

The B.G.E.M.S. undertook educational work in various stations in Malabar in the period between the establishment of the B.G.E.M.S. in Malabar in 1839 and the First World War of 1914. Their immense contribution in the field of education and its impact on the people is palpable even today. Even though evangelism was B.G.E.M.S’s primary goal, they gave more importance to primary education and attempted to give primary education to the people of Malabar, especially to the lower
castes. The B.G.E.M.S. encouraged women to learn in schools and to get themselves educated.

Giving education was a general characteristic of the nineteenth century Protestant missions in India. The B.G.E.M.S. too followed the same means to achieve their goal. Since they adopted the policy of admitting children without regard to caste, the mission contributed to the modification in the system of education which was then prevalent and in the process brought about a radical change in the grass root level.

The intention of this study is to reveal the realities and to make a social history of the Protestant mission. This study seeks to examine the picture of Malabar before the advent of B.G.E.M.S., the origin of Basel Evangelical Mission; their contribution to education in Malabar and S. Canara and the total social, economic, cultural and religious change thereby brought by its influence.

C. Sources of the Study

The study is mainly based on church records of the B.G.E.M.S. in South Western India. Of the English reports, ‘Basel Mission Reports’ from 1843 to 1845, 1854 to 1899, 1906 to 1913 were available. Issues of ‘Basel Evangelical Mission Official Gazetters’ of few were available for the study. The magazine of Weslyn Mission, the ‘Harvest Field’ is also used as a primary source. This primary source contains reports published by the B.E.M. Missionaries on their work in South Western India.
William Logan’s Malabar yet another primary source which has been used to trace the socio-political history of Malabar. Malabar District Gazetteers Volume VI has been used to get figures, statistics and dates. A clear description of the history of the early work of the B.E.M. in North Malabar is got from Joseph Muliyil’s “Sukumari”, which is said to be one of the first four novels in Malayalam.

To trace the overall socio-economic progress of the people I have depended on secondary sources particularly on Kranti.K. Farias, Murkot Kunhappa, Samuel Hebich, Dr.K.K.N.Kurup, Dr.K.J.John, Jaiprakash Raghaviah and thesis written by Peter Wilson Prabakar (S. Canara) H.S.Wilson to trace the educational and social contributions of the Basel Mission and also to trace the response of the people of S. Canara and Malabar to the new educational trends introduced by the Basel Mission and the overall progress of the society.

D. Scope of the Study

This study covers a period of about 125 years ie., 1830-1956. The study mainly aims at understanding how the people in South Canara and Malabar developed as a result of the Basel Evangelical Mission’s educational work in Malabar. The periodisation has been chosen from 1830 the beginning of B.E.M.Ss work in Malabar and S. Canara to 1914, the year of the First World War when the German missionaries had to leave India because every German was regarded as a Possible Spy and the British felt unsafe to have any dealings with them. The B.E.M.
established many industrial and educational establishments during this period.

My study not only deals with the establishment but also highlights the contribution they gave through education to the people of S. Canara and Malabar and their motives behind it. The contributions of the Basel Mission missionary Dr. Hermann Gundert to Malayalam language and literature was highlighted by Dr. K.K.N.Kurup and Dr. K.J. John in their work entitled *The Legacy of Basel Mission and Hermann Gundert*. Although religious propaganda had been the primary aim of the Mission, its activities inaugurated a new stage in the development of language and literature. The Mission established a litho press at Nettur and another printing press at Mangalore. With the help of litho press the Mission published a monthly, *Rajyasamachar*. The first issue of the journal appeared in 1847 and it continued till December 1850. It is believed that the editor was F.Miller. The journals as more concerned with the news related to Christianity, religious propaganda, conversion, etc. The views expressed in the journal on Hinduism and Islam may not be appreciated by members following those religions. However, the prose style, reporting system, clarity, were unique. Simultaneously another monthly, *Paschimodayam* (Rise of the West) by the same editor was published from October 1847 till August 1851. Jaiprakash Raghaviah explains the series of technical changes that were undertaken included introduction of fly shuttle and dyeing techniques, use of jacquard loom to weave intricate
designs and patterns, use of power in certain operations like winding of thread and introduction of new materials (twill cotton piece goods, hosiery, stockinette materials etc). Moreover, these Basel Mission industries also showed greater capacity to introduce new products in the market. All these products were meant for a fairly narrow market, which by and large did not face stiff competition from either traditional producers or British goods. This "niche market" demanded the capacity to bring out new products, for which Basel Mission Industries had the technical capacity. Despite such improvements, the Mission industries did face some demand constraint. After 1882, the Mission did not start weaving factories. They converted the factory at Cannanore into a power loom one. The other factories increasingly turned into jacquard weaving.

In weaving as well as tile-making as it was done traditionally, the specialization of labour was limited by the extent of market which was mainly local. A greater specialization of labour was involved in the factory process introduced by the Basel Mission. Therefore, Basel Mission's entry into industrial activity resulted in not only technical upgradation of production process but also in specialization of the labour process. Though according to missionary sources their industries operated in the areas unaffected by competition from traditional weavers, the overall effect on the gross demand for woven goods would have adversely affected the traditional weavers. In the traditional industries of
weaving and tile-making, described the process as entry of capital. Karl Marx has explained the process as:

By decomposition of handicrafts, by specialization of instruments of labour, by formation of detail labourers, and by grouping and combining the latter into a single mechanism, division of labour creates a qualitative gradation and a quantitative proportion in the social process of production, it consequently creates a definite organization of labour in society and thereby develops at the same time new productive forces in the society.

The transformation as it is described by Marx is bound to affect the traditional artisan.

Basel Mission is known to have taken an uncompromising stand against the caste system, from the very beginning of their missionary activities. This was evidently a natural position in the light of their understanding of the Christian teaching on the basic equality of human beings. Socially imposed stratification on the basis of birth was held obnoxious by the missionaries.

The Basel missionaries opposed the caste system as part of their over all opposition to hierarchies. Though they themselves accepted hierarchies of a commercial and industrial society, such inequalities could
be explained as outcomes of human endeavour. Hierarchies created on the basis of value system unalterable by human action, attracted opposition by these missionaries.

The missionaries also found that their predominantly lower caste converts were condemned to life of low social esteem even after adopting Christianity. Though some blatant inequalities of the caste system like untouchability were in some cases removed, even the Christian converts had to lead a life of least social mobility. Therefore, the missionaries went all out to create conditions for the converts to earn economic prosperity and through that social esteem. One of the best means that was available to them was commercial and industrial enterprises. Apart from achieving social, mobility industrial labour had the added advantage of lessening social stratification amongst the converts themselves. The general atmosphere of mission industries where converts from higher castes and lower castes worked side by side helped in the eradication of caste prejudices. Moreover the Basel Missionaries took initiative in arranging marriages between converts formerly belonging to different castes.¹

The Basel Mission experiment of a casteless group further accentuated the process of social mobility by offering a chance for the Thiya and Billava castes to seek an existence outside their caste based occupations. As for the Cheruma caste in Malabar and its equivalent

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¹ This is the impression gathered from discussions with old and knowledgeable Parishioners of the former Basel Mission.
Holey caste in South Canara, they had nothing to lose by conversion. Being a polluted caste, they had to keep certain distance from the upper castes. This difficulty was overcome to some extent by way of conversion.

Improvement of the social status is also closely linked with the creation of a technically oriented labour force. A technically oriented labour force could command a higher reserve price in the sense that its employment would also be sought after by people other than the missionaries which further enhanced the social status of converts. This was possible only in a society which had created sufficient demand for such skills. The second half of nineteen century was a period in which such demand had spread in both Malabar and South Canara.

The church acted as an agent of change for economic upliftment and progress. The Basel Mission Industrial commission was formed as early as 1846 and given greater importance to weaving and tile industries. From 1858 to 1947 Malabar was under the British Government and it remained as a part of Madras presidency. Till the Madras Act No. I of 1900 (Malabar Compensation of Tenants Improvements) came into effect tenants in Malabar were completely at the mercy of landlords. For it was impossible for a tenant who was evicted, even to secure adequate compensation for the improvements he had made. After 1900, the tenant enjoyed the right to claim compensation. Yet the landlord could evict
him, though for a hundred generations or more the property might have been in the possession of his ancestors. Under these circumstances, the life became miserable for those who incurred the landlords displeasure, especially when practically all land was privately owned as in Malabar. Legal provision for security of tenure and fair rent did not make its appearance in Malabar till 1930.2

Through the narrow meshes of the social organisation which enclosed and imprisoned Hindu Society in Malabar the rich as well as the powerful must have found it hard to escape. Yet the depressed classes in Malabar have been a source of so much profit to the wealthy landowners that as a class these aristocrats could never value with equanimity any movement which aimed at their social liberation.

The collector of Malabar and the British Resident of Cochin made unremitting efforts to arrest the lower class people. Thus, whether it was the oppressed class or the aristocratic Brahmin, to all conversion meant a break with their social and economic past. Banished from home and Caste, deprived of any claim that they had to ancestral property, evicted from their lands and denied work by the land lords whom perhaps their forefathers had served for many generations, the early converts found themselves forsaken and helpless. The missionaries were compelled therefore to find a new home and new occupations for the converts. They

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bought land at convenient centres and established the Basel Mission Industries. Thus the Protestant Christian population of the plains of Malabar tended to emigrate round weaving establishments or tile factories and in mission compounds which provided the converts with quarters as well as cultivable land. Most of the educated people who could not find employment in the factories were absorbed in the educational and evangelistic departments of the mission.³

A new home and new occupations did not mark the full measure of the convert's separation from his natural environment. Conversion implied a change in the system of ownership and inheritance. In every case either by conscious choice or silent permission the Marumakkathayam system has given place to the Indian Succession Act. Conversion also brought about a Revolution in the institution of marriage. Till the Madras Act of 1933 was passed, according to the Marumakkathayam system marriage involved no responsibility towards wife and children.⁴ To the Christian convert governed by the Indian Christian Marriage Act, on the other hand, marriage not only forms a sacrament indissoluble before death, but also entails legal responsibility for the welfare of his family. These changes the early converts only anticipated a transition from matrilineal succession, joint family and free marriage to patrilineal succession, individualism and more stable

⁴. Ibid.
marriage contracts which have been gradually pervading Hindu society in Malabar.

Social life within the Malabar church did not by any means serve to bridge the gulf which conversion had created. The organization of the church had little in common with the Hindu social structure. After the break up of feudalism caste in Malabar has been at its best a loose social organization bound together by common traditions, but without a systematic hierarchy and exercising an uncertain control over the daily lives of its members.⁵ On the contrary, the organization of the church not only accustomed the converts to a new discipline, but endowed them with new privileges and responsibilities. For, with the passage of time, the members of the church obtained a larger share in its government and were expected to contribute a larger amount for its expenses. The social standards set by the church were moreover calculated to banish from the convert’s mind even a recollection of the past. No custom or observance which had the least association with the idea of caste was permitted in the Christian community. Markers of caste identity like hair knots and tufts disappeared, peculiarities of food and dress gave away; and converts began to borrow more and more freely of European dress and European manners. Western music replaced Indian music, western forms of worship replaced Indian forms.

Early missionaries hoped for the day when the Hindu community in Malabar would cease to disown Christian converts as they had done. It

⁵ Ibid., p. 50.
was the policy of the mission to do their best, in the meantime to make the church a self reliant and self supporting body. Certainly, the training given by the mission in their factories led to considerable dispersion of industrial knowledge and created a few independent artisans as well as business men in the church. But the progress towards self sufficiency remained slow and was suddenly upset by the world war. With the outbreak of hostilities the Basel Mission industries were taken over by the custodian of enemy property. Funds available for education and evangelism work began to decrease and the economic basis of the church was shaken to its very foundations.

The Naduvazhis were the rulers but were subjected to the authority of the British Government. The government did not allow any missionary activities in India till 1813. In 1813 the Charter Act of the British Parliament permitted British Missionary organizations in India. The 1833 Charter Act allowed non-British missionary organization to do missionary work in India.

The religions context presents the three major religions that existed in Malabar in the first half of the nineteenth century namely Hinduism, Islam and Christianity and a brief explanation is given about each one of these religions.

The socio-economical context was controlled mainly by caste and kinship. In the caste system, the people were-arranged in hierarchical
order which was maintained by two religious ideas, incarnation and pollution. Since the lower castes were forced to observe certain rules and even certain professions according to the caste, it was not the ability of a person but the birth to a caste that would determine his/her profession and social status. Thus before the advent of the Basel Evangelical Mission in Malabar, the high castes held power over the land and had ruling powers. While the low castes were looked down upon and treated as slaves in the society. Therefore the economic context was that high castes were economically sound and the low castes were under privileged. Kinship was portrayed among upper castes through ‘Marumakkathayam’ – succession by nephews – through the joint family system.

In the context of the indigenous educational system, several indigenous vernacular schools which were in existence in India before any western attempt begun on education is traced out effectively. These schools were for elementary knowledge of reading and were entirely devoted either to religious studies either of Hinduism or Islam.

Basel Mission done pioneer services rendered by various missionary societies both to the indigenous church as well as to our nation in various fields of life, thought and activity. The majority of missionary societies were independent of both states and state-related churches, and were voluntary movements supported by the like-minded
people who were committed to the cause of communicating the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The Basel Missionary Society which came into existence in 1815 at Basel in Switzerland was such an independent and voluntary movement, which was neither a part of any government nor of a state church. It was primarily a product of the Pietistic revival in southern Germany and the German-speaking Switzerland in particular. Its sole aim was to make known the offer of God's love to one and all, and to invite people to accept that offer. Among other mission fields, it also started sending its missionaries to India since 1834, and continued to be active in India till recently. It mainly worked in Malabar Coast, Coastal Karnataka, Northern Karnataka and Nilgiris. Its plans to extend its work to other parts of India as well as its ongoing work were hampered and jeopardized by the two World Wars. Despite this problem, the work continued and, on the whole was well established.

The churches that were founded by the Basel Mission in the above-mentioned regions in India joined subsequently other traditions to form a united church – the church of South India. These churches are, thus, independent and indigenous churches today, constituting a part of the Church in India. Being the church in India, its raison d'être is to live for India as the servant of Christ. In view of this, the unity of the churches is of utmost importance for working together for the total well being of our fellow countrymen. In view of this, the church in India must also
constantly seek to develop new patterns of ministry as well as administrative and organizational forms which will facilitate its mission.

To those of us who have come from the Basel Mission tradition, the life and work of the missionaries of the Basel mission in general, and the pioneer missionaries in particular, are a constant source of inspiration. And at the same time, it is a great challenge to us to emulate their sense of dedication, enthusiasm, steadfastness, perseverance, loving concern for the people, willingness to suffer hardships, trials and privations for the same of the gospel, simple yet profound trust in God and ready obedience to their high calling. It is with deep gratitude that we remember that our churches came into existence in this region as a result of their and self-sacrificing labour.

The Basel Mission showed special concern for quality. It successfully and effectively resisted the temptation of indiscriminately proselytizing the people merely for the sake of big numbers. The inner conversion and the ensuing high moral standard were the sine qua non for admission into the church. This is one of the reasons why the Basel Mission did not as a rule encourage mass movement. It was also equally determined not to allow the caste evil to creep into the church, and took special care right from the beginning to effect integration of converts both from the lower and higher castes into one body of Christ. The Basel Mission was even prepared to lose a large number of prospective converts rather than compromising on the caste issue. Its concern for spirituality
becomes evident in its emphasis on the Bible centered piety, congregational singing and family prayer. It took special interest in Christian nurture, and sought to impart a balanced Christian teaching both to the adults and the children. To facilitate this, it produced an impressive mass of literature in the vernaculars. In the converts dignity of labour and truthfulness were inculcated, and they were taught simplicity of lifestyle, Christian witness through one's life was specially stressed. From the very beginning, top priority was given to theological education with the intention of developing an indigenous ministry, which was primarily evangelistic in orientation. Being itself an inter-denominational organization, the Basel Mission maintained a good ecumenical relationship with other Protestant Church traditions and missionary societies.

While laying special emphasis on the religious and spiritual things, the Basel Mission also took the secular aspects of life seriously. It thus worked intensively in the fields of education, literature, medicine, industry and agriculture and in a number of these fields the Basel Mission was the pioneer. It thus started a number of schools in the nooks and corners of its mission field, and began to produce helpful text-books and other school materials. It is the educational policy of the Basel Mission that is responsible for the high literacy rate among its converts. Its contribution to the Kannada, Malayalam and Tulu literature is laudable and in fact without peer. So also even before the Gandhian revolution, it had opened schools for the uplift of Harijans. It opened dispensaries and
hospitals, including clinics for lepers and tuberculosis patients, and gave special attention to the health problems of the women and children. It also tried to introduce the use of homeopathic medicine which was more easily accessible to the villagers, encouraging the villagers, encouraging the village pastors and teachers to practices it. So also it tried to popularize some of the useful indigenous herbal medicines. The concern of the Basel Mission for the poor and the needy becomes evident in establishing a number of orphanages, and widows’ homes on the one hand, and in starting industries in order to provide them with jobs on the other. So also the importance that has been given to the vernaculars is highly commendable, which helped the church to be truly indigenous.

The establishment of various industries, which no doubt was both necessary and helpful, gave a town-orientation to the life of the converts, who began to flock into the nearby towns, leaving their villages. As a result the town churches swelled in number, whereas the village churches dwindled in strength. This had serious negative effect on the evangelization of the villages. Finally, we also need to point out that being under the British Raj in India, the Basel Mission did not positively encourage the native Christians to take part in the freedom movement, nor has it actively participated in it. It suspected the motives of nationalism, and feared that it would mean closing the doors for evangelism, and even trouble for native Christians. It is, thus, against this background that we, the Christians from the Basel Mission
background, should now seek, as a part of the wider Indian Church, to make our positive contribution to both the common ecclesiastical and national life.

The study concentrates on the educational and industrial policy of the nineteenth century protestant missions in general and the educational policy of the B.E.M. nature of their work. The main concentration of this study is given on the position of Gundert, Samuel Hebich, Hermann Moegling, Rev.A.H. Kaundinya, Charles George, A. Plebst, Dr. Eva Lombard, Fr. Muller and their intention behind their socio-economic development.

An attempt has been made to trace the Basel Mission's involvement in education, industrial development, medical field in S. Canara and Malabar and the consequent impact in the socio-economic realms.