CHAPTER 3

HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN INDIA

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CHAPTER THREE
HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN INDIA

This chapter proposes to give a brief survey of the history of Christian missions in India, shedding light on the origin of Christianity in India, the arrival of Portuguese and Protestant missions into the country and their agenda to Christianize India.

3.1 The origin of Christianity in India

There are two views among scholars about the origin of Christianity in India. According to one, the foundation of the Christian church in India was laid by Saint Thomas, one of the twelve Apostles of Jesus. The other view would ascribe the arrival of Christianity in India to the enterprise of Christian merchants and missionaries belonging to the East Syrian and Persian churches. But it has been widely believed that India was St. Thomas’ sphere of work. As Cardinal Tisserant says there was a very ancient evangelization started by St. Thomas, the Apostle and mainly in South India.¹

At the dawn of Christian era there were trade routes connecting West Asia and the East. The land routes reached parts of North India, while the Sea routes reached the coast of Kerala and other parts of

South India. Then, one can accept the possibility of the Apostle finding an easy passage to India. Jewish settlements and trade connections with Malabar was an added attraction to the Apostle for his missionary journey\textsuperscript{2}. Modern scholarship has advanced evidences and testimonies to prove the historicity of St. Thomas apostolate in Malabar\textsuperscript{3}.

3.2 The Syrian tradition

Also the tradition of Christians of Malabar is rich in stories regarding relation between the Christians in India and Church of Persia. The NEB reports:

“The origin of Christians of St. Thomas are uncertain, though they seem to have been in existence before the 6th century AD and probably derive from the missionary activity of East Syrian (Nestorian) church...Despite their geographic isolation, they retained the Chaldean liturgy and Syriac language and maintained fraternal ties with the Babylonian (Bagdad) Patriarch: their devotional practices also included Hindu religious symbolism vestiges of Syrian Christians to their early religion”\textsuperscript{4}.

\textsuperscript{2} A.M. Mundadan, History of Christianity in India Vol.1 (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1982) 21.
\textsuperscript{3} Tisserant, op.cit: 10.
An important aspect to note about the early Christian community according to Brown is: “There is no evidence at all that the Christians were considered a foreign community. They were a recognized part of Malabar society and that society had coloured their understanding of Christianity”\(^5\).

The original community of St. Thomas Christians had undergone, in course of time, a decline. It was reconstituted and reinvigorated by groups of Christians who came from Persia. This contact was an important event in the history of St. Thomas Christians in the middle of the 4th century. According to Julius Richter:

“In the year 345 AD there landed in Malabar according to the tradition of Thomas Christians of south India, under the convoy of a Jerusalem merchant Thomas, a bishop from Edessa, accompanied by Presbyters and deacons, and by a company of men and women youths and maidens from Jerusalem, Bagdad and Nineveh…. They were welcomed with great rejoicing by the Christians of the country, and endowed with important privileges by the ruler of the land so that their arrival was the beginning of a flourishing epoch in the history of Malabar Church”\(^6\).

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The king of Malabar gave St. Thomas Christians as much land they wanted, conferred upon them royal honours and inscribed the grant and honours on copper plates. The Christians distinguished themselves as merchants, who concentrated in their own hands a large part of commerce of the Malabar coast (Kerala). Most important of all, they were assigned comparatively high rank in the hide-bound caste system of the south coast region, superior to that of the Waniars and Kammalars, Vyisyas and as feudal lords to have been placed on level with the aristocracy of the country.

3.3 Socio-cultural life of St. Thomas Christians

It is only fair that, man should always have the privilege of evolving and enjoying his socio-cultural milieu. One cannot imagine a life, which totally ignores the socio-cultural environment. The success of a life, more so of a spiritual life depends very much on the ability of a person or community to adapt itself to the milieu in which one lives. This is true also of Christian community. Its qualitative and quantitative growth and dynamism depended on its adaptability to the social and cultural set up of the period.

In the early centuries of Christian era and even before, Malabar was a ‘museum of race and cultures’. The early inhabitants were predominantly Dravidians with their own religious practices. The Brahmins were believed to have migrated to Malabar around 300-400
B.C and they are known as Nambudiris. The Nairs next in the social scale were the ruling class and military men of Malabar. All others were considered to be low castes. The main religions were Hinduism and Buddhism. In the beginning of the Christian era while forming their own religious and social customs Thomas Christians owed a great deal to Hinduism. Adapting themselves to the caste-ridden Hindu social set up and mingling with many aspects of the ancient Hindu culture they became the sons of the soils in the fullest sense. This was what might naturally follow as most of the early converts were from high caste Brahmins. Thus the legacy, which the Thomas Christians received from Hinduism, had not only given them a high social standing but also helped to shape spiritual life and attitude adapting itself to the environment. On St. Thomas Christian’s success in adapting themselves to the cultural milieu of Malabar Brown comments:

“Syrian Christian community, foreign in origin, put down such deep roots in Indian soil that it became accepted without question as indigenous a position hardly yet attained by Christian Churches which are the fruit of European Christian missionary movement of the nineteenth century”.

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7 K.M. Panikkar, A History of Kerala (Annamalai Nagar: Annamalai University, 1959) 2-3.
10 L.W. Brown, op. cit.: 167.
The works of the L.W. Brown, A.M. Mundadan, and Placid J. Podippara have an elaborate description of social life of St. Thomas Christians in its first sixteen centuries of existence. As mentioned already the majority of people converted by the Apostle were Brahmins and other high caste people. It is no wonder therefore, that in the overall social set up of Malabar, the Christians differed very little from higher castes. Their day-to-day lives resembled very closely that of the Brahmins.

They followed many customs practiced among Hindus. Newborn child is fed with a paste of honey and powdered gold. This custom followed by Brahmins was intended to ensure prosperity\(^\text{11}\). The infant was given name from the Old Testament or New Testament. But a child gets also a call name or pet name which is quite indigenous and very often a Hindu name. The Synod of Diamper forbade this practice believing that such a name was given as a baptismal name\(^\text{12}\). At the age of four the child is initiated into the letters of alphabet by a teacher (Asan or guru) probably a Hindu. After this initiation the child is sent to the local school for further instruction. Thomas Christians also followed these practices since that was the educational system of Kerala at that time. Placid J. Podippara says, generally the gurus were Hindus but they taught the

\(^{11}\) L.W.Brown, op. cit.: 185.

\(^{12}\) Scaria Zacharia, ed. The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper (Edamattom: Indian Institute of Christian Studies, 1994) 120. Synod of Diamper (1599) is the synodal council at Oodiamperoor, or Diamper where the Roman Catholic rites were forcefully imposed upon the St.Thomas Christians. The decrees were violently enforced by Menezes the Arch Bishop of Goa with the help of Portuguese authorities.
Thomas Christian children even the Christian prayers and catechism\textsuperscript{13}. The Synod of Diamper forbade the parents to send their children to heathen masters who were idolaters, because the masters demand from the children ‘reverence’ to their Pagodas (temple)\textsuperscript{14}. The Christians shared many other things besides name with the Nayars. They occasionally took wives from that community and their children often went to school with Nayar children. They joined in many of the ordinary celebrations of country such as Onam and Vishu or New Year’s Day\textsuperscript{15}. Many Christian families have had certain privileges in the temple, which are believed to have been granted in recognition of some service given, or some present made in former times. And some Christians give gifts to temple.

Communication of faith is an expression and an outflow of one’s deep faith and spirituality. It is believed that each Christian community has the responsibility of communication of its faith because of Christ’s command to spread the gospel to the nations. Ever since the dawn of Christianity ‘faith-communication’ is being increasingly carried out by the local Churches and individuals. It is generally believed that the Church of the Christians of St. Thomas had not done much in this direction before the arrival of the Europeans. Stephen Neill in this regard opined that: “There is no clear evidence of attempts by Indian

\textsuperscript{13} Placid J. Podippara, \emph{The Thomas Christians} (London: Longman and Todd, 1970) 81.

\textsuperscript{14} Scaria Zacharia, op.cit. : 96-97. The nature of this ‘reverence’ is not known, as the Synod does not describe it.

\textsuperscript{15} L.W.Brown op cit.: 171.
Christian community to propagate its faith in the non-Christian society in the midst of which it had its existence”\textsuperscript{16}.

The question why the St. Thomas Christians of India did not propagate their faith had generated many explanations. Some argue that it was the result of the honorable place given by the Rajas to the Christians and of their assimilation of the social customs of their Hindu neighbors. Propagation of one’s faith was not common in Hinduism and therefore St. Thomas Christians were averse to proselytizing. The caste feeling no doubt stood in the way of receiving into their community people of low caste.

Though Thomas Christians were ranked among high-caste people, being a minority they could not in any way influence the structure of Hindu society. And many attempts at breaking the caste system meant disruption of society. Thus the policy of non-conversion of the lower castes seems to have been accepted by the St. Thomas Christians. This changed after the arrival of the Portuguese.

The unique feature of the life of the St. Thomas Christians was that while they upheld their Christian faith, they were culturally integrated with mainstream Hindu community. The Synod of Diamper forbade a number of Hindu customs and practices retained by St. Thomas Christians, which

\textsuperscript{16} Stephen Neill, A History of Christianity in India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 47. Before the arrival of Portuguese there was communal harmony and cordial relation between Christians and Hindus. It was presumed that Christian population increase not by proselytizing but by power of their life style.
the Portuguese considered unchristian, pagan, and heathen errors. These prohibitions and restrictions imposed by the Synod were detrimental to communal harmony and the cordial relations that existed between Christians and Hindus. The concern for communal harmony and the spirit of tolerance should be considered a typical Indian contribution to Christian Vision. The Synod of Diamper mentioned among others one particular error the St. Thomas Christians are said to have held the belief that, each one can be saved in his own law (religion), all laws (religions) are right\textsuperscript{17}. This reflects the Indian view of universal salvation.

As is clear from the above, the St. Thomas Christians adapted themselves well to the culture of the place. Living for centuries in a positive encounter with Hindu community they developed a theological vision, which was inclusive, pluralistic and liberal. Compared to the modern missions’ approach to non-Christian religions one must admit that the vision of St. Thomas Christians was truly an enlightened one. At the time of the arrival of Portuguese at sixteenth century the Christians of Kerala were living a life of a privileged position in society, preserving the ancient culture of India vitalizing it with Christian principles. Scholars rightly described the identity of Thomas Christians as: “Hindu in culture, Christian in Religion and oriental in worship”\textsuperscript{18}. C.V. Cheriyan observes; “it is evident that their life was strikingly similar to that of their Hindu brethren. Their customs and manners, life

\textsuperscript{17} A.M. Mundadan, *Indian Christians Search for Identity and Struggle for Autonomy* op. cit.: 27.

\textsuperscript{18} Placid J. Podippara, op. cit.: 27.
and culture conformed to the general pattern in the land where they lived. Hence, Christianity in Kerala developed as an essentially Indian religion while the votaries of that religion zealously guarded the fundamentals of their faith as the most treasured of their possession”\(^1\)

3.4 The Portuguese intrusion

The second half of the fifteenth century is famous in the history of the world as the time of the great voyages of discovery undertaken by maritime nations of Western Europe, which led to the founding of colonial empires in America, Africa and Asia. The pioneers in this enterprise were Spain and Portugal. One of the motives behind it was the desire to find out a new route to India for the purpose of trade. The famous traveller Marco Polo who travelled in the East from 1270 to 1295 was the first to bring a moderately trustworthy account of India, its people, its wealth in the ears of Europe. In 1498 Vasco de Gama reached India and landed near Calicut in search of ‘Christians and spices’. For the Christians of Malabar it was the beginning of a new epoch of tremendous importance, entering into a new world of existence. As Julius Richter says; the landing of the Portuguese marks the advent of a new epoch, an epoch of Roman Catholic Mission in India\(^2\).


\(^2\) Julius Richter, op.cit: 44.
The Portuguese Kings also viewed it as their sacred duty to render all support to spread the gospel. Panikkar says:

“With the Portuguese Christianisation was a state enterprise. The king paid for the entire ecclesiastical establishment of the East. The doctrine of Padroado (jus patronatus established by the Papal Bull of 1514) vested the authority for missionary work effectively in the hands of the Portuguese crown in areas where Portugal claimed political rights.”

3.5 Portuguese-St. Thomas Christian interface

The Portuguese considered the Indian Christians’ life inferior in many ways. Their attitude to Indian Christians or St. Thomas Christians was motivated by a sense of superiority about their form of Christianity, which according to them was the true form to which all Christians should conform in order to be perfect Christians. Their aim always was to make the Indian Christians conform to the Portuguese ways and usages, which were of Latin derivation. On the other hand, St. Thomas Christians held a different view. They could never imagine that only the Latin form of Christianity was the true form of Christianity. According to them:

“… both the Portuguese and they were Christians and both belong to the universal church. But each local community has

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their customs and usages probably going back to the time of the Apostles themselves. They could never entertain the idea of giving up their customs and practices. They were ready to accept from the Latin missionaries what they lack in instruction, a better discipline, but not those missionaries.”

The general impression in the west about the eastern Christians was that they were heretics and schismatic. The conflict began when the Portuguese tried to bring St. Thomas Christians under their ecclesiastical jurisdiction. There were some fundamental differences between the Portuguese and the St. Thomas Christians. Though both were motivated by the same principle of Christian unity, the Indian Christians were conscious of their communal identity, local culture and naturally there were reservations in their social relations with the Portuguese. On the Portuguese side there were no restrictions or reservations. The St. Thomas Christians were not ready for a compromise on their communal life, which was culturally governed by local customs. Though Christians, they did not like to mingle with Portuguese freely because they were alien to Indian culture. In this sense the high caste people of Malabar were less strangers to them than the Portuguese. Also the Indian Christians are said to have held the view that each one can be saved through one’s own

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24 Ibid.
faith and all faiths are, in that sense, right. Portuguese considered this a serious ‘error’, bordering on heresy.

In its relation with the Portuguese Christians the St. Thomas Christians wanted their community to remain unimpaired in any way, each independent of the other but with full cooperation for the benefit of both. But the Portuguese naturally tried to persuade the local Christians to accept the Pope as their patriarch, which they were not easily prepared to do though at the same time they did not want to alienate the goodwill of the Portuguese and endanger their pepper trade. Portuguese missions were against any sort of indianisation or integration of Christianity with Indian culture. They did not practise religious tolerance. Many of their moves were meant to destroy the customs of the indigenised Christians and to Europeanize them. The Portuguese and the missionaries indulged in proselytization but asked the new converts to give up their caste and as a sign of it they asked them to eat beef and drink wine, so abominable to the Indian high castes. (Eating beef and drinking liquor were the customs of the lowest castes and the outcastes in India). Thus they made Christianity a hated and untenable religion for the higher castes. Firth says:

“In the eyes of the Hindus Christianity was the religion of the ‘franks or parangis’ the term used to denote especially the Portuguese but also any kind of European. It was not a

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complimentary term, it suggested meat-eating, wine-drinking, loose-living, arrogant persons, whose manners were so far removed from Indian propriety that social intercourse with them was unthinkable”\(^{26}\).

Thus the Portuguese-St. Thomas Christian encounter became a turning point in the history of the Christians of the Malabar Coast.

### 3.6 St. Francis Xavier and Jesuit mission

By the year 1540 the Portuguese had established themselves firmly on the west coast with their main mission centre at Goa and stations at Cranganore (Kodungallur) and Cochin. The Indian Christians continued as before and their relations with the Portuguese were still friendly. Under Portuguese influence there had been many conversions to Christianity resulting in the creation of an Indo-Portuguese Christian community though of rather unsatisfactory quality. It was at this stage that the King of Portugal, always solicitous for the progress of Christian faith in his rapidly expanding dominions, appealed to the Pope and the newly formed Society of Jesus for missionaries to go to India. The first man to be chosen was Francis Xavier (1506-1552). Francis Xavier was educated in Paris where he had come under the influence of Ignatius Loyola. In 1541 he set out for India with the object of reclaiming for Christ the ‘heathen’ population

\(^{26}\) C.B. Firth, op.cit. : 111.
of the areas under Portuguese influence\textsuperscript{27}, or in other words ‘conquer the East for Christianity’. Thus began the Jesuit mission in India, which really changed the cartography of Christianity in Asia.

Francis Xavier is justifiably called the pioneer of missions in Asia, of which India had a share. He towers above all those who followed him by his sympathy for the poor and the lowly, by his energy and spirit, by his utter fearlessness in the face of dangers and his supreme faith in his mission. His consuming desire was to spread the message of Christ far and wide. He was dogmatic and intolerant, but it was the outcome of his blind faith. By starting various schools at important places, Xavier contributed also to the spread of education in India. The fact that he showed special concern for the sick and the poor, particularly the fisher folk, increased his popularity. His spirit has been an inspiration for generations of Christian workers in India. However, his main drawback, as it must be admitted, was that he knew very little about the genius and wealth of the Indian culture and religions. Actually his contacts with India were only through the coastal regions of the south-west and south-east and with the less or least educated people. Firth is right when he wrote: “He had been criticized for hasty and superficial methods never stopping to learn a language or really get to know the culture of a people”\textsuperscript{28}.

\textsuperscript{28} C.B. Firth, op.cit. : 67.
3.7 Robert De Nobili and the Madurai mission

The Jesuit mission that St. Francis Xavier established in India took up with enthusiasm the work of conversion. But progress was slow till Robert de Nobili a brilliantly gifted, highly educated, and zealous man came to be in charge of the mission in Madurai in Tamil Nadu. De Nobili a man of remarkable insight who came with desire to convert as many Hindus as possible to Christianity, after a short experience of life in Madurai, reached the conclusion that Christianity would have little success in India if it kept to its western grab and refused to understand the mind and thought of the people of the country. The problem before him was to make Christianity acceptable to Hindus without being imposed on them. He received the answer from St. Paul who said that while preaching one has to get naturalised in the culture of the community for whom the message is meant*. De Nobili obtained the approval of the Jesuit mission to undertake a serious study of Hinduism and Madurai was specially suited for this purpose. Closely following the social habits of Brahmins, Nobili was able to obtain assistance from learned pundits in his study of Hindu religious thought. He hoped to win people of the higher castes by leaving the whole caste system untouched. After years of arduous work, in the course of which he acquired a fair mastery of Sanskrit, he met in argument the learned Brahmins of Madurai, in religious discussion. These were according to the ancient

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* In 1 Corin.Chapt. 9: 20 St. Paul says that: To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law- though not been myself under the law, that I might win those under the law.
well-established practice of sastrathavada, debates on religious topics before a learned audience. There he tried to uphold Christian doctrines in terms of Upanishadic thought. He is said to have gained the respect of even the orthodox Brahmins of the court. But, as Richter says, Nobili’s system stood in sharp contrast to that of Xavier, which had prevailed hitherto, to the ordinary rule and practice of every monastic order in India.

But the other mission groups could not appreciate Nobili’s attempt to present Christianity in a Hindu grab. Rome forced Nobili to abandon his methods and forbade him to baptize. He was accused of corrupting Christianity by admitting Hindu practices into it. Intolerance of things Indian became henceforth the characteristic feature of missionary zeal in India. Any compromise with Hindu life or religion was forbidden for example, the eating of beef was held to be necessary as it would put the convert altogether out of the pale of Hinduism.

3.8 The Mogul mission

To acquaint himself better with Christianity Emperor Akbar invited scholarly Christian missionaries to his court. They were well received and they held several discussions with the Emperor. From those discussions it became apparent that Akbar was bent on developing and propagating his own religion, Din Illahi that would...

29 Julius Richter, op.cit. : 63.
30 K. M. Panikkar, Asia and Western Dominance op.cit.: 281.
combine according to his opinion the best elements of all different religions. The Jesuits did not wish to have any part in it and showed the same spirit of intolerance. Panikkar, in fact, sums up the attitude of Jesuit missionaries when he wrote: “Their intolerance of other religions and their arrogant attitude towards the exponents of other faiths were unwelcome also to the Emperor. So the missionaries had to leave the capital greatly disappointed”\textsuperscript{31}.

3.9 Portuguese missions: An assessment

From the very beginning Christianity had grown up in Indian soil as a naturalised religion and was accepted as one among the Indian religions. The Christians were respected and honoured by the rulers, leaders, and higher castes. The Rajas and the Emperors conferred upon them royal privileges and grants to be enjoyed forever. In martial, commercial and cultural achievements the Christians also made their contribution. Most of the foreign missionaries of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries particularly the Portuguese who imposed latinization on the Indian Christians, were to a large extent ignorant or ill informed of the social life and customs of India, and consequently failed to appreciate them. Indian Christians looked for an alternative structure to the Roman Catholic one, which had been imposed on them at the Synod of Diamper. The Coonen Cross Revolt in 1653 at Mattanchery near Kochi marked the final out break and split the

\textsuperscript{31} K.M. Panikkar, \textit{Asia and Western Dominance} op.cit.: 281.
Christian community into two groups. One remained in communion with the Pope and the other took an oath known as Coonen Cross Oath and decided to sever all communion with the Rome and keep its identity and autonomy.

The Christian missions did not make much inroads into the world of the caste Hindus or Muslims in the sixteenth century. There was hardly any creative encounter between Christianity and Indian culture. The missionary efforts of the Portuguese were mainly confined to small pockets in India where they held political power. Christianity spread mainly among the employees of the Portuguese and the depressed classes. Consequently caste Hindus developed the notion that Christianity was the religion of the depressed classes. Disappointingly the converts’ understanding of Christian faith was shallow, their moral and ethical character frivolous and their life-style uninspiring that they provided no impetus for the surrounding non-Christians to rethink their way of life. Christianity and their missions were interpreted as means for the extension of western political control and aggressive imperialism. Many right thinking Indians had expressed their amazement at this dubious association. The words of Jawaharlal Nehru are illustrative: “The gospel of Jesus, the gentle but relentless

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rebels against untruth and injustice, could so easily be made a tool of imperialism, capitalism and political domination.”

Although Portuguese missionaries had been pioneers of missionary work and services during sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, their mission was aggressive and not in the way mission was envisaged by Jesus Christ. Their interest in missionary and ecclesiastical progress began to die down the moment the temporal power of the Portuguese began to decay. The Dutch and the British who came after the Portuguese were interested solely in trade. Moreover, they were Protestants and had no sympathy with the activities of the catholic orders. So the first phase of evangelization came to a close in India by the middle of the seventeenth century with the decline of the political power of the Portuguese in the subcontinent.

3.10 The Protestant missions

It is true to that the Protestant missions in the nineteenth century like the Roman Catholic mission in the sixteenth century largely followed the colonial flag. Colonialism and Christian mission went hand-in-hand since the arrival of the Portuguese in India. The extent and the nature of the relationship between the missions and colonialism varied from one colonial power to another. Nevertheless, there was an alliance and for many in India during this period Christianity was a western religion and a means used by the western

powers to establish their political control. And missionary enterprise was interwoven with commerce and cultural imperialism. The attitude and feelings of the educated Indians towards Christian missions are reflected in the following statement of the great social reformer Raja Ram Mohun Roy:

“In Bengal, where the English are rulers, and where the mere name of English man is sufficient to frighten people, an encroachment upon the rights of her poor, timid and humble inhabitants and upon their religion, can not be viewed in the eyes of God or the public as a justifiable act”\(^{34}\).

Chakkaria a Tamil Christian convert and a prominent lawyer was voicing the attitude of Hindus when he asked; why should the Hindus who yielded in politics and commerce allow the sanctity of their souls to be violated by the intrusion of a foreign religious denomination\(^{35}\)?

Most of the missionaries and some historians of eighteenth and nineteenth century missions believed that British rule in India was an opportunity provided by God to lift India from ignorance about God and superstitions. In European mission histories, the colonized were termed as ‘barbarous’, ‘savages’, ‘pagan’ and ‘superstitious’. Hence

\(^{34}\) T.V. Philip, “Christianity in India during Western Colonisation: Conflict, Reconciliation or Adjustment”, ICHR Vol.XXI, No. 1 June (1987): 16.

the mission goal was not only Christianising heathens, but also civilizing them under superior European culture and evangelical spirituality. Further the missionary work in eighteenth-nineteenth century India was grounded in the binary distinctions of European and Indian, white and brown, civilized and primitive and Christian and pagan. This binary division gave the colonizers grounds for justifying the European project of colonization of India and proselytizing of the Indians. William Wilberforce, leader of Evangelical group in the House of Commons said in 1793 that the Indian natives were idolatrous and superstitious with a “feeble knowledge of God”. The people themselves were barbarous and low measured in the scale of European civilization. The natives must be taught a better religion at a time and in a manner that will not inspire them with passion for political change\textsuperscript{36}. Hence the British, the patrons of the Christianising scheme, had a simple goal of raising the people to a higher and superior culture. It was the hope of the colonizers that if the higher classes in the Hindu social order were converted it would eventually lead to the dissolution of Hindu culture.

3.10.1 The first Protestant mission

The first Protestant mission to India came from Denmark. King Frederick IV was an ardent follower of the Lutheran teachings. He believed that it is one of the duties devolving upon monarchs to make provision for Christianising their non-Christian subjects. A mission

was founded in the Danish settlement of Tranquebar in South India. The first Protestant missionaries to arrive on Indian soil were two German missionaries Ziegenbalg and Plutschau sent by the King. They landed on July 9\textsuperscript{th} 1706 in Tranquebar a Danish trade post. Julius Richter says that this marked the birthday of Protestant missions in India\textsuperscript{37}. Since the Danish trade post never crossed boundary of Tamil kingdom, their missionary work was confined mainly to Tamil Nadu region. The Protestant missionary work gained momentum only after the arrival and the expansion of Anglican power.

3.10.2 The British period

The British Government had three roles in India, first that of a trader, second that of ruler and then that of a Christian propagandist. British rulers held and professed Christianity. Consequently British rule was equated with Christian domination. In the early years of its rule the Company had taken a position of neutrality with regard to the religious and social affairs of its subject. The East India Company decided not to interfere with the traditional cultures of the people by supporting missionary work. The company’s policy was non-interference in Indian education but favouring traditional Hindu or oriental learning. The non-interference probably based was on the fear that missionaries through English education expecting to aid conversions might offend the Hindu

\textsuperscript{37} Julius Richter, op. cit.: 103.
subjects of the company and create unrest. This policy of non-interference with the customs and traditions of the natives and lack of support for missionary work were reviewed after the Company Charter was reviewed in 1813. Finally in 1833, the policy of the company was changed under pressure from the Evangelicals in England. This marked the first decisive step of missionary work in India. A spokesman of the Evangelicals declared: “The true cure of darkness is the introduction of light. The Hindus err because they were ignorant and their errors have never fairly been laid before them. The communication of our light and knowledge to them would prove the best remedy for their disorders”.

The Charter of 1833 approved the permanent presence of missionaries in India and made provision for Anglican hierarchy at Calcutta. With the expansion of the British Empire missionaries began to arrive and Christianity began to spread by establishing dioceses at Madras and Bombay. Ever since there existed a renewed cooperation between the missionaries and the colonial power in helping one another in their missions.

By the end of the eighteenth century a new wave of the spirit of evangelization permeated Protestant Churches. In 1792 the English Baptists organised the first Anglican mission Baptist Missionary Society.

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39 Ibid.
40 Jacob S. Dharmaraj, op. cit.: 19.
Later Protestant missionary operations were undertaken on a large scale by LMS and CMS. Alongside the older societies there have come into the field a bewildering number of missionary organisations. The characteristic feature of nineteenth century missions was the enthusiasm for the multiplication of missionary efforts. The priority of the colonial missions was conversion. Conversion of individual souls was considered the sole end of mission. To a European missionary non-Christian religions and Eastern cultures were non-slavific and that Christianity alone would redeem them. The British rule had provided favourable atmosphere and necessary infrastructure for the missions to work even in the remotest mountain villages without confronting much opposition. Julius Richter says that, it would be hard to find any land possessing so great an attraction for the missionary societies. The mood of mission societies and missionaries were summarized in the following words:

“The content of their (missionaries) hope was not merely a conglomerate of individual conversions but a comprehensive revolution in heathen Society in which every aspect of that society would be praised from the grip of satanic domination and submitted to the liberating lordship of Christ”.

After the Charter of 1833 was renewed, missionaries were allowed freely to come to India. Missionary teams became powerful

41 Julius Richter, op. cit.: 221.
42 Jacob S. Dharmaraj, op. cit.: 58.
and their style of work changed. By this time a new set of missionaries rooted in ‘the iconoclastic zeal of extreme Protestantism’\(^43\) began to arrive. These missionaries, soon through letters, reports and stories, created a very distorted image about the people and culture in India. They were imbued with the western ‘imperial sentiments’ and the sense of cultural superiority and agreed with Charles Grant, the spokesman of the Evangelicals in England, that it was not any inborn weakness that made Hindu degenerate but the nature of their religion. For the evangelicals India was in darkness and would need the light present in the western world. Claudius Buchanan another spokesman of the evangelicals who had been a missionary in India said:

“The missionaries asserted that since God laid upon Britain the solemn duty of evangelizing India, the Government should not hesitate to throw its weight into the struggle. They demanded above all open Government patronage of Christian education and vigorous warfare upon the abuses associated with Hindu religion”\(^44\).

The Evangelicals and other mission societies made a combined attempt to change the policy of the British Government and demanded the introduction of legal and social reforms in India. It was thus that William Bentick in March 1835 issued his resolution intended mainly

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\(^43\) C.P. Mathew and M.M. Thomas, op.cit. : 48.
to promote European literature and science and utilize funds mainly for English education\textsuperscript{45}. The study of Indian literature and oriental works was admitted to be of little intrinsic value and the opinion was that these literatures inculcate the most serious errors on the subjects. Also the customs and traditions and the religious beliefs of the subject people were considered by the missionary educators and their societies in England as a sign of depravity and futility. The remedy was the introduction of English education\textsuperscript{46}.

Alexander Duff, Scottish missionary and leading educator whose ideas can be considered representative of the majority of missionaries in the nineteenth century, thought that though Hindu philosophical discourse contained lofty terms in its religious vocabulary what they conveyed were only vain, foolish and wicked conceptions. According to Duff, Hinduism spread like a dark universe where all life dies and death lives\textsuperscript{47}. The Christian task for him was to do everything possible to demolish such a gigantic fabric of idolatry and superstition. Needless to say, such an attitude prevented any positive encounter between Christianity and Indian culture. Duff, Buchanan, Trevelyan, Macaulay and others had great influence on the missionary thinking. The missionaries and civil servants who came to India were so prejudiced that they did not see anything good in India society.

\textsuperscript{45} S.Immanuel David, op.cit. : 27.
\textsuperscript{46} Stephen Neill, \textit{Builders of the Indian Church} (Kottayam: CMS press, 1940) 106-123.
\textsuperscript{47} T.V.Philip, op.cit. : 20.
The missionaries and their societies subscribed to the view that civilizing the Indian people would prepare the primitive religious people to embrace Christianity. Nineteenth century Protestant missiology could be understood against the background of Christianisation and civilizing as two sides of the same coin. Missions were unwilling to understand the complexities of Indian cultural variants. Deeply entrenched in them was a sense of superiority of European civilization and that coloured their approach to people of other cultures and religious faiths. The missions and colonial administrators asserted that Hinduism would die away soon and the whole nation could be civilized and Christianised. English education was a means towards this goal. That is to facilitate change from exterior to interior, from trade to religion, a cultural revolution for the betterment of the natives by disseminating knowledge of Christianity and make them loyal to the British. The comment of Arthur Mayhew is worth mentioning: “The evangelical supporters of Anglican mission were far more interested in the dissemination of the Bible and baptismal statistics than in any measure for the general enlightenment of India.” The primary interest of the Raj was to keep control over India. The dominant interest of missions was to work for the conversion of Indians to Christianity. But in the colonial situation they found themselves in need of one another and so mutual support was but natural.

50 Arthur Mayhew, op. cit.: 163.
Although the missionaries worked hard and suffered a lot for bringing education and awareness of social justice to the people living in the rural areas of India, as they were associated with the colonial-imperial powers, the significance of their selfless service was either overlooked or misunderstood.

The response this approach evoked need to be looked into detail. The fourth chapter is an attempt to do this. If Indians really lived under the influence of the pagan religion and were uncivilised, they would have whole-heartedly welcomed the missionary enterprise. But they did not. The natives were not unresponsive to the civilising project. How they reacted needs to be examined in detail and the next chapter intends to do it in some detail.