CHAPTER III

ENTRY OF THE MISSION

Christianity, a historical religion, emerged as a result of the birth, ministry, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in Palestine, on the south eastern shore of the Mediterranean sea in the first century A.D. It made its entry into India also. India, a country with diverse cultures, was always receptive to other faiths and beliefs. Hence the foreign missionaries were accorded a warm welcome and permission was granted to them to live and propagate their religion among the natives.

The Syrian Period

According to tradition Christianity was brought to India in the first century by one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, St. Thomas. St. Thomas is said to have landed in 52 A.D at the fort of Cranganore in Malabar and first preached to the Jews there.\(^1\) The remnants of a church at Kumari Muttam locally called “Thommai Palli” (Church of St. Thomas) and the old Church at Tiruvithamcode are considered to be the most

\(^1\) Krishna Chaitanya, M., *Called to Serve*, New Delhi, 1975, p.105.
ancient Churches in the Kanyakumari district and they are said to have been consecrated by St. Thomas himself. Moreover the living tradition of the community of St. Thomas Christians who are also called Syrian Christians, bear a strong testimony to his presence and ministry. His preaching which might have drawn a lot of hostility finally resulted in His martyrdom at Mylapore, a suburb of the Madras city, around 72 A.D.

The apostle was contented with the introduction of the ‘New Religion’ to the Syrian Christians and never insisted on the change of their age long customs and practices. Hence the converts remained attached to their Hindu way of living. But a change of fortune took place with the rise of the Portuguese, a Catholic power of Europe, who succeeded in placing these Christians under the suzerainty of their religious head the Pope.

Roman Catholic Period (St. Francis Xavier)

The real beginning of Christianity was marked by the advent of the Portuguese in the fifteenth century. The Portuguese, after establishing themselves in Goa which they captured from the Sultan of Bijapur in 1510, wanted to propagate their religion too. Since they had the three ‘G’s-Gold, Glory, Gospel as their motives, they brought with them missionaries with the approval of the then Pope Alexander VI. Francis Xavier, “The Second Apostle of India” arrived at Goa on 6 May 1542. It

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marked the beginning of the active missionary activities in India in general and South India in particular. Francis Xavier sailed with three native Christians to begin to work among the pearl fisheries on the coast of Cape Comorin, in the extreme south of the Indian Peninsula.

He arrived in Travancore in November 1545 and reached Trivandrum by land. For 14 months he laboured continuously along the coast naming it the “Mission of Cape Comorin”. Overcoming difficulties of language, climate and distance, he spent himself in strengthening the faith of the people. In 1544 he had the consolation of baptising more than 10,000 people along the coast of Travancore from Thuthur to Pallam. He concentrated his activity in South Travancore, at present Kanyakumari District (mainly in Agasteeswaram taluk), where the people spoke Tamil, a language which at that time he knew perfectly well. Kottar was selected by Francis Xavier as the centre of his religious activities. He then proceeded to the Mukkuva fisher people of Manakudy near the Cape to baptize them. The Paravas were proud enough to call themselves, “The Children of St. Francis Xavier”.

From the time of St. Xavier there has been a Church and a resident priest at Cape Comorin and it forms the nucleus of the present Church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title “Our Lady of

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11 Narchisan, J.R., A Local Church Emerges Called to Serve, Nagercoil, 1983, p.4.
Ransom. Tradition points to a small chapel of our Lady in the cathedral at Kottar at the very place, where St. Xavier used to celebrate Mass during his sojourn in Kottar.

It was during his stay at Kottar that he helped Unni Kerala Varma, the king of Venad in warding off the invasion of the Badagas. This historic incident brought St. Xavier and the Venad King closer, as the result of which he was permitted to carry on his missionary work without hindrance together with the assignment of land to build a Church. It is said that the Unni Keralavarma, the king of Venad, gladly gave his consent to the conversion of the Arasars in gratitude to the Saint who, armed only with a crucifix, forced the invading Badagas to retreat at Vadasery. He devoted himself to conversion of the coastal inhabitants. The missionaries from early days found it necessary to instruct the converts to read and write, so that they could themselves read the Bible and receive spiritual sustenance from it.

Tranquebar Mission

In the 17th and 18th centuries the Industrial Revolution and the new methods of transport permitted Europe to spread Christianity over the whole world. Among the Protestant nations, the Danes have the honour of first conceiving the idea of conveying the Gospel to the people of

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India. Tranquebar was a Danish settlement on the Coramandel coast, started in 1616, having been ceded to the Danish East India Company by the Raja of Tanjore. In 1705 Dr. Luelkens the court Chaplain appealed to the king of Denmark Frederick IV, and requested him to send two young Ministers to work among the Indians in and around Tranquebar.

Accordingly two young men undergoing theological training at Halle were selected as the first band of Protestant Missionaries to India. They were Bartholomeu – Zeigenbalg and Henry Plutschau. In accordance with royal orders, Bishop Bernemann ordained them on 11th November 1705 in a Lutheran Church. On 29th November 1705, the two young men boarded the ship Princessa Sophia, Redwiger and set out for the great voyage. After a long voyage they landed at Tranquebar, a Danish colony on 9th July 1706 and when they arrived, no welcome awaited them.

The Danish company opposed them and positively hostile to them. They learned the Tamil language. Ziegenbalg mastered the Tamil language to a high degree and preached his sermons in Tamil. Ziegenbalg was an exceptionally talented man with a gift for languages and within the short span of his life he translated the New Testament into Tamil and got it

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16 John A. Jacob, op.cit., p.15.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., p.15.
21 Ivy Peter and D. Peter, op.cit., p.4.
22 Joy Gnanadhason, op.cit., p.47.
printed in his press, the first printed book in India in the first printing press. In spite of opposition from the Governor of Tranquebar and other Europeans in this colony, the missionaries were able to start schools and Churches in the locality. On 4th August 1707 the first Protestant Church at Tranquebar was consecrated and was named 'New Jerusalem'. By 1712 A.D 220 people had been converted. Ziegenbalg died in 1719 at an early age of 36 and Schultz succeeded him and carried forward the work.

**Christian Frederick Schwartz**

Of all the Missionaries associated with the Tranquebar Mission Christian Frederick Schwartz was the best known and the most loved. He had won universal respect and love through sheer force of character. In 1732 the Dutch Chaplain of Nagapatinam requested the Missionaries at Tranquebar to send a catechist and with the fulfilment of this request an opening was found for the expansion of the mission towards the South. In 1750, Schwartz arrived at Cuddalore. In less than four months he developed the skill to preach in Tamil and started his work with full vigour. During the last part of his life, at the invitation of the ruler of Thanjavur, Raja Serfojee, he transferred his quarters to Thanjavur. During

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23 Ibid.
24 John A. Jacob, *op.cit.*, p.15.
27 Ibid., p.11.
29 Sherring, *The History of Protestant Missions in India*, p.18.
30 Jesse Page, *op.cit.*, p.46.
his reign he granted vast tracts of land and money to the Tanjore Mission and Thanjavur became the cradle of Protestantism in India. In 1761, he undertook a missionary tour accompanied by his friend and colleague J.C. Kohlhoff to Cuddalore and Madras and in the following year he went on foot to Tanjore and Trichinopoly.

**Palayamkottai Mission**

In 1778 Schwarz was asked to visit Palayamkottai, where he baptized a Brahmin widow called Clorinda, who in subsequent years, became instrumental in developing a mission station at Palayamkottai. In 1785 Schwartz visited Palayamkottai for the second time. When he left, the Palayamkottai Congregation was placed under the care of two native catechists, one of them being the famous Satyanathan, who was ordained as the first Tamil Pastor in the South. Satyanathan, a Hindu Vellala whom Schwartz had baptized in 1772, was sent to Palayamkottai. This "able and pious catechist" may be called the "Apostle of the Tinnevelley Mission". With the inauguration of the Palayamkottai Mission Station, Protestant Christianity reached the South eastern border of the Kanyakumari District.

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33 John A. Jacob, *op. cit.*, p.16.  
36 John A. Jacob, *op. cit.*, p.16.
Rev. W.T. Ringeltaube
London Missionary Society

The London Missionary Society like other great religious and philanthropic organisations which sprang into existence at the close of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, was the child of the Evangelical Revival in England led by George Whitefield and John Wesley and his brother Charles. A Founder's week was organised, and on Monday September 21, 1795 at the Castle and Falcon in Aldergate street, the London Missionary Society was started.

The Society's desire to send missionaries to South India 'to the Tamil and Telugu area in particular' was aroused by the invitations received from the eminent missionaries of the Danish Mission in Tranquebar, J ohn Rottler and Caemmerer. On 20th April 1804, a party of six missionaries were sent out to establish mission stations in South India and Ceylon. The names of the missionaries were Ringeltaube, Desgranges, Cran, Voss, Erhardt and Palm. Among them Ringeltaube was sent to South India.

Ringeltaube and his Early Attempts

Ringeltaube was born on the 8th August 1770, near Brieg in Silesia. Five days later he was baptized and received the name Ringeltaube. He was educated at the University of Halle. He had one

37 Ivy Peter, and D. Peter, op. cit., p.5.  
38 John A. Jacob, op. cit., p.19.  
39 Ibid., pp.19-20.  
40 William Robinson, op. cit., p.11.
sister and one younger brother namely Anna and Ernest. In his 18\textsuperscript{th} year he desired to become a missionary of Christ.\footnote{Ibid.} His father encouraged him by supplying information on hymns and the story of the Green Land Mission.\footnote{Azariah, S.A., \textit{Ringeltaube the Apostle of South Travancore}, Nagercoil, 1939, p.1.}

**Ringeltaube’s stay at Tranquebar**

In 1803 Ringeltaube was sent to India by the London Missionary Society.\footnote{Nagaiti Aiya, V., \textit{Vol.II, op.cit.}, p.221.} He landed at Tranquebar on 5 December 1804 and was welcomed by the Danish Missionaries. At Tranquebar he remained for several months, assisting the venerable Dr. John the senior missionary of the Tranquebar Mission. He decided to settle in Tranquebar and studied Tamil language under the guidance of a Tanjore Missionary, J.C. Kohlhoff.\footnote{Daniel Poll, E., \textit{British Baptist Missionaries in India}, Oxford, 1967, p.4.} He preached at various places in Madras and exhorted his brethren and dined together every Sunday.\footnote{\textit{The Missionary’s Society’s Report 1795-1814}, Nagercoil, 1947, p.258.} During his short visit to Madras he cultivated the friendship of Dr. Kerr who had been to Travancore on a deputation relating to the affairs of the Syrian Church in Travancore.

**Services in Tirunelveli District**

Ringeltaube’s attention was also drawn to the miserable condition of the Christians in Tinnevelly belonging to the S.P.C.K Mission.
J.C. Kohlhoff, entered into an arrangement with Ringeltaube by which the latter was to take ad-interim charge of the Tinnevelly station. In accordance with the agreement, Ringeltaube hired a boat and sailed from Tranquebar on 1\textsuperscript{st} February 1806 and on the 9\textsuperscript{th} he landed at Tuticorin.\textsuperscript{46} On the 11\textsuperscript{th} he started for Palayamkottai and reached on 12\textsuperscript{th} February. The Tirunelveli Mission gave him a horse for his purpose of journey. By riding and walking he attracted many people towards Christianity. He laboured up to June 1806 and preached the Gospel in Tamil.\textsuperscript{47} On the 13\textsuperscript{th} of April Ringeltaube set out for Travancore and entered the princely kingdom through the Aramboly Ghat on 25\textsuperscript{th} April 1806.\textsuperscript{48}

**Maharasan Vedamonickam and Spread of Christianity in Agasteeswaram Taluk**

The name of Maharasan Vedamonickam, a humble citizen of Travancore, is always associated with the introduction of Protestant Christianity in Agasteeswaram Taluk. Protestant Christianity had the honour of having been introduced into the country by a son of the soil called Maharasan, a native Paraya or Sambhavar an outcaste of Mylaudi.\textsuperscript{49} He was a Hindu devotee and belonged to a staunch orthodox Saivite sect.\textsuperscript{50} Before Ringeltaube came to Mylaudi, Maharasan along with his nephew Sivagurunathan had set forth from his home to seek in the Hindu shrines of

\textsuperscript{46} William Robinson, *op.cit.*, p.37.
\textsuperscript{48} William Robinson, *op.cit.*, p.45.
\textsuperscript{49} Silvester Horne, *op.cit.*, p.93.
\textsuperscript{50} William Robinson, *op.cit.*, p.91.
Tiruchendur and Chidambaram the enlightenment and spiritual solace which he could not derive from the crude demon-worship at home.\textsuperscript{51} As the solace he sought was not available at Chidambaram, he set off homewards and on the way at Tanjore, he stayed with his Christian cousin and brother-in-law. He accompanied his sister and brother-in-law to the Church and as he had never before heard a sermon he listened with great curiosity and attention. J.C. Kohlhoff a missionary of Tanjore was preaching the Gospel on that occasion.\textsuperscript{52}

The good news given by J.C. Kohlhoff was the light of Heaven shining upon him in the utter darkness.\textsuperscript{53} This exercised a profound influence on the restless idolator and Maharasan opened his heart for Christ and accepted Christianity. He was eager to become a follower of Jesus. Instructed further and baptized by J.C. Kohlhoff, Maharasan and his nephew were received into the community of Christians and thus Maharasan became the ‘first fruit of Travancore for Christ’.\textsuperscript{54} When J.C. Kohlhoff baptized the young pilgrim, he changed the name of Maharasan into Vedamonickam (gem of the Bible) and his nephew’s name Sivagurunathan into Masilamoni (the spotless gem or the innocent).\textsuperscript{55} As he conversed with J.C. Kohlhoff he came to know of the Christian

\textsuperscript{51} Hacker, I.H., \textit{op.cit.}, p.20.
\textsuperscript{52} Samuel Mateer, \textit{The Land of Charity}, p.260.
\textsuperscript{53} William Robinson, \textit{op.cit.}, p.92.
\textsuperscript{54} Augur, C.M., \textit{op.cit.}, pp.439ff
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.441f.
activities going on at Tranquebar. Vedamonickam was now eager to go there. He visited Tranquebar and observed the working of the Mission. Shortly after he returned to Tanjore and thence to Mylaudi.

Both Vedamonickam and Masilamoni were hailed with delight on their arrival and when asked for the Prasadam and the Vibuthi, which they had gone to fetch from Chidambaram, Vedamonickam held forth his Tamil Testament and said, “Here is the holy gift of the Lord of all worlds”. It was the beginning of Vedamonickam’s work among the despised and degraded people of Agasteeswaram taluk. From the next day he began preaching the Gospel to the members of his family. Perumal or Gnanamuthu, the head man of the family and Vedamonickam’s brothers and sisters were attracted to the gracious words and they embraced Christianity. This was followed by the conversion of many others and in all about thirty persons nominally professed Christ publicly and put themselves under Vedamonickam’s instruction and thus the nucleus of the Protestant Church in Agasteeswaram taluk was formed. Vedamonickam gave the converts native Christian names with which he was conversant while at Tanjore. The conversion of the natives and the growing influence of Protestant Christianity evoked the jealousy of the Hindu neighbours as well as of the petty Sircar officials.

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56 Hacker, I.H., op.cit., p.21.
58 Augur, C.M., op.cit., p.447.
It seems Vedamonickam was very much disturbed by the persecutionist policy of Caste Hindus and he even thought of leaving his little flock and going back to Tranquebar. But he was consoled and strengthened in his work by the occasional visits of the catechists from Tinnevelly with whom he had intimate contact. In an hour of trial Vedamonickam conceived the idea of going to Tanjore once more as he hoped that such a visit would help to soothe his troubled mind and to receive better counsel from J.C. Kohlhoff. After he reached Tanjore he reported to Kohlhoff that a little congregation of Christians had been formed at Mylaudi and requested him to send a missionary to South Travancore. J.C. Kohlhoff suggested to Vedamonickam to approach Ringeltaube and convince him that there was a wide field for his labour. Ringeltaube seriously heard the condition of Travancore Christians. At once Ringeltaube made up his mind to go to them, after gaining sufficient knowledge of Tamil. However, for the time being work was carried on by Vedamonickam and Yesudian catechist whom Vedamonickam had brought with him from Tanjore.

Call to the People of Travancore

In 13 April 1806, Ringeltaube wrote to Col. Macaulay asking him to obtain permission of the Travancore Government to issue

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60 Ibid.
61 Augur, C.M., op.cit., p.450.
63 William Robinson, op.cit., p.32.
64 Augur, C.M., op.cit., p.455.
Resident's Passport to enter the Travancore State. Col. Macaulay issued a Resident Passport authorising him to travel throughout the State. Col. Macaulay not only procured for him the sanction but also promised to defray the expenses for his journey. April 25, 1806 is a watershed in the history of South Travancore especially in Agasteeswaram taluk when William Tobias Ringeltaube, the first Protestant Christian Missionary made his epoch making entry into Travancore through the Aramboly pass. Ringeltaube arrived at Mylaudi on 25 April 1806 and there Vedamonickam a native of Mylaudi welcomed Ringeltaube. Of this he writes "My timid companions, however trembled at every step, being now on ground altogether in the power of the Brahmins, the sworn enemies of the Christian name; ...". He started training Vedamonickam and Masilamony, the two young men of piety and considerable talent and thus the nucleous of a native ministry was formed. As in other LMS Mission fields in India, in Travancore also mass conversion began first among the outcastes because the depressed classes lacked a sense of individuality and hence acted corporately. The liberal treatment of the missionaries attracted the lower castes. Once they became Christians, their image changed as they were carefully educated and treated with kindness and the

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67 John A. Jacob, *op.cit.*, p.29.
converts as a class began to earn for themselves a constantly improving position in public estimation.

**Salvation Army**

Internal bickerings and caste prejudice within the LMS Church favoured the advent of other missions. The Salvation Army was founded in 1878 by William Booth, an ordained Minister in the Methodist New Connexion Body in England.\(^3\) It was started purely as a Home Mission Movement for the purpose of forming a link between the unchurched masses and the Churches of England.\(^4\) In course of time it grew into an international religious and charitable movement organised and operated on a military pattern with its headquarters at London.

The Salvation Army made its appearance in India in 1883.\(^5\) In India the early missionaries of the Salvation Army left their bungalows to live in huts and threw off their shoes to walk bare-footed. They started to eat and live as the natives did and drudged with begging bowls in hand while preaching the Gospel from village to village.\(^6\)

It made its entry into Agasteeswaram taluk as early as 1889 but it was only in 1892 it was able to produce some impact on the people. Nagercoil had been an occasional visiting station of Salvation Army. But the officers of the Army did nothing in the shape of securing converts or

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\(^3\) *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol.XXX, p.969.
the like.\textsuperscript{77} But an opportunity was offered to the Salvationists in 1890 when a local Christian of Nagercoil sent an earnest invitation to the territorial commander of the Salvation Army at Madras requesting him to start evangelistic work in the Hindu villages around Nagercoil.\textsuperscript{78} The Army leaders worked among the Nadar coolies in their villages near Cape Comorin. Their attempt to bring the Nadar coolies in the way of salvation was not a great success.\textsuperscript{79}

After that the Salvationist decided that the work of the Army should be directed towards the outcaste Panchamas. Captain Devasundaram was selected for the work.\textsuperscript{80} Finding that the majority of the outcaste Pariahs were living in the region north of Nagercoil, the Salvationist went to Talakudi on 31\textsuperscript{st} July 1892.\textsuperscript{81} Evangelist Vedamonickam of the LMS congregation at Talakudi reported in 1892 that the Salvationist adopted measures according to Hindu customary forms of worship, such as the use of noisy, drums, bells, fireworks and dancing. Later they carefully selected men of the Army marched with music and flags and thus attracted the poor down caste villagers.\textsuperscript{82} Boom Marches were organised in Agasteeswaram taluk. But the Boom Marches evoked bitter opposition from the high caste Hindu population who set fire to the

\textsuperscript{77} Augur, C.M., op.cit., p.1044.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Sobhanan, B., History of the Christian Missions in South India, p.175.
\textsuperscript{80} Augur, C.M., op.cit., p.1045.
\textsuperscript{82} Robert Sandal, op.cit., Vol.II, p.120.
barracks of the marchers and alleged false cases against them.\textsuperscript{83} Heavy sentences were passed upon them by the caste dominated judiciary.\textsuperscript{84}

Persecution of the converts broke out in various centres, as the mass conversion of the low castes highly irritated the high castes. They thought that they would be losing their hold over the low castes by the intervention of the Army and forfeiting the chances of extracting free and slave labour for their farm and domestic works.\textsuperscript{85} Despite these persecutions, the Boom marches of early 1892 helped to strengthen the Army in Agasteeswaram taluk and more souls were won.

The Salvationists renewed their efforts to draw closer to the LMS with a view to draw closer to their fold. They found a noble opportunity for this at the time of the famine of 1894. At this season of scarcity the Salvation Army increased the salary of its agents and this tempted a few agents of the LMS to cross over to the Army.\textsuperscript{86} Further the Salvation Army offered promises of help of various kinds to their members to keep them attached to their side.\textsuperscript{87} Since the establishment of the Salvation Army headquarters at Nagercoil, batches of students from the Nagercoil Seminary of the L.M.S used to visit the Salvation Army for Christian Fellowship and for learning army songs.

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Ibid.}, p.121.
\textsuperscript{84} Sobhanan, B., \textit{History of the Christian Missions in South India}, p.178.
\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Ibid.}, p.177.
\textsuperscript{86} Minutes of the T.D.C Parasalai, dated September 9, 1893, p.194.
\textsuperscript{87} \textit{T.D.C Report for 1894}, Thittuvilai Mission, p.2.
However, the work of the Salvation Army progressed among the Parayas. As they came under the influence of the Gospel they became refined and sophisticated. Their social habits became very much changed. These advancements among the Parayas provoked the wrath of the caste masters. To check the insolent aggressions and attacks of the rustic caste men, the Salvationist were obliged to resort to law on several occasions.

Salvation Army is committed to the relief of poverty, through education, health and other charitable pursuits beneficial to mankind. Its onward march offered relief to many when social disabilities and economic inequalities backed by the indifferent attitude of the administration rendered the life of those less privileged sections meaningless. The Gospel of liberation they heard from the Army as well as the material benefit offered by it boosted confidence in the life of the dejected millions.

**Lutheranism**

Apart from the Salvation Army, another powerful mission came to Agasteeswaram taluk at the beginning of the twentieth century was the MELIM. Towards the close of the nineteenth century the L.M.S in Agasteeswaram taluk encountered several problems in its Churches though the first fruit of the LMS in Agasteeswaram taluk were from among the

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89 Ibid.
91 MELIM means Missouri Evangelical Lutheran India Mission.
depressed outcaste community namely the Pariahs. This mission, in course of time, became dominated by the Shanars.\textsuperscript{92} Therefore the Pariahs felt that they were neglected. As a dominating community in the Church, the Shanars enjoyed all the secular benefits of the Mission. The missionaries also inclined to favour them.\textsuperscript{93} Consequently the poor and neglected languishing minorities in the Church began to search for other missions who could better shield their interest.

The extension of Lutheran work to Agasteeswaram taluk was not the result of any deliberate planning.\textsuperscript{94} It was the outcome of a chance happening. The selfish, arrogant and contemptuous demeanour of the Shanars towards the Pariahs who were a part and parcel of their own congregation at Nagercoil led to cleavage in their relations. This paved the way for the formation of an independent congregation at Vadasery under an Indian Pastor called Nathaniel.\textsuperscript{95}

In 1894 the Missouri Synod decided to organise a new mission in India. Accordingly the Synod established the Missouri Evangelical Lutheran Indian Mission.\textsuperscript{96} The dissatisfied Pariahs organised under the guidance of G. Jesudasan, a secretary to the British Resident at

\textsuperscript{92} Meckenzie, G.T., \textit{Christianity in Travancore}, Trivandrum, 1901, p.5.
\textsuperscript{93} Jesudasan's \textit{Letter to R.M. Zorn} dated Nagercoil, December 5, 1941 in Minutes of the Nagercoil District Conference, dated Nagercoil March 24-27, 1942, p.11ff.
\textsuperscript{96} \textit{A Seventy Fifth Anniversary Publication of the Missouri Evangelical Indian Mission}, p.11.
Trivandrum. He published a number of articles in the Christian Patriot in which he exposed the real state of affairs in the Nagercoil Mission field and the way in which the local Adi-Dravidas were being neglected by the mission agencies and pleaded for another mission to come and serve their interest. They approached the Lutheran missionaries to work for them. The Mission Board sanctioned the opening of a field in Nanchilnadu and accordingly Albert Huebener moved to Nagercoil in 1907.

**Agasteeswaram Taluk in the eyes of the Foreign Missionaries**

In Agasteeswaram taluk, as elsewhere in India there was an almost intolerable sufferings. In the absence of learning and enlightenment society was immersed in ignorance, conservatism and superstition. To the early missionaries another problem of an extreme intricate nature was the caste system. In fact caste, “the Achilles heel of Hinduism posed a serious threat to the intrusion of Christianity.” Though the missionaries had brought with them a casteless culture and a literature full of thoughts on individual liberty, they never seemed to have taken any step to discard it. Hence the missionaries irrespective of their denominations, could neither agree upon the nature nor the way of tackling it unanimously. In the words of a Jesuit Priest, “in India four demons stalked over the land –

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Disease, Darkness, Drink and Debt, in other words, Infirmities, Ignorance, Intemperance and Indebtedness." So also in Agasteeswaram taluk, besides, caste system, illiteracy and ignorance, many social evils were prevalent.

Hence the missionaries had a clear cut vision of their mission. Though evangelism was their principal aim they felt constrained by the love of Jesus Christ to alleviate human sufferings and misery by providing better facilities of life as their prime concern. Consequently they charted out an agenda of social reforms for the benefits of the natives of Agasteeswaram taluk.

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