Chap 3

LIFE OF BESCHI
Life

Fr. Beschi was born at Castiglione delle Stiviere in the province of Venice, on the 8th of November 1680. He was christened on the 13th of the same month with the name Constanzzo Giuseppe Eusebio. The name Constanzzo was destined to be permanent in Tamilnad as Viramūnivar. Giuseppe (Joseph) has become the hero of the Tamil epic Tēmbāvaṇi. Eusebio was piously confined to oblivion.

Very little is known of Beschi's early years. He had his grounding in humanities. The wealth of thoughts and feelings supplied by the classical Latin writers and the Renaissance Italian authors are to be seen in the abundant use he made of them in his Tamil poems, major and minor. After one year of Philosophy, he entered the Novitiate of the Jesuits at Novellaria on the 21st of October (alibi 23rd October) 1698. From September 1700 & 1701 he taught the lowest class of Grammar at Tavenna. This would stand him in good stead later on when he instructed the rustic villagers as well as the missionary-students in Tamilnad. From 1701 to 1710 was the period of philosophical and Theological training according to the Ratio Studiorum or the Jesuit system of education. In 1703 he completed his course of Philosophy; 1703 - 1705 saw him teaching successively the middle and the highest Grammar classes. After his Theology which started in 1706 came his ordination to priesthood in 1709. After completing his Divinity course in 1710 he prepared himself to go abroad, obedient to the mandate of his Master, "Going, therefore,
teach ye all nations". He was then 30 years of age.

The Portuguese vessel, with him as the only missionary abroad, strange to say, set sail from Lisbon in 1710. And he was with his brother missionaries of the Madura Mission on the 8th of May 1711. The sentiments with which he started his work are seen in his first letter to the General of the Society of Jesus; "...... I feel myself under the obligation of returning infinite thanks to your most Rev. Paternity, now that I am in the dear Mission for which I have longed so much ..... to enable me to live till my death as a true son of the Society, procuring incessantly and in everything the greater glory of God and the salvation of my neighbour;"¹ he concluded by craving for his superior's paternal blessing. Here we see the twin sentiments of loyalty to his faith and religious vocation and love for the land of him adoption, henceforth inextricably entwined for life.

On joining the Madura Mission, in May 1711, Father Beschi was first posted at Pudupatti-Gurukkelpatti in Tirunelveli District. But from 1712 to 1713 we find him in Ayampatti ministering to the Christians tossed about by the vicissitudes of Tanjore Kingdom, himself in the midst of great obstacles. Back again at Gurukkalpatti, near Palayamkottai he made his Solemn Profession, becoming a full fledged member of the Society of Jesus. He was then transferred to Kamanayakkanpatti. Here some "false
brethren" calumniated him and he first experienced the sweetness of being imprisoned and sentenced to death by the Commander of the Muhammedan army. His life however was not to end in an easy martyrdom. The influence of some powerful friends obtained his release after a detention of only twenty four hours, to his great disappointment.²

Missionary labours were hindered by the extremely troubled state of the country, incendiaryism and plunder being rampant everywhere. Making the best of this enforced inactivity, Fr. Beschi plunged himself into the study of Tamil literature. "In the space of a few months," the Superior of the Mission Fr. De Bourges wrote³ "he made more progress in it, than any other missionary since the foundation of the Mission. The result is that he writes Tamil verses most elegantly, and what is more difficult, he has read the ancient poets with much profit. From these poets he will one day be able to make a choice of beautiful maxims for the formation of good manners, and of excellent arguments in support of the faith with these people who trust implicitly only their poets."

This gives us a peep into the true motive of those missionaries who went all out for adapting themselves to the land and people of their adoption. Every true missionary has repeated the words of his Master, Jesus Christ. "I came not to destroy but to fulfill." His anxiety has been to protect and foster whatever is good, pure, true and noble in the
cultural and spiritual tradition of the people to whom he
goes as the bearer of Christ's message. It was with this
spirit and outlook therefore that Beschi plunged into the
sea of ancient wisdom of the Tamils so that he might nourish
himself with the ambrosia that would come out from the
churning of this ocean as he so beautifully declares in several
places in Tēmbāvāṇi and Tirukkāvalūr Kālambakam.

Father Beschi was appointed to fill a vacancy that
occurred in Marava. But political conditions in that region
made that assignment impossible, and he was therefore asked
to go and help at Ēlākūrichi, then at Madura and then again
at Ēlākūrichi. Thus during his first six years in the Madura
Mission, Father Beschi found himself a wanderer continually
shifting from place to place, now at Aur, now at Corali, now
at Eylūr, now at Gurukkalpatti, now in Marava, now in
Ēlākūricchi, now in Madura. Places so different and so
distant gave Beschi the most valuable experience of intimate
contact with every possible way of life of the diversified
Tamil race. His life flowed like the river that he describes
in Tēmbāvāṇi as flowing through the most diverse tracts of
Kurūnjī, Mullai, Maruđam and Neidal, always tending towards
the final goal of union with the divine ocean.

The Missionaries believed that good always results
from every temporal evil. During the reign of Sarboji in
Tanjāvūr, missionaries were forbidden to enter the territory of
that kingdom, and so they built a church at Ēlākkurichi on
the northern bank of Coleroon in the territory of the Naynār of Ariyalūr who was neither hostile nor favourable. Father Beschi was appointed in 1717 to cater to the needs of the Christians who flocked to this Church of Elakkurichī. Here he was laid up with a virulent tumour in the back; he was taken to Pondicherry for treatment and when he was well again he was sent to Vadugarpatti, on the north bank of the Coleroon, a place more suitable for his health. Here we learn that he began giving spiritual retreats to Catholics and reaped abundant fruits. No other information is available about his stay at Vadugarpatti. "We can only surmise", says Fr. Beschi, "that if any time was left to him after he had fulfilled the multifarious duties of his calling, he devoted it to the composition of his Tamil works."

His talents:

By now Fr. Beschi's proficiency in Tamil was well known, and new missionaries who had to study Tamil were sent to him. We read in a letter of Fr. de Bourzes to Fr. Stephen Souciet, in Paris, dated Colupatti, 12th January 1721: "I have just been told that dear Father Gargam (who had just come to the Carnatic Mission) is now with Fr. Beschi, viz., with the 'Father of the flowers'. Fr. Gargam could not find a better master of the language: the Father possesses a perfect knowledge of it, so much so, that he writes beautiful verses in it; a feat which no other missionary has accomplished before."
The phrase 'Father of the flowers' refers to a previous letter by the same Father de Bourzes to the same Fr. Souciet, dated 10th January 1721, in which he thanks Fr. Souciet for the trouble he took in sending to India the flowers asked by Fr. Beschi.

It is usually the task of the Superior of the Mission to write the Annual Letter to Rome, giving an account of the labours of the missionaries during the year. Once Fr. Manuel Machado, Superior of the Mission entrusted the writing of the Annual Letter of 1720, 1721 to Fr. Beschi because evidently of the latter's facility to write. But just at that time Fr. Beschi met with an accident; his horse tripped and fell, he got his right arm bruised and so was unable to use it for writing or any other purpose. After he regained the use of his arm he did write the Annual Letter of 1720, 1721, which fact is mentioned in the letter of Fr. Manuel Machado, from Marava, dated 30th August 1722: "The same Father Beschi is now busy writing in order to send your Paternity the account of the events of the years 1720 and 1721." "This will show how much the labourers of the Madura Mission, in spite of their poor health, have worked in the Lord's vineyard. If I am not mistaken, your Paternity, I hope, will see better narrated by a more eloquent and exercised pen than my own those facts which have been lightly touched upon by me in this letter."
In 1726 Fr. Beschi is found in Marava helping the Bishop of Mylapore in the canonical process on the heroic virtues and martyrdom of St. John de Britto, put to death in Marava on the 4th February 1693. With his knowledge of the Tamil language and of the Tamil manners, gained from his frequent transfers to different places, Father Beschi could now help to examine properly the witnesses to the martyrdom of John de Britto. And during this canonical process, he must have revised his knowledge of the Theological principles concerning miracles. This revised knowledge is used by him in 17th chapter of the prose work 'Vēda Vilakkam' in which he reports and discusses the miracles wrought by the intercession of the martyr John de Britto.

Fr. Beschi wrote in 1727 the book Vēda Vilakkam (Explanatiion of the Religion) in order to refute, according to the wish of his superior, Fr. Dominic Madeira, the errors made by the Lutherans of Tarangābadi (Tranquebar) in their magy books attacking the Catholic Church. The Annual Letter dated 16th July 1728, signed Prosper Giuliani says:

"In the meantime Fr. Constant Beschi, who is in charge of the district threatened with these heretics, and who possesses an admirable knowledge of Tamil tongue, received orders from Dominic Madeira, his Superior, to write a book refuting their errors. I do not doubt that his genius, learning, zeal, activity and mastery of the language would greatly have helped him to fulfil this command."
To this book the Danish missionaries answered by a pamphlet of 13 pages entitled 'Tiruchabai Pēṟagam' (Scheism of the Church), written in Portuguese and then translated into Tamil. This pamphlet which Rev. Elijah Hoole calls a brief review of ecclesiastical history is said to contain, according to J. Murdoch, 78 falsehoods. Fr. Beschi wrote another book in refutation of this book called Pēṟaka Maruttal (Denial of Schism) in 1728.

These books of Fr. Beschi were not printed then, but only hand-written, as is mentioned in the letter of Father Calmette, on 28th September 1730: ".... They also refuted the errors of these heretics, by learned writings......, as Father Beschi actually did.... The difficulty of multiplying books by hand-writing is not a small obstacle to our zeal, and our means do not allow us the expenses printing would entail."

Generally dated about 1727 is Fr. Beschi's manual for Catechists, called Vēdiar Olukkam with an appendix called Gnāna Kaṇṇādi (Spiritual Mirror). The Grammar of Common Tamil was also written in that year as Fr. Beschi himself remarks in it: "This 1726th year from the Birth of Christ, at the end of which I write these things, is according to the Tamil calculation the 4829th year complete of the Kaliyugam".

1728 was a year of terrible famine in the regions of Tanjore and Madurai. Taking advantage of this situation
the Danish Protestants helped with money many Catholic neophites who therefore went over to the Protestants. To counteract this, Fr. Beschi had recourse to a spiritual means. He requested the Bishop of Mylapore to write to them exhorting them to celebrate every year a solemn feast in honour of Mary the Mother of Christ, under the title of Our Lady of Refuge. It was done so and the prodigal Catholics came back to the Catholic fold. It was about this time that Fr. Beschi, we may suppose, wrote the poetical works in honour of Mary, namely: Thirukkāvalūr Kalambakam, and two small poems - on Our Lady of Refuge at a place named by him Thirukkāvalūr, half a mile from Īlākkurichi.

In 1731, 29th of January, Fr. Beschi wrote a letter to the new General of the Society of Jesus at Rome, which reveals two more of his traits. Two years before he had, with the permission of the Bishop of Mylapore, started a solemn feast in honour of Our Lady of Refuge to arrest the spread of Lutheranism. Now with a tenacity of purpose, and foresight for the future, he requested the General to get the Pope's approval of this feast and obtain from him a special indulgence for the participants in the feast.

"I humbly request that your Paternity inspired by your great zeal for souls, should obtain from the Sovereign Pontiff the confirmation by his authority of the Feast already established by the authority of the Bishop...... " This is not for the whole Mission, but for this church of Īlākkurichi, or any other that in future might be substituted for it."
Adaptation:

We have briefly stated above the principle of adaptation which De Nobili had introduced and which Father Beschi a century later faithfully followed. The Danish Lutherans showed clearly in their books and pamphlets that they were European. But Fr. Beschi condemned outright these foreign methods of preaching the faith and proved that the Catholics were not following that path. In the Annual letter for the year 1731, which Beschi himself wrote, he speaks of a certain Mudali who laboured under the false impression that the Tranquebar protestants and Fr. Beschi were of the same kind and was ready even to prove it in public, but on reading Beschi's book 'Vēga Vilakkam' changed his opinion and began to show high regard for Beschi and his religion. "From a persecutor", says Fr. Beschi, "he became a defender of the Church. Now that he has been reinstated in his office, at the court of the King, we firmly hope that he will no longer act as an enemy towards us." 9

That the way of these missionaries was not easy to human nature is clear from what he confesses:

"The dress adopted by us in the Mission, is in no way protecting us from the inclemency of the air; the diet so light, composed of rice, vegetables and mild; the climate a burning sun ...................... all these were among the inconveniences, which seem an unbearable burden
to the missionary fresh from Europe. But with the help of divine grace, as time goes on, the burden becomes lighter, nay even sweet."

Beschi and the Poor:

Fr. Beschi's chief end in view was to work for the people of Tamil Nadu, guided by the Christian spirit of justice and charity. "He was very liberal," says Mr. A. Muthuswamy Pillai, "in his donations to the poor, and in the erection and repairs of churches. He was assiduous in instructing the youth in different languages and sciences, and in procuring for them situations suitable to their capacity." He took special care of his catechists, a group of leaders who would help him in his contacts with the people. His anxiety to raise their standard of life is seen in his letter to the General of the Society of Jesus, in Rome. He wrote from Elakkurichi on the 29th of January 1731: "I insisted with the superiors, that they might increase at least by one-fourth the salary of the catechists. But I am not listened to, and they answer me that our resources do not allow it. But where there is a will, there is a way". For the uplift of their spiritual level, he arranged in 1730 for a common Retreat for the catechists, during which he made use of his Tamil book 'Vēṭṭir Olukkam' - where he had exposed clearly and in order the duties of catechists. Nor did he neglect their intellectual formation. Making a selection among them he formed a school of High
Tamil, and taught them the rules of Grammar, of Prosody and Rhetoric, making use of his books 'Thonnool Vilakkam' and 'Sentamil'.

His work for the common people at large brought him more troubles. When in 1731 the people of Elakkurichi were falsely accused by their unkind neighbours of ill-treated a cow, it was Fr. Beschi, who taking upon himself the accusation went to see the Prince of Arialur and averted the sentence of punishment. The year 1732 was a year of civil wars, as we have mentioned above, in Tanjore by the invasion of Moghuls, in Ramnad by the attack of the king of Tanjore, and in Madurai due to the death of the king Vijia Ranga Krishna Muthu Vira Sokkanathen Nayaker. During the unrest and confusion caused by such wars and the consequent dearth of the necessaries of life, it was the pleasant task of Fr. Beschi to bring help to the sick and suffering; making use of his knowledge of Tamil medicine he went about doing good; he also urged the sick to have recourse to St. Quittery, a Christian Saint of Portugal. It was about this time perhaps, that he composed his poem in honour of this saint, entitled 'Kitteriammal Ammanai'.

In 1734, the Madurai region became again a battlefield, in which the Moghuls, the Tanjorians, the tondamans and the Maravers took part. As a result a fierce famine raged and the churches at Elakkurichi, Vadugerpatti, Tiruchirapalli, Avur, and Marava suffered much. Fr. Beschi
went on doing his best to lessen the troubles of his people. Nor did he omit his intellectual pursuits. "It was then", says Fr. Besse "that he studied the Hindu Calendar and wrote a treatise about it." 11

It was also in 1734 that Fr. Beschi's Church of Our Lady of Refuge at Elakkurichi was specially honoured by the Zamindar of Ariyalur. According to Fr. Besse, the Zamindar came to discuss religion with Fr. Beschi and at the end of the discussion, he brought presents to the missionary and donated a vast plot of ground for the Church. Oral tradition asserts that the Zamindar was cured of a disease by the missionary's practical knowledge of Tamil medicine and in gratitude for it the Zamindar made those presents. Whatever be the reason, today the stone can be seen which bears the Tamil inscription of that donation of land. Its translation is as follows:

"Swasti Sri (May happiness and prosperity attend). In the year Ratchada following the year 1657 of Salivahana (1734 A.D.), on the 26th day Adi-Srimadu (August the 5th) Rayamaniya Rajestri Rajappamalivarayer, whose seat of Government is fixed in Ariyalur, has caused a stone to be engraved, and granted the whole of land situated within the limits, from the East of Viran Road, to the West of Kovilur road, and from the south of the road to the North of Periya Yeri, at Elakkurichi Tirukkavaiur, for the use of the church of Almighty God, to last as long as the sun and moon last, and the stone and river Kavari, the
the grass and earth exist. If anyone prevents this charity, let him incur the guilt of killing a black cow on the banks of Ganges and become a sinner with the five great sins."

When Tuccoji, the king of Tanjore, who was opposed to Christianity, died in 1735 or at the beginning of 1736, Fr. Beschi and his conferers hoped for better times, but were disappointed. The new king, Pratab Sing, suspecting the Christians to be sorcerers because they used prayers, ordered their arrest and required a public testimony of the nature of the Christian prayers. During these events Fr. Beschi wrote from Elākkurichi to a friend of his in the court of Tanjore, by name Sitoji, a man of influence with the king, and thus helped to put a stop to the persecution.

Beschi and Tranquebar:

In his relations with the Lutheran Missionaries of Tranquebar, Fr. Beschi may be said to have been their friend and foe. As is evident from the following informations culled from the diaries or mission reports of Tranquebar missionaries, Beschi was their opponent in matters of faith or doctrine but their benefactor in their study of Tamil.

The 'Short Mission History' prepared from the extracts of the Evangelical Mission Reports from East India calls Beschi,¹² 'one of the most efficient missionaries at Elākkurichi',¹³ 'particularly able to make friends with nobles
and officials.' Once Missionary Schultz met the Bishop of Mylapore, "with whom there was a father who had such a good knowledge of Tamil that he could have been called a poet". On the 30th Dec. 1726 the poet (evidently Fr. Beschi) went to see Schultz who showed him their printed books, particularly their Bible in Tamil. As expected Beschi did not appreciate it very much; he was of the opinion that it was not good to give the pagans the word of God like throwing pearls before swine.

This Bible in Tamil does not seem to have been free from errors. The sentence of I Cor. 9.5. 'Have we not power to carry about a woman, a sister, as well as the rest of the apostles, and the brethren of the Lord and Cephas?' had been rendered in the Tranquebar Bible as 'Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as the other apostle?'

In the Tamil Protestant Bible (even today) the verse runs as:

"என்று அண்மம் என்று, கொஷ்டமக்கள் செவ்வாது,
பாரசம் ஓடுகள் எரும, வோரநர் ஓடி இன் சகோட்டனே
ஒடுகள் என்றுள்ள உங்கள் வைணவருக்கு அருங்கையில் முன்னே?"

This sentence, pointed out Beschi, seems to allow marriage with one's own sister. It is the Tamil of the Tranquebar Bible that made Beschi remark in his Vēta Vilakkam (Ch.16) that their putting the divine word into Tamil is like throwing a bright gem into mud, like mixing poison with milk and
like spreading charcoal over a lovely painting. The report of Missionary Schultz (27 Dec. 1726) mentions a Latin manuscript in which the Lutheran Bible translation was criticised as barbarian. Because of such criticisms and because of the well known fact that many of the Catholics were going over to Lutheran sect, there was tension between the Catholics and the Protestants. And as Beschi was the chief man on the Catholic side, the Lutherans sent a letter of complaint through a Catholic (secular) priest who had been to Tranquebar, to the Bishop of Mylapore about their relations with the Missionary (Beschi). They instructed also their catechists to be friendly towards Catholics, to convert pagans and leave the Christians of other churches alone. "Some days later we shall have an opportunity to send a letter to the Missionary (Beschi) himself about the same matter."

Catechists:

There were Catechists both among the Catholics and among the Protestants. The Catholic Catechists numbering 30, were being trained by Beschi. A Catholic Catechist had a brother called Ignacimuthu who had become a Protestant Catechist. The former met Ignacimuthu, explained translation 1 of I Cor.9.5; as a result Ignacimuthu's faith was shaken. Another Protestant Catechist, Rajanaicken, (formerly a Catholic) reported to the Missionaries at Tranquebar on 18th March 1729: "Tairianather, the Roman priest at Plakurichi, has given something in writing to his catechists, thereby to confuse our Christians and to
strengthen his Christians. Among other things there is quoted I Cor. 9.5. Owing to this quotation doubts arose in the mind of Ignacimuthu through his brother, a Roman Catechist. I emphasised the doctrine of rebirth according to John 3. After ten days his brother and some others came from Vadugerpatti and I explained to them that through baptism all Christians are brothers and sisters."

A public discussion has been arranged between the Catholic Catechists and this Rajanaicken. The report of Sept. 1745 says: "... the Roman Catechists came together in their church, read a polemical work which their Fr. Beschi had written and so strengthened one another as they wanted to prepare for the public discussion with Rajanaicken, the Lutheran Catechist. From 6th to 8th August there were discussions every day; the Catholic Catechists took all their arguments from Beschi’s book; when Rajamanickens produced two oleis of Lutheran Missionaries, the Catholic Catechists would not listen." This Rajaniacken brought the news in February 1746 that he had successfully settled some disputes between pagans and Catholics and "the present Roman father in Elakurichi, Paranjothi, called some Catholic Christians of Tanjore with their Catechists and by means of Beschi’s olei strengthens them against the doctrine of our church."

The Catholic attitude towards Rajanaicken was not too friendly. Once on the occasion of the feast of Our Lady of Refuge at Elakurichi Catholics showed their opposition to
Rajamickicken in action;21 "they wrote his name and the names of others whom they did not like and burned them and carried the ashes in the midst of weeping as in a funeral." Another time when Rajamickicken was by his able discourses changing the mind of Saverinayagam, the son of a Catholic Catechist of Tanjore, the rumour spread22 that Beschi had told his Christians to kill Rajamickicken wherever they found him, when he had gone to Eiakurichi.

Evidences are not wanting of friendly relations between the Catholic Catechists and the Tranquebar missionaries. When Saverirayen, the Catholic Catechist was ill, the Protestants gave him medicine and sent through him a letter to Beschi who answered on the 13th Nov. 1732 by the following letter which is quoted in the report of July 1733. 23 "De impensis Catechistaer meo pictatis officiis gratias ago, ac communem Dominum precor, ut ipse, qui misericordibus misericordiam polliceris dignatus est, gratiam luculentem retribuat pro beneficio. De Catechistaer salute tristia ominaris, ...... ardua operatur, qui sine querela mala matienter sustinet: ad agendum vel ipsa ambitione impellimur, pati vero unius animi virtutis est." Missionary Walther speaks of his conversation with a Catholic Catechist on 28th Oct. 1726. The Catholic spoke to him about his pictures painted on cloth, about the greater difficulty of converting Hindus on the coast than those inside the country.24 "I asked him," says Walther,
"if he still had the Gospels and Acts given him by Missionary Schults. He replied 'yes' and added that Ziegenbalg had given him 26 sermons. I gave him some Epistles and the first part of the O.T. and some tracts for use in his work among pagans. I gave him also 'Refutation of paganism' and he praised this work...... He went to visit another missionary Pressier. When he took leave we gave him some money for his food during the journey."

Help in Their Study of Tamil:

If the firm stand of Beschi in matters of doctrine was disliked by the missionaries of Tranquebar, his books in Tamil, particularly his grammars and dictionaries were liked by them, used and, in one case, printed by them. Missionary G.W. Obuch wrote to the editor G.A. Francke on 8th Jan. 1738, about the difficulties the beginners had in pronouncing Tamil vowels and consonants and added that they depended on God's help and the grammar of Beschi. "But the Lord be praised, that we, with a stammering mouth may proclaim his word and Gospel. He will help that we can speak properly and preach his name freely and joyfully. We have received thereunto a nice admindiculum which, one (P. Beschi) who has most criticised the Tamil books translated here, has written and sent to us. It is an accurately composed Tamil grammar, which is very useful in particular for us beginners."

Ziegenbalg had also written a Tamil grammar, printed
in 1716; the missionaries who were using this saw the superiority of Beschi's grammar and so asked Beschi's permission to print it in their press. This grammar of Kodunthamill which was the only book that was printed in the life time of Beschi was published by the Tranquebar Mission Press in 1738. Here is the testimony of one who read the proofs. Missionary G.W. Obuch in a letter to a good friend of his in England, speaking of the different helps he had in his study of Tamil, says:26

"After we had acquired some notion of the language from the grammar of Ziegenbalg, it was of great help to a thorough study of the language that the grammar of P. Beschi, a Jesuit, arrived here to be printed (for which a request had been sent even before our arrival here). By copying and reading it we got a better and more exact understanding of some positions, and even while I am reading the proofs it gives me new insights into the genius of the language."

When this grammar came out of the press, Beschi was surprised to see the appendix 'Observationes Grammaticae' by Walthier. This appendix though praised by 27 the Bishop of Mylapore, was not appreciated by Beschi as it was printed without his permission and contained unproved contradictions to his rubes. 28 "Vidi annexas observationes," wrote Beschi to Obuch, "laudo quidem studium ac laborem; nonnulla tamen asserit aperte contra ea, quae ego scripsi nec, ut par erat, probare dignatur. e.g., dicit scibendum contra id, quod ego dico et probare videor - sic dicit scribendum - contra regulam,
quam ex ipsorum praeceptis tradó et hujusmodi plura; quae
pluribus intentus nec referre queo nec necessarium censeo:
licet longe graviora adnotare possem. Haec autem scribo
veritatis amore non censoris genio motus: quae typis dantur
plurimo indigent examine, ne legentium ferulae subeant.
Ceterum jube et vale."

It must have been this said experience that prompted
Beschi to deny his permission later when the Lutheran
Missionaries wanted to print his dictionary of high Tamil.
The transactions between Beschi and the Tranquebar Missionaries
with regard to his dictionaries are interesting; they are
better reserved to the Chapter on Beschi’s dictionaries.

Fr. Beschi and Chanda Sahib:

The Annual Letter of 1733 mentions a service rendered
by Fr. Beschi to the village of Āvūr, near Tiruchirapalli.
When the Moghol soldiers encamped near Āvūr, wanted to destroy
the village on the false charge that the villagers had lifted
some of their cattle, Fr. Beschi who happened to be at Āvūr then,
went to plead for the villagers. The soldiers would not
listen to him, led him like a prisoner to their camp, threatened
and insulted him and even exposed him to the burning sun at noon.
Finally by order of the Chief Commander he was set free and
the plan of devastation given up. Before returning to Āvūr
went to thank the Chief Commander, and made friends with him.
"There after", says the Annual Letter, "not only could he
approach him (the Commander) whenever he liked, but also, by his means, he was able to obtain an audience with the Supreme Chief of the Moghul army (Chanda Sahib), who delivered to him letters of safe-conduct for the missionaries." In the opinion of Fr. L. Besse S.J., this is probably the first time Fr. Beschi had an interview with Chanda Sahib.

During the years 1735-36, South India witnessed many more civil wars than before, owing to the invasion of Muhammedans under the command of Chanda Sahib. It was the influence of Fr. Beschi with this leader that preserved the poor villagers round Elakkurichi, Kalpālayam and other places in the midst of untold calamities. The Annual Letter of 1736-37 makes mention of the protection afforded by Chanda Sahib to the Church of Kalpālayam in 1735: "Kalpālayam and its church was preserved owing to the Mahomedan chief's special kindness towards our Fathers. He gave audience to Father Beschi who went to see him. He gave his soldiers to guard our churches, saying: Take these guards to protect your churches. It is to such soldiers that I entrust the security of my own person."

In the year 1736, during the civil war between Queen Minatchi and Bangara Tirumalai, some Christian churches suffered under the unscrupulous officials living far from the centre; but the churches situated near the station of Chanda Sahib "were not only preserved, but became so many strongholds for the villages in which they happened to be found, and so
many reports for christians and non-christians alike who took
refuge in them. 30 (Chanda Sahib and Beschi - L.Besse S.J.p.9)
When at the end of civil war Bangara Tirumalai Nayakar was
by the endeavour of Chanda Sahib put on the throne of Madurai,
the new king too showed himself quite friendly to Fr.Beschi.
It is said that Fr.Beschi using his knowledge of history of
Tamil Nad, prepared on paper a genealogical tree painted by
himself and presented it to the king. The leaves of that tree
went in the shape of a throne, upon which the Nayakar kings
were seated for 222 years.

When the Catholic priest at Āvūr (near Tiruchirapalli)
was harassed by some of the soldiers of his army, Chanda Sahib
punished the soldiers publicly and arranged that a herald should
proclaim his will "to be that Roman priests, men who are so
virtuous and worthy of universal esteem, should be safe from all
kinds of injustice." This general appreciation of the
Christian Missionaries on the part of Chanda Sahib was so well
known that even after the death of Fr.Beschi in 1747, the
Christian fathers in the South expected kindly treatment from
Chanda Sahib on his return from the Maratha country. Fr. John
Baptist Buttari S.J., writing from Travancore on 29th October
1749, describes how some Turkish governors came to plunder
the churches and imprison the priests in the hope of getting
money as ransom, and concludes thus: "But all this will soon
come to an end with the arrival of the supreme governor of
these countries - Chanda Sahib, the Turk, who when here, favoured the Christians so much, and always desired to have one of our fathers at his court. The same father wrote in September 1751 from Madurai Mission. The Father Superior of this Mission went to visit the aforesaid Mussalman Prince (Chanda Sahib) and was received by him with great honour. The Father Superior presented him with a load of lemons and some medicines; and the prince gave to the Father Superior a garment of the finest cloth; and to the villages where our missionaries are to be found, he sent his flag with soldiers, so that no one in the army should be audacious enough to enter there for the purpose of robbing and pillaging. "As long as this Turkish prince rules over this country, he will favour the Christians .... as he did ten years ago when he was Vice-roy".

In the straightened circumstances of the years between 1737 and 1740 the Madurai Mission was forced to borrow money from merciful men. "Among them", says the then Provincial, Fr. Louis Vasconcellos, "we must mention in the first place, the Commander-in-Chief of the Moghul army, Chanda Sahib, who has become master of the Madura kingdom, and has given to the Madura Mission 350 San Thome Seraphims; for he shows the greatest kindness to our missionaries."

Such marks of kindness shown by Chanda Sahib to all Christian Missionaries and especially to Fr. Beschi may have

* 1 San Thome = 8 shillings and 4 pence.
been responsible for the creation of pompous mythical details round the life of Fr. Beschi in the days of Chanda Sahib.
To quote from A. Muthusswamy Pillai's 'A Brief sketch of the Life and Writings of Fr. C. J. Beschi': "On his first visit, Chanda Sahib, admiring the rare qualities of this distinguished divine, conferred on him the surname..... Ismattee Sanyasi, indicating his excellence as a religious devotee, and presented him with a palanquin, inlaid with ivory, in which his grand-father, Sadoolah Khan, used to ride. The prince also granted for his maintenance a free gift of four villages..... yielding a net revenue of 12,000 Rupees per annum, and appointed him to the office of dewan. Whilst in that office he retained the habit of a religious devotee, and on his circuits assumed all the pomps and pageantry with which Hindu gurus usually travel, along with the civil Mahomedan honours, such as chobdars, horsemen, drums, fifes, caparisoned state horses, hurcarras, daloyets, nowbut, tents, etc." 34

Fr. Besse S.J., an authority in the life and works of missionaries of those times asserts that this description is exaggerated. If Fr. Beschi had been offered the real function of Dewan, he should have obtained the explicit permission of the Superior General of the Jesuits in Rome, before accepting it. But there is no mention of this matter in any of the correspondence of Fr. Beschi to Rome. If it be argued that some of his letters may have been lost, neither does the Annual Letter - which is the official record of all the events of the Mission in the past year make any reference to this
to this office of Fr. Beschi. From the letters that came from the General in Rome, we learn "that Father Beschi had visited the Nabob of Vellore, and received from him honours and favours which surpassed all the previous ones. On that occasion, Father Beschi, wishing to express his gratitude to Doust-Ali-Khan, had requested the Father General to send him curiosities from Europe and a letter of thanks signed with his own hand. This letter was despatched on October 29, 1739. The Father General praises the benevolent protection accorded by the Nabob to the Christians, the liberty he gives to preach the Gospel, the signal kindness with which he has taken care of our churches and presbyteries and endeavoured to put a stop to the persecution to which the Christian religion had been subjected for so many years in the kingdom of Tanjore; he speaks in a special manner of his friendship with Father Beschi, and expresses his gratitude for it; finally he promises to pray for him to the Lord of Hosts, Dispenser of all good etc." 35

The opinion of Fr. Besse, agreeing with that of Fr. Bertrand 36 in his La Mission du Madure, is that "we may admit an honorary title, but the actual function and office of the Nabob was not suitable either to the vocation or to the occupations of the missionary."

With regard to the gift of lands given by Chanda Sahib to Fr. Beschi, it is possible that such gifts - maniyams, i.e., lands free from taxes - were given for the maintenance
of the Christian churches, for that was the then prevalent custom in India, but, "There is not", says Fr. Besse, "the least allusion to it in the correspondence between Fr. Beschi and his superiors; and this silence constitutes a very strong argument to any one who knows how strictly the rules of poverty are adhered to in the Society, and in what state of dependence subjects are on their superiors as regards the administration of temporal goods." 37

But the undeniable fact is that Fr. Beschi was known for his contacts and friendship with great personages, and for his rather large expenses in buildings and other things - which made his conferees think he was unfit for administrative works. 38

Considering the numerous external activities of Fr. Beschi, one wonders how he found time and leisure for his intellectual pursuits. Such a rare combination of varied works we may attribute to his typical Jesuit training which aims at making one actively contemplative and contemplatively active. Fr. Beschi's natural abundance of thought and expression may be another explanation and to use this talent he seems to have adopted a novel method, which is not altogether unknown in this country. De Sicle describes that method as follows: "Beschi was always surrounded by five ...... secretaries. Four wrote, each separately on a palm leaf, a verse of the quatrains, which he dictated to all at the same time, the fifth had to gather them up together and copy them out in proper order. A single secretary, however expeditions would have never been equal to
the task, such was the flow and abundance of his diction." 39

The same idea is found also in the life of Fr. Beschi by A.
Muthuswamy Pillai. 40 The booklet 'Lutterinettiyalbu' was
written in compliance with the request of a Hindu Tamil Scholar
called Sāttan; in the introduction, Fr. Beschi refers to the
wish of Sāttan, which was that Fr. Beschi should say (dictate) the
writing concerning the nature and origin of the Lutherans. 41

Fr. Beschi's last days:

After the downfall of Chanda Sahib, Fr. Beschi was
transferred in 1742 to Tuticorin, where he devoted more time to
his literary pursuits. It was while on the Fishery coast that
he gave the final touch to his Tamil-Latin Dictionary,
probably in 1743. Some have assumed that Fr. Beschi was superior
at Manapad. But Fr. Besse asserts that the triennial reports in
which the different posts held by each Jesuits are enumerated,
do not mention that Fr. Beschi was at any time superior.

In this connection it is interesting to note
the opinions of other Jesuits about the administrative aptitude
of Fr. Beschi. In the report of 1715, the following opinion
was expressed of Fr. Beschi: "Excellent genius, of a judgment
and prudence sufficient, endowed with great talents; of
a sanguine complexion." In 1718 we read: Fr. Beschi is of
quick genius; but the maturity of judgment is somewhat
defective, however not in things of greater moment. Let the
same be understood of his prudence; there is hope, however,
that he will become more prudent, with the advice of the superiors, and with the experience he will acquire with years. He shows great aptitude to treat even affairs of great importance."

This hope seems to have been fulfilled. For Fr. Beschi was once made Visitor of the Madurai Mission, and later Visitor of the College at Ambalamaṭ where young Jesuits were being trained in philosophy, Theology, and Humanities. A Visitor in the Jesuit order takes the place of the General of the Order, has the duty 'efficaciously to urge the execution of the things that are wanting in the boservance of the Institute, regarding both the spirit and the discipline as well as the apostolic labours, and to remove the difficulties that came in the way. And these are the duties of a Superior.

We have no particulars about the last days of Fr. Beschi. In his preface to his Tamil Dictionary, he calls himself a man of broken strength (fractis viribus). In 1746 he was Visitor at Ambalamaṭ. Fr. Carlos Sommervogel who had recourse to first hand documents says in his brief notice on Fr. Beschi that he died on the 4th of February 1747. Historians like Fr. Besse hold that he died in Ambalamaṭ. But there is a tombstone in the village of Malayadipatti, near Tiruchirapalli, which seems to refer to Fr. Beschi. Julian James Cotton, C.S. in his interesting volume of 'List of Inscriptions on Tombs or Monuments in Madras' says: "A little
monument stands at the foot of the hill near the village of Malayadipatti. It is divided into two compartments . . . . In the middle of the other compartment are the remains of i.e., Father Constant came from Town. The town at the time was Trichinopoly and this Father Constant appears to be none other than the celebrated Jesuit Beschi."

No perishable monument honours his place of rest. But living monuments - the churches he built in Kōṇānkuppar, in Ėlākkurichi, the customs he started, above all the literary edifices he raised in prose and song - will bring him imperishable fame. As he lived for the Tamil people, so it is certain he will continue to live in the grateful heart of Tamil Nad as a scholar and saint.
Notes

1. Besse, Father Beschi S.J. (His Times and His writings) p.17 St. Joseph's Industrial School Press, Trichinopoly - 1918
2. Ibid. p.44
3. Ibid. p.67
4. Ibid. p.67
5. Ibid. p.80
6. Ibid. p.85
7. Ibid. p.92
8. Ibid. p.105
9. Ibid. p.111
10. A. Muthusamy Pillai, Selections of Beschi and his life - p.6 Printed in 1843
12. Niekamp, 'Short Mission History...' XIV 1 Halle, 1740
13. Ibid. XLII 8
16. Continuation 37
18. Continuation 23
19. Ibid. 64
20. Ibid. 65
22. Hallesche Berichte, Vol 6, p.278
23. Continuation 37
24. Ibid. 22 23
25. Ibid. 44
26. Ibid. 48
27. Arno R Lehmann: 'Es Begann in Tranquebar'
28. Quoted in W. Germann's article 'The Scholary work of our old Tamil Missionaries' in a German Mission periodical 'Mission Information of the East Indian mission Institution at Halle', edited by Dr. G. Kramer, 17th Vol., Halle 1865
30. Ibid. p.152
31. Besse, Chanda Sahib and Beschi, p.9
32. Ibid. p.10
33. Ibid. p.12
34. Ibid. p.13
35. A. Muthusamy Pillai, A brief sketch of the life and the writings of Fr. Beschi (in English) p.23
36. Besse, Fr. Beschi, p.161
37. Bertrand, La Mission du Madure, Vol.IV, p.359
38. Besse, Fr. Beschi, p.161
39. Ibid. p.163
40. Quoted in D. Ferroli's 'The Jesuits in Malabar', Vol. II p.311
41. A. Muthusamy Pillai, Selections of Beschi and his life, (in Tamil) p.8
The people of Malayadipatti, which I visited on 21.5.'62, not only hold that Fr. Beschi died there but also pray to him to remove the pests in their fields; once the petition is granted, they invariably distribute food to the poor, at Beschi's monument. It is possible that there was another Thariyanathar Samy lived a little later than Beschi like the one who is buried in Purattakkudi where the grave bears the name Thariyanathar Samy, 1765. Or it is possible that the ancient inhabitants of Malayadippatti built a monument in memory of Fr. Beschi, which later generations have come to identify with his tomb.