CHAPTER III
THE BASEL EVANGELICAL MISSION AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN MALABAR

The advent of Protestant Christian missionaries in the beginning of the 19th century marked a turning point in the history of Kerala. In their zeal for spreading education, abolishing slavery and forced labour, fight for women's liberation and eradication of caste difference and untouchability they became precursors of social reform movements in Kerala. The Basel Evangelical Mission played a significant role to bring social change in the 19th century Malabar. Although the activities of Christian missionaries aimed primarily at either the protection of the interests of European capitalists or at the proselytization of the members of the backward community to Christianity, their activities did spread enlightenment among certain sections of society. It had also resulted in dispelling, to an extent, superstitions among the people of Malabar and engendering in them a feeling of self respect and equality.\(^1\) Overall, the Basel Mission did the pioneering effort to the modernisation of the Malabar society.

The Birth of Basel Mission

The Basel Evangelical Missionary Society was formed in connection with the despotic rule of the French Emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte. In the

early days of the 19th century the European nations were trembling under the boots of the ever progressing, relentless army of Napoleon. All major European powers desperately needed the defeat of Napoleon. So in order to fulfill their dream Russia, Germany, Austria and Britain formed military alliance in 1814. This was formed at Basel, a small town in Switzerland, and they stayed there for a few weeks awaiting a better chance to attack Napoleon. The French General automatically reacted and warned that his canons would blow up Basel to bits. At this desperate moment, a group of Christian believers in the allied force met at Basel for a group prayer. From there they took a solemn oath that if the united force would ever win the battle against Napoleon they might form an evangelical mission for conducting missionary activities and charitable work all over the world.

Finally in June 1815 Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo and it left a deep impression in the minds of the soldiers who took the oath. As a fulfillment of their oath they decided to form a missionary society. Thus on 25th of September 1815, a new missionary society, ie the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society, was formed under the Presidentship of Rev. Nicholas van Brunn. But the society is better known as German Basel Evangelical Society

---

because behind its formation, the initiative was taken by German soldiers. Gradually its headquarters was shifted from Basel to Germany. In the initial period one of the primary aims of this society was to train young men in the task of carrying the gospel of peace to the different parts of the world. So on 26 August 1816 a theological college was opened under the auspices of the mission committee. Within six years this small college became the biggest seminary in Europe. So when the contributions increased, naturally the Basel Mission Society was emboldened to establish missions of their own in Africa, the West coast of India and China.  

**Basel Mission in English Colonies**

Till 1833, the English East India Company was not ready to allow any mission society in India except the English based societies. In 1833, the British Parliament passed the Charter Act, by which all missionary societies belonging to any country were given permission to work independently in all British colonies including India. Earlier to the activities of the Basel Evangelical Mission, the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) had engaged in missionary activities in Travancore and Cochin. A striking feature common to all missionary activities was that they worked among the weaker and depressed sections of society from where they got the bulk of converts.

---


The Basel Mission in Malabar

It was the Basel Mission inspector Blum Hardt who laid the foundation of the Basel Evangelical Mission works in India. In 1834 with the financial assistance of German Prince William the BEM Society sent its first three missionaries viz., Rev Samuel Hebich, Rev. John Lehnar and Rev. Cristoph Grener to India. The missionaries landed at Calicut on 13th October 1834 and travelling northwards commenced the work with their head quarters at Mangalore in South Canara. Consequently missionary activities were started in three districts of West Coast comprising Bombay, Karnataka and Malabar with Mangalore as its headquarters. When compared with other missionary societies, the BEM had many peculiarities and more limitations. Unlike that of other missionary groups the BEM had never tried to convert anybody forcibly and they never tried to impose any particular religion upon them. Instead they only tried to teach Jesus Christ's principles along with other social humanistic and moral values.

At the time of the arrival of Christian missionaries the social system of Malabar was well entrenched in the principle of caste hierarchy and differentiation. The status of the individual in society was determined by the norms of caste. The traditional institution of caste system, feudalistic land ownership and various the social evils like untouchability and unapproachability etc., were prevalent in the society. The higher castes

---

9 E.J. Edona, n.7, p.16.
enjoyed all the rights and privileges, while the lower castes were deprived of them. The lower castes had no freedom to enter into the temples. They were not allowed to walk through the public spaces and education was almost denied to them. The degraded condition of the lower caste people invited the attention of the early missionaries. The Basel Missionaries approach towards the people attracted many low castes and they felt that conversion to Christianity could liberate them from the then existing social bondages and discriminations. Therefore, many low caste people were converted to Christianity: The conversion made them independent of caste restrictions and untouchability. Now they could not only walk along the road without the fear of polluting the upper castes, but also could go near to the brahmanic temples, both were otherwise restricted. Also, newly emerging public places like post offices and schools were made open to the converted. The freedom enjoyed by the converted people attracted many low caste people into Christianity.\footnote{P.K.Gopalakrishnan, \textit{Keralathinte Samskarika Charitram} (Mal.) Thiruvananthapuram, 1994, p. 508.}

To attract more people to Christianity, the missionaries of Basel Mission thought that, social changes need to be brought about by extending educational facilities to the low caste people. With this objective they started educational institutions in different parts of Malabar. The pioneers in thought in Malabar were the missionaries like Dr. Hermen Gundert, Rev. Samuel Hebbik, Rev. J. Hermelink and Rev: John Michael Frists. They paid great attention to the educational efflorescence of Malabar. Dr. Herman Gundert
was the outstanding figure among them and he was considered as the founder of the Basel Evangelical Mission Church and its educational institutions in Malabar.12

**Herman Gundert:**

Dr. Herman Gundert arrived with Mr. Grovers in Madras in July 1836. Herman Gundert was an eminent linguistic scholar and soon he got familiarity with Indian languages. During his early period of missionary work in India he carried out an active work in Madras as a strong worker of the Church Mission Society at Tirunelveli.13 While he was engaged in work, Gundert received an invitation to join the Basel Mission at Mangalore. At the Mangalore headquarter of Basel Mission, he was deputed as the first missionary to Malabar. Thus he moved to Tellicherry were he established the first unit of Basel Evangelical Mission.14

**Basel Mission and the Introduction of Modernisation of Schools in Malabar:**

As we know, after the Macaulay's minute of 1835 the British opted English as the medium of instruction in India. Thus the Indians got a chance to study English and western education. Its introduction into Malabar was

---

14 Ibid, p.25.
done by the Basel Mission. But the main intention of the Mission in introducing English education was not devoid of their political interests. Therefore, through imparting modern education the Missionaries were trying to proselytize the lower caste to Christianity and also were creating a new local petty bureaucracy. It is clearly stated in the missionary reports that the mission always believed schools as a powerful force for the evangelisation of India. The prevailing social system in Malabar forbade the lower castes from attaining proper education. Therefore, the school established and run by the Basel Mission admitted all irrespective of their caste or religion. The educational works started by the Basel Evangelical Mission attracted the low caste people in Malabar and their schools helped to remove the barriers of caste from the Malabar Society.

The educational activities of Basel Mission served as a model for the British government to follow. The school buildings were solid, airy and spacious where children sat on benches and used desks and wrote on slates and paper. There were text books to learn. The Basel Mission gave importance to elementary education. Dr. Hermen Gundert was instrumental in initiating this activities. He established an elementary vernacular school at

---

Tellicherry on 14 May 1839. In the beginning there were only 12 students in the school. Gundert visited both bungalows and huts, met the parents of children in person and explained them the necessity of educating their children. As a result of his incessant efforts students belonging to all communities began to enroll in his school. Later he started another elementary school at Nettur near Tellicherry. As a recognition to his effort, in 1852, the Madras government appointed Dr. Gundert as the first School Inspector in Malabar and South Canara.

At school, Gundert's main intention was to lay a proper literary foundation in Malabar. He taught Science, History. Geography, Malayalam, English and Bible in the school.

**Samuel Hebbik and other schools:**

Another great Basel Missionary and architect of English education in Malabar was Rev: Samuel Hebbik. Like Gundert, he also started his work at Mangalore. Then he was insisted to stay at Kannur by the authorities. From Kannur he extended his works to the nearby areas such as Taliparamba, Sreekandapuram, Chirakkal, Thayyil and later in Palakkad. Under his initiative, a primary school was opened at Bernessery near Tellicherry in 1841. He appointed a popular Tiyya man named Ambu Gurukkal as

---


Malayalam teacher in the new school and it helped to promote education among the Tiyyas of Kannur and nearby areas.\textsuperscript{22}

The support of the British aided the Basel Mission in spreading modern education in Malabar. With the help of the British, the mission started a school in Tellichery in March 1856 with 74 students. A Parsy student gave donation of Rs.1500/-. Then the school was known as BEM Parsy school.\textsuperscript{23} When we examine the mission period from 1845 to 1899 we can see the growth of mission schools in Malabar area. Mission schools were started in Kasaragod, Taliparamba, Melparamba, Ottappalam, Vaniyamkulam, Vadakara, Koyilandy, Koothuparamba, Kannur, Payyanur, Palakkad, Vadakancheri, Kozhikode and Tellichery etc. In 1900 about 48 Basel Mission schools were functioning in different parts of Malabar.\textsuperscript{24} Many schools started by the Basel Mission are still functioning as important educational centres.

The Malabar Christian College situated at the centre of Kozhikode city was the important educational contribution of the Basel Mission. The Malabar Christian College was developed from a primary school established by the mission at Kallayi in 1848.\textsuperscript{25} The school was later shifted to Calicut city with the intention of attracting students in and around the city. The institution was upgraded as a Middle school in 1872 and a high school in 1879. It was

\textsuperscript{22} P.K.Gopalakrishnan, \textit{n.11}, p.507.
\textsuperscript{23} Interview with Rev. Dr. G .S. Francis, BEM Church, Tellichery, 22. 05. 2004.
upgraded as a second grade college in 1907. On the breaking out of First World War in 1914, the Basel missionaries had to give the work and leave the country. The college was then being managed by the local Christians. In 1919, Madras Christian College took over the institution and it was known as the Basal Mission College. Later it was renamed as the Malabar Christian College.

**Edward Brennen:**

Another important name in the history of the development of the Basel Mission education in Malabar was Mr. Edward Brennen, a Basel Missionary and a master attender in the harbour. He deposited Rs.12,000 for starting a free school for giving modern education to all persons irrespective of religion, caste and creed. The school was opened at Tellicherry in 1862. Since its opening the school has passed through many vicissitudes. In 1866 the school was taken over by Basel Mission and named as BEM Brennen school. Basel Mission gave up the school in 1871. So from 1872 onwards the school was known as Brennen District school. In 1891 the Brennen school was affiliated to the Madras University as a second grade college. The government took over the college in June 1919. In 1925 a secondary training school for teachers was amalgamated with the college. In 1947, the Brennen college was upgraded as a first grade college. The college produced many famous

---

The Basel Mission at Palakkad was an out station of Kannur. The mission started Primary schools in Mankara, Panayur and Vadakancheri. In 1866 the BEM started a high school at Palakkad and later it became the well-known Government Victoria College.

Girls’, Vernacular, and Training schools:

The Basel Mission gave sufficient encouragement for female education. The Basel missionaries were the pioneers to start female education in Malabar. They started a number of girls' school in all important towns in Malabar. The elementary education was made compulsory for female converts. The mission opened two types of schools for female education, i.e., Boarding schools and Day schools. The first girls' school of the BEM was opened in 1839 at Nettur near Tellicherry. Julie Gundert, wife of Dr. Herman Gundert opened an English school and Female Day school at Tellicherry in 1840. A school for girls was started at Kozhikode in 1882 and Vadakara in 1886. In Kasaragod region the BEM opened nine schools for girls. The girls were taught reading, writing and also sewing and knitting. As a result of the work of the Basel Mission a large number of girls who were under the yoke of caste rigidity got chance to receive proper education by refusing the social customs of that time.

---

32 Albresht Frenz and Scaria Zacharia, n.12, p.85.
The BEM also started Anglo-Vernacular schools where elementary education was imparted with little English education. The first Anglo-vernacular school was opened at Calicut in 1859 and later at Tellicherry, Palakkad and Cannanore. These schools later faced many difficulties due to the establishment of government schools. Subsequently mission closed Anglo Vernacular schools. The middle schools started by the mission also raised the standard of education. In the middle school instructions were given in religious and elementary subjects. The first middle school was started at Tellicherry in 1863. Most of the students in the middle schools came from the orphanages. The students who were promoted from the middle schools were admitted in the training schools of the mission.

Basel missionaries were pioneering in founding boarding schools in Malabar. The boarding schools were started at Cannanore, Calicut and Tellicherry. Besides this the Mission started Nursery schools, Sunday schools, Day schools, Parochial schools, Night schools, Seminaries and orphanages etc. as part of their evangelical works in Malabar. The students in these institutions were given instructions in Bible history, church history, geography, Arithmetic etc. By aiming at the upliftment of lower castes such as Cherumans, Parayans, Pulayas, Karuvans, Nayadis, Paniyans etc. the

---


62
mission started Panchama schools. In 1900, there were about 22 primary schools for Panchama children in Malabar.

Another important achievement of the BEM was the establishment of a training school for teachers. The first school of this category was established at Tellicherry in 1865. Those who were successful in the middle school were selected for study in these training schools. The mission training school trained men for elementary higher grade teachership. Only the Christian students were admitted into these schools. The main motive behind starting the training school seemed to be the replacement of non-christians teachers by Christian teachers in BEM schools. The mission started the Theological Seminary at Nettur for the theological education of malayalee candidates.

The industrial schools were another important accomplishment of the Basel Mission. The BEM started industrial school at Manjeri where the poor people got free boarding and lodging. There they underwent a three year course in welding, carpentry and spray painting. In the field of adult education the Basel Mission played a great role for creating social consciousness among the rural masses. The mission opened schools for adults at Calicut and Tellichery. The Mission also started education camps in different places and gave education to the workers and lower classes.

---

34 Devadas Madai, "Basel Mission Tulunattil' in 'Samanwyam'-Youth Fellowship CSI St. Mary's Church, Kulappuram, Souvenir, Kulappuram, 1997, p.34.
**Press and Print culture:**

The Basel Mission used press as a medium for the propagation of Christian religious faith. This indirectly strengthened the development of Malayalam language and literature. In 1840, the mission established a press at Balmetta in Mangalore, where religious and educational books were printed in both Indian and foreign languages. Soon the BEM established a new press in Malabar which, in effect, inaugurated a new stage in the development of Malayalam language and literature in Malabar. In February 1846 Dr. Herman Gundert opened a litho graphic press at Nettur near Tellicherry.\(^{36}\) The Mission published a Malayalam fortnightly magazine called *Keralopakari* in May, 1874 for the circulation in Malabar church. Keralopakari was printed by using letter press printing method. Besides the religious news, Keralopakari published world news, news on weather, agriculture etc.\(^{37}\) The introduction of sophisticated printing technology and the publication of text books for the schools by the Mission were great boost to the development of education in Malabar.

Dr. Herman Gundert made significant contributions to several branches of Malayalam language and literature.\(^{38}\) He devoted more attention to literary and educational work. He at first contacted local people like Ooracheri Gurukkal of Chokli near Tellicherry and learned considerable knowledge in


Malayalam. He also learned Tamil and Kannada languages which helped him to make a comparative analysis of three Dravidian languages.

Herman Gundert was considered as the pioneer of Malayalam journalism. He started the first Malayalam monthly 'Rajyasamacharam' in 1847 and the publication of it continued till December 1850. The journal was more interested in publishing news related to Christianity, religious propaganda, and conversion. Simultaneous to the publication of Rajyasamacharam he, with the help of Fr. Miller, began publishing another monthly named 'Paschimodayam' in October 1847. Paschimodayam was a Malayalam science magazine meant mainly to publish articles with the political interest of annihilated the superstitious believes on sun, moon and planets existed in the minds of the people of Malabar. Paschimodayam also dealt with the subjects like history, religion, geography, and astrology.

Gundert also wrote and published works dealing with aspects of astronomy, geography, kerala history and folklore. He published Bible stories in Malayalam and translated the Old Testament and the New Testament into Malayalam. In 1851 he compiled the first Malayalam Grammar book. Among his other works include Kerala Pazhama, Keralaolpathi, Malayalarajyam and Pathamala.

The most monumental work of Gundert is the Malayalam - English Dictionary popularly known as the 'Gundert Nigandu' published in 1872. In

\[39\] M. Achuthan, Swathanthriya Samaravum Malayalam\textsuperscript{sa} Sahityavum\textsubscript{sa} (Mal.), Thrissur, 1994, p.63.

\[40\] Devadas Madai, n.37, p.17.
the preparation of this work, he made use of all the available Malayalam works, both published and unpublished. It showed the humanity and strength of Malayalam language. It is more scientific and authentically documented and gives good reference on the etymology of words.\textsuperscript{41} Therefore his work immensely helps both native and foreign students who wanted to pursue the Malayalam language\textsuperscript{42}. In addition to these, Gundert also authored texts books of history, Malayalam, literature, geography, astronomy and a few other subjects taught in the Mission schools in Malabar. In those times when printed books were not in common use Gundert's works contributed much to the development of Malayalam language and literature.

The contribution of the Basel Mission in the field of education in Malabar is praiseworthy. Their involvement brought about changes in the educational and socio-economic realms of Malabar society.\textsuperscript{43} The English education helped the people to improve their knowledge of the world and imbibe modern western ideas.\textsuperscript{44} The spread of educational facilities made the lower caste people's rapid advancement in social scale. In the schools of the Basel Mission almost every communities was represented, therefore, they were able to bring changes in the attitude towards castes among the students of Mission schools.

\textsuperscript{41} Chummar Choondal, \textit{n.13}, p.27.


\textsuperscript{44} P. Chandramohan, \textit{n.1}, pp.261-262.
The Tiyyas’ of Malabar were a prominent group who best made use of the facilities provided by the Mission. By enrolling themselves into Mission Schools the Tiyya boys and girls acquired new skills required to survive in the age of colonialism and after.\textsuperscript{45} They got employment in colonial bureaucratic structures which also resulted in the improvement of their social and economic positions. Colonial documents shows that by the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century several bureaucratic postions became a sort of monopoly for the Tiyya community. The highest post that a native could reach in those days of British administration was that of a Deputy Collector. It was a Tiyya of Tellichery named Churayi Kannan who first became a Deputy Collector.\textsuperscript{46} Tiyya men were also appointed as Tahsildars, subjudges, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other employees in the colonial government services.

The educated Tiyya were instrumental in beginning journals, both in English and Malayalam, to spread the idea of social reform through education and bureaucratic services. The ’Malabar Spectator’ later known as ’West coast Spectator’ edited by Puvatan Raman Vakil and ’Mitavadi’ by C. Krishnan were well known among them.\textsuperscript{47} The mission appointed qualified low caste teachers to impart knowledge to the children in the Basel Mission schools. Some of the English educated teachers renowned for their scholarship were the members of the Tiyya community.

\textsuperscript{45} Murkot Kunhappa, \textit{n.2}, p.236.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Ibid.}, p.86.
Though education among women was a slow process, the encouragement given to female education by the Missionaries inspired some Tiyya women to go for higher education. The first women doctors of Malabar namely Ayyathan Janaki and Murkoth Madhavi were among a few low caste women who had got basic education at the Basel Mission schools.

A job in the government service was much desired in Malabar because it removed the caste grievances of an individual who belonged to an inferior community. The educated Tiyyas who constituted an emerging professional group in Malabar had been comparatively well-placed in economic status with a fixed income. They enjoyed considerable social prestige. Their status and social upliftment was more related to their English education and professions. Gradually the people who got freedom and education from the Mission schools started protests against the social evils like casteism and untouchability. They also questioned the domination of upper classes in all fields of activities in society. Thus the seeds of English education sown by the Christian missionaries and nurtured by the colonial government began to blossom and bare fruits in the form of open resistance against caste domination and discrimination.

**Basel Mission and Socio-Economic Constructive Activities:**

Apart from the educational work the Basel Mission also gave importance to take up other socio-economic activities for the betterment of
Malabar society. The Mission undertook the economic activities in Malabar mainly to rehabilitate the converts and thereby to increase the social and economic status of the depressed castes. One of the best means that was available to them was commercial and industrial enterprise. The prevailing laws of inheritance in Malabar prevented the convert to claim his share of property because the property was jointly owned by the members of the family. He was forced to abandon his professional trade ancestral property and also his relatives. In these circumstances the missionaries were compelled to shoulder the responsibility by providing suitable means of livelihood for all converts.

The missionaries made attempts to settle the converts as agriculturists on land which they acquired or bought from the government. But due to the lack of interest and idleness of converts, the agricultural activities ended in failure. So the Mission decided to withdraw from agricultural field and concentrated on industrial establishments. The industrial establishments operated by the Mission were a unique mode of missionary work in the 19th century. The organization of industrial activities was marked by a high level of decentralisation. The Mission tried to implement modernisation through the

---


establishment of factories. Through this they aimed to train the people as independent artisans.\textsuperscript{52}

The Basel Mission industrial activities became under the central control of the Industrial Commission started by the mission\textsuperscript{53}. In 1882, the Industrial Commission was amalgamated with the Mission Trading Company. It enabled higher capital investment and expansion of industrial activities in Malabar. The Mission Trading Company undertook the trading activities of the mission. The Basel Mission gave training to converts in traditional crafts like wearing and carpentry with the help of native craftsmen. But this move was not a success. Later the Mission started numerous industrial establishments like tile making, weaving, mechanical workshops, bookbinding, tailoring, blacksmithing, watchmaking etc. in different parts of Malabar.

An important industry started by the Mission was tile making industry. Tile factories sprang up in Malabar under the banner of the 'Malabar Trading Company.'\textsuperscript{54} Basel Mission opened tile factories at Puthiyara, Feroke, Kodakkal and Olavakkodu. These industrial establishments provided work for a large number of converts and also for the natives. The manufacture of tiles was years old profession undertaken by a particular caste in this region. The traditional pattern of tilemaking was improved and contemporary know-

\textsuperscript{53} Jayaprabha Raghaviah, \textit{n.50}, p.28.
\textsuperscript{54} Chummar Choondal, \textit{n.13}, p.35.
how was introduced in its manufacture. Bullock power which was previously used in tile factories was replaced by steam power. The Mission factories in Malabar utilised cheap labour potential available at that time.\textsuperscript{55}

The tiles manufactured by the Mission were more advanced than the traditional ones and the Mission introduced new patent in this field. Initially the factories produced flat tiles which are being used for roofing. Subsequently the factories built ridge tiles, sky lights and ventilater grooved sphire tiles, hanging wall tiles, ceiling tiles of many different designs, flooring tiles, chimney bricks, drainage pipes, earth ware, terracotta vases, flower pots etc. All buildings under the Basel Mission such as schools, hospitals, factories etc. were thatched by their own tiles. The products were sold not only in India but also exported to many foreign countries.\textsuperscript{56} In the tile factories 45 percentage of employees are non converts. The tile making industry was the most profitable business ventures of Basel Mission in Malabar.

The weaving and spinning industry established by the Mission also provided job for a large number of converts and natives. The most important of these establishments were opened at Cannanore and Calicut. While smaller branches were started in the rural centres like Chombala and Tellicherry. All the weaving factories were established by the Mission before 1882. The 'Kakki' Mill cloth largely made for uniforms in the armed forces were


\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Census of India}, 1911, Vol.XII, Madras, 1912, p.205.
manufactured by the Basel Mission for first time in India.\textsuperscript{57} The Basel Mission factories differed from the traditional forms of cotton weaving. They imported spinning machinery to India from Europe and it revolutionised textile production. The introduction of Fly shuttle and use of jacquard loom gave a new wave to weaving. It improved local industry based on traditional rooms. For raw materials they introduced scientific method of cotton cultivation. Women were employed in large numbers in the weaving establishments during the early stages. As per the employment record of the weaving units as on 1877, out of the total 392 workers, 216 were woman-all employed in one category, 'thread makers and spool winders'.\textsuperscript{58} But the weaving establishments did not possess adequate arrangement for the elimination of dust which was very harmful to health. By the first decade of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century a high rate of pulmonary tuberculosis was seen among the labourers.\textsuperscript{59}

The Mission also undertook the industries like mechanical workshops, book binding and printing, carpentary workshops and also trading activities. The mechanical workshops started by the Mission at Calicut and Cannanore conducted the repair works of the machinery of weaving and tile factories.\textsuperscript{60} Its functions were considerably widened in later years. It trained a large


\textsuperscript{58} Jayaprakash Raghaviah, n.50, p.60).

\textsuperscript{59} E.J. Edona, n.7, p.151.

\textsuperscript{60} 40\textsuperscript{th} Annual Report of Basel Evangelical Mission Society for the year 1879, Mangalore, 1880, p.87.
number of apprentices and mechanics. Many of them were able to find employment outside the industrial set up of the Mission. The book binding and printing establishments mainly undertook to print the religious and educational books of the Mission. The carpentary workshop started in 1852 at Calicut trained the converts in carpentary profession.

The country faced severe economic crisis in 1880. A large number of people lost their occupation following famine and diseases. The Mission factories absorbed many of the famine affected people. In the beginning of 20th century Basel Mission was the largest industrial entrepreneur in Malabar. Its eight weaving industrial establishments and seven tile factories gave employment to thousands of Christians and non-Christians. The outbreake of First World War in 1914 caused the cessation of activities of the Basel Mission industries in Malabar.

The Basel Mission's industrial establishments rehabilitated the converts and increased the social and economic status of the depressed castes. The industries started by the Mission led various low castes like Tiyyas and Dalits to achieve a process of social mobility and seek an existence outside their caste based occupations. The Mission industries destroyed the caste barriers existed in the society. The people belongs to different castes lived and worked together in the caste stratified environment of Malabar society.61 By giving employment to thousands of low caste people they could alleviate poverty and create better living conditions. The important economic impact of the Mission

61 Jayaprakash Raghaviah, n.50, pp.58-59.
industries was transfer of technology, creation of a skilled labour force and diversification of the economy.

**Health:**

The Basel Mission also undertook social service like providing medical assistance to the needed. At that time, the medical care facilities were very poor in Malabar. There was no organised medical assistance and western medicine was practically neglected. The people of Malabar were highly superstitious and they depended on traditional medicines to cure diseases. Dr. E. Lieben Darfer was the pioneer to organise systematic medical work in Malabar. In 1892 he opened the first Mission hospital at Calicut. In 1903 Mission opened leprosorium at Chevayur near Calicut. It was an asylum for those who had been rejected by the society. The Mission carried out evangelisation works among the lepers. Later Mission dispensaries were opened at Codacal and Vaniyamkulam. Mission also opened a small dispensary at Sultan Bathery in Wynad district for medical work among the tribal people.

In the early years the natives were skeptical towards the Basel Mission medical institutions, therefore, they did not approached it much for medical aid. Later they came for treatment in Basel Mission hospitals. Many natives especially the low caste people benefited with the medical works of Basel Mission. The Basel Mission brought new medicines available at that time in

---

Germany and utilised them for charitable purposes. The spread of medical care enabled the pastors and evangelists to maintain good contacts with the people in the villages. Many epidemics like cholera, typhoid, smallpox, tuberculosis and plague were effectively cured in the Mission hospitals. The Mission also created social consciousness about the importance of fatigue, sanitation etc. and through this checked the spread of diseases mainly in coastal areas. The medical works of Mission caused the spread of medical care activities in Malabar.

The Basel Missionaries' relations with the British government paved the way for the emancipation of slaves. The abolition of slavery by the British government brought about great changes in the life of the lower caste people in Malabar. The missionaries educated the slaves on a large scale and they got enlightened by the beginning of the 20th century.63 The Basel Mission made good efforts for the cause of women's liberation. Basel Missionaries took for special care for widows. The widow homes were opened in different parts of Malabar. They also started a fund to care and help the widows. The mission also gave jobs to widows' and education to their children. The missionaries' stand against the dowry system the important social evil also brought great changes in Malabar Society. These efforts of Basel Mission enlightened the life of women. They gained freedom from their traditional chains and freedom to employ themselves. The Basel Mission's social service activities such as the starting of 'Normal Homes' to the destitute children, 'Special Homes' to the mentally and physically

63 R.N. Yesudas, n.10, p.199.
handicapped people, Old People's Homes etc. benefited much for the progress of lower class people in Malabar. The Basel Mission introduced new dress and life style to the converts. The abandon of traditional hair style and the wearing of dress according to their will by the converts affected the caste ridden social structure of Malabar.

The Evangelisation policy of the Basel Missionaries had created dislike among the Hindus in Malabar. Though the Evangelists and Utilitarians belonged to same school of thought there were some differences in their political and administrative policies. Like the Utilitarians, the Basel Missionaries also believed in the racial and cultural superiority of European nations and they were supporters of colonial administration. In general they evaluated Christianity as light and Hinduism as full of darkness. They criticised and satirised the Hindu festivals and ritual dances, ie, Teyyam, Poorakkali and the festival of Kalpathi (Palghat) etc. The missionaries treated the Teyyams as devil dance. When the wheel of the chariot broke down and the idol capsized during Kalpathi festival, they interpreted the incident as a punishment for mocking the missionaries by the Brahmins. They prepared the primary reading material in Malayalam on the basis of the gospel. Among the stories, a popular one from the Panchathantra was included. The story narrates how a Brahmin carrying sheep for sacrifice, was mocked by some crooked persons that he was carrying a dog. Finally the Brahmin gave up the

64 K.K.N. Kurup, n.8, p.110.
65 Ibid., p.97.
sheep believing that it was a dog. Although the story was didactic, it was against Brahmins. The themes of most of the songs used in the mission schools were biblical in spirit.

The books written by the missionaries were also not free from religious prejudices. The books contained criticism against the native customs and manners. The missionaries had the tendency to establish the superiority of Christianity. They tried to distort history according to their interests. The text books like 'The Malayalam country and History' (1869) states that most of the native people had lost their belief in false gods and idolatry. They accepted such belief due to the fear of others. The historians like K.M. Panikkar had criticised the missionaries for their alliance with colonial masters. According to him, the missionaries were prejudiced and narrow minded in their approach to non-Christian ideas.67

The Basel Evangelical Missionaries had faced resistance from the local rulers, upper caste Hindus and other privileged classes of Malabar Society. The opposition was not organised in a systematic way. In Malabar region the upper caste Hindus, ie., Nambudiris, Nairs and Mappilas disliked the propagation of Christian faith. The English education and freedom given by the Basel Missionaries to low caste people created resentment among upper caste Hindus, because they wanted to bring the lower strata under their hegemony. Compared to the Hindus, the missionary activities were not

---

spread wide among Muslims. When conversions increased individual and mass attempts were taken up by the relatives of the concerned individuals to get them back to their religious fold.

**Resisting the Missionaries:**

The missionaries faced stiff resistance from the natives when the missionaries used to address the natives in local fairs and festivals in Malabar. The festivals of the natives were held every year in the places like Calicut, Cannanore, Payyavur, Taliparamba, Palghat and other places in Malabar. The fairs and festivals formed an essential part in the life of local people where they gathered to see festival, to meet friends and to conduct trade. The Basel Missionary, Rev. Samuel Hebich and his associates visited the festivals of Taliparamba and Payyavur, where they faced joint opposition of the natives. Finally they were forced to withdrew the place. The missionaries also faced the oppositional natives in the Vaniyamkulam and Calicut festival. In Chombala, a young Tiyya woman who resolved to stay in the mission compound was taken forcibly by her relatives. The Mappilas also disliked the propagation of Christianity in their areas. In Panur, near Tellicherry, the Mappilas opposed and questioned the preaching of Christian gospel by the missionaries. When the missionaries when to preach at Panur, the Mappilas also sent an opponent preacher to preach at the same place. The Mappilas in Codacal and Chombala areas also conducted movement against the evangelical works of the Basel Mission.

---

In some places of Malabar, Christians were not given employment in the paddy fields. In Chombala, a landlord offered to a tenant land at low rent if he did not break his caste. The Brahmins and other high caste Hindus sent rival preachers to every place where the missionaries preached. In the places like Taliparamba, Palghat etc the Hindu preachers conducted preaching to counteract the activities of missionaries. In the preaching they requested the natives that do not any account become Christians, they attract people by gifts of money, clothes etc and bring them to Christian religion. This was resorted to spread a general feeling against the evangelical activities of the missionaries and to resist numerous conversions.

Apart from this, the Basel Missionaries had to face the antagonism of the French government in Mahe and the Roman Catholic missionaries. The activities of the Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj and the Theosophical society in Malabar acted as a counter force to the Basel Mission's activities. The Arya Samaj started Suddhi movement to bring back those Hindus who were converted to other religions. Brahma Samaj made its entry into Malabar in 1898 with the establishment of its branch at Calicut. They gave more attention to the depressed castes. Brahma Samaj warned the people not to send their children to mission schools. The Theosophists and the nationalists

---

69 K.K.N. Kurup, "The attitude of the missionaries towards the traditional society of South India during the 19th century," in K.R. Basavraja (Ed.) Proceedings Volume of VII Annual Session of the South Indian History Congress, Quilon, 1988, pp.96-97.


propagated the concept of national education. Annie Besant called upon the Hindus to establish their own schools, as in Mission schools their religion was blasphemed. They opposed the domination of religious ideals in the educational activities of the Basel Mission. They also attacked the prevailing caste system, untouchability and other evils in the society. As part of this religious revival several national institutions were established in different parts of Malabar. The religious revival by the end of the 19th century indirectly caused the rise of nationalism and socio-religious reform movements in Malabar.

The Basel Evangelical Mission suffered a setback with the outbreak of the first world war. Germany was the enemy country of Britain in the first world war and they regarded German missionaries as spies. The British power confiscated all the properties of the Mission and the German missionaries were forced to leave their respective stations. Then the Swiss missionaries took up the properties of the Mission. Later the properties were transferred to a trust called "Mission Trust of South India". In 1919 the Basel Mission church stood affiliated to the South India United Church (SIUC). The SIUC was a union of various protestant churches of South India.

After the second world war, the Basel Mission Church Council in Malabar sent a petition to the home board of Basel Mission to allow them to enter into the union scheme of South Indian Church. As a result the Basel

---

72 K.K.N. Kurup, n.8, p.108.
73 Ibid., p.109.
74 E.J. Edona, n.7, p.205.
Mission church joined the Church of South India (CSI) in 1947. The other two Basel Mission churches, in South Canara and Bombay took more time to join the CSI. At present six main stations come under the jurisdiction of the CSI Diocese of North Kerala. The schools established by the Basel Mission during the period function today as CSI BEM schools. Some of the factions in the CSI still carry on disputes regarding the control of properties and management of these educational institutions.

Conclusion:

The Basel Evangelical Mission is a landmark in the social, economic, cultural and educational activities of Malabar. It laid the foundation for the future development of Malabar. Although evangelisation and spiritual happiness were the proclaimed aims of the Mission, their fight against casteism, superstitions and other social evils resulted in tremendous changes in the attitude and approaches of the people. They helped to improve many low caste people who were condemned by the accident of birth to a caste. The people who sought to escape from caste burden got protection and dignity.

The Basel Mission's involvement in the educational activities brought about a great change in the prevalent Malabar society. The lower caste people got the chances to receive education and it improved their social and economic position. The educated youth began to criticise and fight against the social evils like caste system, untouchability, superstitions, irrelevant traditional beliefs etc. The educational works of Basel Mission caused the
growth of literacy rate in Malabar. The English education helped the people to think about nationalism and freedom and it caused the rise of nationalist movement in Malabar. Many students studied in the Mission schools became the active participants of the national movement in Malabar. The female education influenced the later women liberation movement in Malabar. The educational activities pioneered by the Basel Missionaries forced the government to interfere in the education of the people. So they paved the way for the system of Modern education in Kerala.

The period also marked a new stage in the development of Malayalam language and literature. It not only promoted Christian religious literature but also secular literature related to history, geography and civics. A large number of books written by the missionaries in various subjects helped the development of Modern Education in Malabar. The journals started by the Mission influenced many and by the dawn of the 20th century several native newspapers appeared in Malayalam and many of them spread the spirit of nationalism. The Basel Missionaries were responsible for the economic elevation of lower castes. By providing job to many, the Basel Mission industries improved the living condition of the people. The Basel Mission's social service activities like Medical works, Orphanages, Widow homes, Old people's homes etc. also made advancement in the life of the people of Malabar. The Basel Mission's activities to a extend contributed in eliminating feudalistic social relations in Malabar.

The Basel Evangelical Mission activities awakened the low caste people to a sense of self respect and better living. The mission works helped
the lower caste people to know about the concept of freedom, justice and social equality. They opened the door towards modernity and tried their best to uplift the people to a literate, progressive and organised class. The awakening caused the elevation of a deprived humanity and influenced reform activities of social reformers in Malabar society. Any how the Basel Evangelical Mission played a vital role in the modernisation of the traditional Malabar society.