PROTESTANT MISSIONARIES\(^1\) AND DEPRESSED CLASSES \(^2\)
IN SOUTHERN TAMIL NADU 1813-1947

"I saw numbers of people who are poor, ill-fed men, with the merest shred of clothing; women, mothers, with no clothing above the waist; and children, with nature’s robe, hurry off the public road into the side way or jungle on our approach, and after we had passed I saw them re-enter the road, proceed a little further, and retire again for some others. They were not lepers, these came along boldly enough clamouring for alms; nor were they beggars, these approached even the highest; these I found were Pariahs and Pulayans. And many a time since have I seen them driven off the public roads, denied access to the markets, and in courts of justice denied justice.\(^3\)

Pariahs, Pallas, Pulayas and Nadars are the depressed classes of South India, who on account of their poor social plight had always attracted a great deal of scholarship around the world cutting across disciplines. The study assumes greater significance as the political landscape of India is undergoing a dynamic transformation through a dialectical process of social engineering.

It may be argued that there is no aspect left to study about the socio-economic and politico-cultural conditions of these marginalised sections of India. Considering the current political reality, understanding the events of the past which led to the emancipation of depressed classes needs to be historically explained with a view to reconstruct the history of modern India in the light of the emerging new theories and evidence.

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\(^1\) The first Protestant missionary enterprise in India began with the arrival of Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg and Henry Plutschau of Halle University, Germany who were sent under the patronage of Frederick IV, King of Denmark in 1706. At the turn of the eighteenth century when the modern missionary movement began in England and the United States of America, and when the East India Company had also removed its veto by the Charter Act of 1813, the way became clear for Protestant Missions. Soon a number of missions such as, London Missionary Society in 1795, Church Missionary Society in 1801 and Society for the Propagation of Gospel in 1820, commenced their activities in different parts of Tamil Nadu. See John William Kaye, *Christianity in India*, 1859, pp. 2-16. See also Richter Julius, *A History of Mission in India*, 1908, pp. 2-26; J. W. Cunningham, *Christianity in London*, Hatchard, 1808, pp. 18-32.

\(^2\) The term, depressed class referred here is largely used for technical convenience rather than for ideological reasons. The 1891 Census was the first to adopt a standard classification of caste. Depressed classes, particularly Pariahs, Pallas, Nadars and Chuckliyars were considered as defiled labourers, leather workers, watchmen, village menials and scavengers. See *Census of India*, 1891, vol. XIII: Madras Report, p. 298.

\(^3\) J. Knowles, "Rescue the Pariah," *The Harvest Field*, Madras, October, 1892, pp. 132-133. He was one of the missionaries, who arrived in Travancore in 1880. In his article, ‘Rescue the Pariah,’ he says that, ‘I knew nothing of the Pariah beyond the name, but after few days I found out that there exists a class who need and deserve emancipation quite as much as or even more than the African slaves in America did.”
Unquestionably, the current plight of the depressed classes of India has significantly improved but there is still no holistic transformation. This study ‘The Protestant Missionaries and Depressed Classes in Southern Tamil Nadu 1813-1947’, attempts to offer a critical explanation to the study of social history of modern Tamil Nadu focusing mainly on the role of Protestant missionaries in ameliorating the socio-economic and political conditions of the depressed classes.

Missionaries who came to Tamil Nadu in the late sixteenth century concentrated on the lower sections of the society to bring them into the fold of the gospel. Their enterprise to win the ‘souls’ of the marginalised people brought them into direct contact with them. Soon the missionaries realised the need for knowledge of the local language and customs which made them focus specially on these fields.

Gradually missionaries began to wield a great deal of influence in the lives of the depressed classes leading to the creation of local churches in Tamil Nadu. The head-on-collision between the concepts of caste hierarchy and Christian equality created possibilities for the incorporation of Hindu social rules into the Christian congregations. This study attempts to explicate the circumstances leading to the establishment of local churches with native customs and cultural practices and how in course of time they came into direct conflict with the Christian values and ethics. The central focus of the study is to evaluate and examine the implication of conversion for their social and cultural life. While Christianity brought about a visible economic and material change in the lives of depressed classes, it failed to transform their cultural and social life styles in the light of the Christian teachings.

The study also focuses on the missionaries’ contribution to vernacular education, which indeed was responsible for creating and producing almanacs, lexicographies and grammar books for various Indian languages in general and Tamil in particular. The question of women’s’ rights, particularly in regard to their education, Zanana mission, and missionaries’ educational enterprise for women also will be delineated. Last but not least, the study attempts to critically evaluate the policies and methods adopted by missionaries, while dealing with the issues of social status and caste dichotomy.
1. Review of Literature

The earliest exhaustive and focused work on a depressed community in Tamil Nadu was by Robert Caldwell. In his work *The Tinnevelly Shanars*, he focuses on the socio-economic and politico-cultural condition of the Shanar community (one of the depressed classes in Tamil Nadu), their religion, their moral condition and characteristics as a caste. He observes that the Shanar or Nadar community converted to Christianity because of social pressure on them rather than individual enlightenment. This was because they were gregarious. His entire work reflects his 'sympathy' for the community rather than for any other depressed classes in Tamil Nadu.

Another systematic work on the Nadar community was by Robert Hardgrave. In his work *The Nadars of Tamil Nadu: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, he tries to evaluate the entire Nadar community in a historical perspective. Drawing on a variety of sources, he examines in great detail the socio-economic and religious life of the community and tries to explain and emphasise their age old untouchable status.

Among the works on depressed classes, the study of Manickam is crucial. In his work *Studies in Missionary History*, he evaluates the missionaries' approach towards the question of caste in the church of Tamil Nadu, as well as missionary education and social progress. His argument, "By providing education to all irrespective of caste, colour, and creed, the missionaries did much for the destruction of caste prejudices," needs to be re-visited and re-located within the broader historical discourse.

Among the other significant contributions to the study of Protestant missions the study made by Geoffrey Oddie is noteworthy. In his work *Hindu and Christian in South East India: Aspects of Religious Continuity and Change*, Geoffrey A. Oddie argues that due to the sudden increase in the number of converts and the solidarity of

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5 Ibid., p. 12.
the groups involved, it became increasingly difficult for missionaries and church pastors to eliminate pre-Christian customs and practices carried over into the church." Henriette Bugge in his *Mission and Tamil Society* argues that only the Society for the Propagation of Gospel and the Swedish Mission regarded the caste system as primarily a social phenomenon. This work, however, did not problematise other issues pertaining to the question of caste within the broader historical understanding. In his seminal work *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Nicholas B. Dirks observed that missionaries made clear their frustration that caste was the single most significant obstacle to conversion.

2. Purpose of Study

Among those who had studied the problem of the depressed classes in the perspective of social change, some have based their work in rural areas, while others based their studies on urban dwellers. Most of them have studied social patterns, customary practices, behaviour and levels of aspiration. However, none of the studies mentioned provide sufficient information with special reference to depressed classes of southern Tamil Nadu, in the context of socio-economic implications of the religious conversion, changes in the customs, practices and beliefs of converts, missionary perspective of women empowerment and the question of caste within church and the dichotomy in missionary understanding of caste.

Hence, the purpose of the study is to bring to limelight the socio-economic implications of the religious conversion of the depressed classes in southern Tamil Nadu between A.D. 1813 and 1947, to examine the strategies of the Protestant missionaries and changes in terms of beliefs, customs, practices etc., missionaries' perspective of women empowerment and to make a critical evaluation about the missionary approach to caste system and its consequences. The work also attempts to problematise the question of conversion with a historical perspective, with a view to

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interrogate a range of issues, that lay embedded within the rubric of cultural, religious, language and gender identities.

It is to be observed that the untouchable castes were in search of a distinct identity during the nineteenth century. During the British rule, different terms such as: “depressed classes,” “exterior classes,” “outcastes,” and “backward classes”, were used to refer to the so-called lower sections of India. Gradually, in the official documents, the use of the term “depressed classes” came to be restricted to refer primarily to those who were subjected to untouchability. Susan Bayly in her book *Castes, Society and Politics* argues: “Once introduced to new standards of ‘social purity’ and ordered conduct, those of the depressed’ who retained supposedly unclean, immoral or improper lifestyles could be accused of willfully letting down the honor of their community and nation. Thus by the 1920s scholars, officials and aspiring ‘reformists’ had come to use the catch-all term ‘depressed’ for anyone who was deemed in anthropological sources or everyday practice to be inherently low or polluting in the eyes of ‘clean-caste’ Hindus.”

Though the depressed classes, particularly Nadars and Pariahs, constituted a very larger portion of the ‘natives’ in many parts of southern Tamil Nadu, the neglect and contempt in which they have been held for ages, their slavish fear, and ignorance made their socio-economic conditions pathetic. It is also to be noted here that, prior to the British rule the whole Pariah community without exception, were the ‘slaves’ of the superior castes and with some exception, the Nadars were ‘slaves’ of the dominant castes. Robert Caldwell, a missionary-cum-Bishop in Tirunelveli described the Nadars as, “Belonging to the highest division of the lowest classes or

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16 The term ‘natives’ as applied to the inhabitants of the colonies, assumed a disparaging and patronizing sense, implying the people concerned were incapable of taking care of themselves and in need of Europeans to administer their lives.
17 Madras Church Missionary Record, vol. 1, no. 9, December, 1830, p. 268.
18 In missionary records Pariahs and some other classes were mentioned as slaves.
20 He was a missionary of Society for the Propagation of Gospel and became Bishop of Tirunelveli Diocese later in the year 1878.
the lowest of the middle classes.\textsuperscript{21} But on the contrary, H.R. Pate describes the Nadars 'as half polluting caste,' whose members lived in separate habitation. Similarly, Kearns, a missionary scholar was of the opinion that, 'Nadars are among the worst types of the human family.'\textsuperscript{22} On the other hand, the over all condition of Pariahs and Pallas in southern part of Tamil Nadu was very pathetic. Knowles, a missionary, observes that, "An ox or an ass is infinitely better treated by its owner than the Pariah or Pulayan by the master whose land he cultivates, whose rice he sows and watches night and day until it is harvested, and whose cattle he tends."\textsuperscript{23}

It was in this context that the first organised attempt to observe, enumerate and study the lives of the people in India was made by the Catholic and Protestant missionaries from France, Germany, England and the United States of America, who came to India between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although they came to spread the message of the gospel of Christ, many of them took keen interest in getting to know the socio-economic conditions of their adopted regions, besides language and literature.\textsuperscript{24} The pioneering effort of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.), Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) and Society for the Propagation of Gospel (S.P.G.) in this endeavor is significant and even historic too.

3. Conversion in Early Rome and Germany

In the fourth century, when Christianity was accepted by the Roman Empire as the community faith, the tension expressed itself in the rise of monasticism. The monks protested against the compromises of the Christian ethical standards in the community religion which passed for Christianity and withdrew from the community to dwell apart or to establish communities of their own where they could attain more nearly to what they regarded as Christian ideals. In the early centuries, entire communities in Rome began to enter the churches and Christianity tended to become a group affair. It was thus that the conversion of the Roman Empire was completed. The process had

\textsuperscript{21} Robert Caldwell, \textit{The Tinnevelly Shanars}, 1\textsuperscript{st} edition, Madras, 1849, pp. 4-5.
\textsuperscript{23} J. Knowles, "Rescue the Pariah," The Harvest Field, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 132.
\textsuperscript{24} S. Viswanathan, "Tamilology and a German Quest," \textit{Frontline}, vol. 15, no. 9, April, 25- May, 2008.
begun before Constantine. Beginning with Constantine, because of the favor of the emperors, the movement was accelerated further.  

In the middle ages, the initiative of monarchs and princes was fully as important as in the preceding period. It was usually these, the leaders, through whom acceptance of faith was accomplished. Some of the rulers seemed to have been actuated by a genuine, seal for the Christian faith. Some of them appear also to have been moved by political considerations. It seems fairly clear, for example, that Olaf Tryggvason (A.D. 968-1000) and Olaf Heraldson, the kings who were largely responsible for the conversion of Norway, used their advocacy of the faith to build up the royal power against the nobles. The latter had as part of their prerequisite the control of the local pagan shrines. By abolishing paganism the Olafs tried to reduce the functions of the chieftains and enhance their own authority. 

Undoubtedly, imperialism was one of the chief agencies for the propagation of Christianity among the 'slaves' on the German borders. Even more than the preceding period the Germans backed with force their efforts at conversion. From the time of Henry E. Fowler and Otto I, strong German monarchs used baptism and the furtherance of an ecclesiastical establishment to extend their rule over the Wends on their northern marches. The Wends fiercely and stubbornly resisted, and the final triumph of Christianity was accomplished more through colonisation by Germans and the extermination or assimilation of the Wends than by the voluntary acceptance of baptism. 

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26 The King of Norway.
27 The King of Norway (1015-1028) In modern day Norway he is known as “Olaf the Holy” as a result of his sainthood.
29 Otto succeeded his father as king of Germany in 936.
30 They were descended from a group of Slavic tribes that had developed a common language in the 10th century and occupied much of central Europe.

Antonio Gramsci illuminates the relations of culture and power through the useful insight that the cultural domination works by consent and often precedes conquest by force. Power, operating concurrently at two clearly distinguishable levels, produces a situation where “the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as domination and as intellectual and moral leadership.... It seems clear.... that there can, and indeed must be hegemonic activity even before the rise to power, and that one should not count only on the material force which power gives in order to exercise an effective leadership.”

The colonial conquest underlined the weaknesses of the traditional order and the need for reform and regeneration of its institutions. An alternative, however, was not entirely found in the Western model presented by colonial rule, particularly because of the apprehension aroused in Indian mind by the cultural and intellectual ‘engineering’ by colonial state as a part of its strategy of political control. While traditional culture appeared inadequate to meet the challenge posed by the West, colonial hegemonisation tended to destroy the tradition itself.

Historical interest in Indian Christians has so far been almost entirely fixed on foreign missionaries, and on the process of conversion that they supposedly inaugurated. In other words, a transition to Christianity is primarily situated in the initiative of the Western missions rather than in the experience and sensibility of Indian converts. The horizon of enquiry is largely filled up with questions about the consequences of conversion, especially the extent of continuity or break with an anterior religious identity. The degree of embeddedness of Indian Christians in surrounding Hindu society thus emerges as a central concern. A second set of preoccupations revolve around the agents behind conversion: whether the hidden hand of the colonial state

was more responsible for it, or it was the social advancement that the missionaries provided with their educational, health, and self-improvement schemes.  

More important influence in the thrust towards reform was exerted by a group of missionaries called the ‘Evangelicals,’ who played a key role in the drama of consolidation of British interests in India. Among them were Macaulay, William Wilberforce, Samuel Thornton and Charles Grant and to these men must be given much of the credit for supplying British expansionism with an ethics of concern for reform and conversion. Insisting that British domination was robbed of all justification if no efforts were made to reform native morals, the missionaries repeatedly petitioned Parliament to permit them to engage in the urgent business of enlightening the Indians. Unsuccessful with the earlier Act of 1793 that renewed the Company’s charter for a twenty-year period, the missionaries were more triumphant by the time of the 1813 resolution, which brought about the other major event associated with the Charter Act: the opening of India to missionary activity.

The history of Christian mission in the East since the sixteenth century is intimately bound up with the colonial expansion of the West. The gospel came in the ships of the conquistadors whose purpose was to conquer and convert. Inevitably this fusion of the sacred led to a confusion of the religious and the political, the entanglement of the ecclesiastical and the economic. In the nineteenth century Christian missions and colonialism, seemed to follow upon each other in Africa and Asia. It is for this reason that in the eyes of many African and Asian peoples, colonialism was seen to assume both the role of a politician and a priest and Christian missions appeared to be a part and expression of western colonial expansion. Some of them even go to the extent of characterising missions as merely the hunting dog of western imperialism.

There were certain traditions which centered around St. Thomas (one of the twelve disciples of Christ) honoring him as the first Christian missionary to the East. While

35 Gauri Viswanathan, op. cit., p. 91.
the tradition of the origin of Christianity in India cannot be fully tested by the criteria of modern historical research, one tends to agree with Jawaharlal Nehru when he declared in the Lok Sabha on 3 December 1955 that Christianity was as old in India as the religion itself and that, as a religion, it found its roots in India even before it went to countries like England, Portugal and Spain.38

Hence, a Christian community existed in India from the first centuries of the Christian era, and its population was later increased by the missionary activities of the Portuguese. The present Christian population is to a great extent, however, a result of the substantial conversion to Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this later period, throughout Asia, missionary success varied as between the various communities. Burmese Buddhist, Malay Muslim, and caste Hindu remained largely outside the Christian fold, and it was among primitive tribes and depressed groups that most was achieved, where Christianity offered a social gospel of emancipation.39

It was in May, 1487 the king of Portugal, Joao II, dispatched two ambassadors to the East, with instructions to reach India by land and to obtain information with regard to a possible sea-route. One of these ambassadors, Pedro de Covilhas, took a ship from Arabia to Malabar and soon sent back valuable information for the king, his master. Acting on this, Vasco da Gama sailed for India in 1497 as the head of Portuguese fleet, and landed at Calicut on May 9, 1498. This journey completed that union of the lands of the West and of India, which had been sought for so many long centuries, and it marks the advent of a new epoch, an epoch of Roman Catholic missions in India in the year 1542 in the coastal region of Tamil Nadu.40

5. Tamil Nadu and its Cultural Past

If the subcontinent of India can be seen as having always been a crossroad for many cultural and religious traditions, this same feature has been even more true for Tirunelveli, southern Tamil Nadu. Here, lying adjacent to the peninsula tip of India at

38 Quoted in Lal Dena, op. cit., p. 12.
40 D. Julius Richter, The History of the Missions in India, London, 1908, p. 44.
Kanyakumari where the three seas meet—most of the world’s great religious traditions have mingled and interacted for as long as they have existed. Moreover, if one can observe that religious pluralism has been a special feature of the Tirunelveli region for its entire history, insomuch that social life of its peoples has always been as markedly composite and multi-cultural as any part of India, characterised by mutual tolerance and irenic co-existence. Nevertheless, from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries onwards the compulsions of cultural and religious interactions have been profoundly changed by impacts of new religious movements by both Catholic and Protestant, whose origins and roots lay in Europe.\(^{41}\)

Christians, of course, have comprised one of the religious traditions of India since ancient times. Not far away from Tirunelveli, up along the western coasts of Malabar, Thomas or Syrian Christian communities possess tradition by which they trace themselves back to the apostle himself. Belief that St. Thomas was martyred in A.D. 72 at Mylapore (now within city limits of Chennai/Madras) remains virtually unquestioned by these ancient communities and in the light of evidence, it is a historical possibility that is not implausible.\(^{42}\) Thus the evidence of a Christian presence in South India certainly dates back to the first century A.D.

Tamil Nadu has a very ancient history of language, culture and civilization. The state represents the nucleus of Dravidian culture in the peninsular southern India. The present state of Tamil Nadu was a part of the Madras Presidency during the period of British rule in India. After independence, during the reorganisation of states on linguistic basis in 1956, the state of Madras was formed. In 1969, Madras state was renamed Tamil Nadu with Madras city as its capital. The original province of Madras came into existence in 1935, when the portion of the Ganjam and Visakhapatnam districts was transferred to Orissa province, to constitute a separate Andhra Pradesh.

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42 Ibid.
state. The states reorganisation in 1956 resulted in the emergence of the present state of Tamil Nadu, with an area of 50,154.4 square kilometers.\(^\text{43}\)

The Tamils from the very early times knew the geographical features, which characterised the land. Perhaps after centuries of observation, they found that there were hilly tracts, forests on the plateaus, fertile cultivable lands in the delta and river valley regions, and wetlands in this country. Besides, the Tamils took naturally and easily to the sea. The manufacture of salt from seawater and fishing were common activities of the coastal people.\(^\text{44}\)

South India is a land of two contrasting natural environments. For at least 1,500 years, intensive rice cultivation had been practiced in the fertile river valleys and the deltas of the Tamil region. Through the development of sophisticated water management techniques, their paddy-growing areas became the ‘core zones’ of a rich agricultural and trading economy, with strong links with the maritime entrepot of West Asia and the Far-East. By the tenth century A.D., five powerful kingdoms were founded in the most productive of the areas, i.e., in the territories known as the ‘West South.’ Their rulers belonged to powerful land controlling groups, who gradually formed into closely organised caste groups or status categories such as the Vellalas of Tamil Nadu and the arm-bearing Nayars of the Malabar Coast.\(^\text{45}\)

The southern districts of Tamil Nadu are bordered on the west by the Western Ghats, dividing Madras from Kerala. To the south of Madurai and in Ramnad and northern Tirunelveli, geographical features include poor soil, precarious rainfall, and an absence of perennial rivers.\(^\text{46}\)

Of the rulers who came from the regions elite wet-zone ‘Peasant’ ranks, the Cholas achieved the greatest power. The Cholas were the neighbors of Pandiyas who ruled from the Tamraparni and Vaigai basins with the


\(^\text{46}\) Robert Hardgrave, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-8.
ancient temple city of Madurai as their capital. The Chola kingdom was centered on the densely settled rice lands of the river Kaveri in modern day Tanjore and Trichi.  

According to Tamil legends, Cheras, Cholas and Pandiyas were rulers who lived and ruled in common with Korkai as their capital, near the mouth of the Tamraparni river in the present district of Tirunelveli. It is to be stated here that, the laudatory poem by Parambaranar prefixed to the Tolkappiam mentioned only the northern and southern boundaries of Tamil Nadu as Venkatam and Kumari respectively. It leaves the eastern and Western boundaries to be inferred. As a commentator suggests, naturally because of the other two boundaries were the eastern and western seas they were left unmentioned.

Broadly, the state can be divided into the following physiographic regions. The coastal plain commencing from Pulicat Lake in the north and extending down to the Cape Camorin in the south covering the deltas of Cauvery and other major rivers of the state, namely Palar, Pennar, Vaigai and Tamraparni. The Eastern Ghats between the river Palar and Cauvery and fringing the coastal plain with a broken line of hills; the Shervaroyans, Kalrayans, Pachmalai and the Kollimalais are noteworthy. The plateau area between the Eastern and Western Ghats, which is about 72 miles wide in the north near the Palaghat gap, narrowing down to about 14 miles near Shencottai gap in the south is also noteworthy. The Western Ghats, a group of high hills with Nilgiri in the north followed by Anamalai, Palani and Cardamom Hills as one goes south.

The Tamil country is and has always been a land favored by nature, which had manifested itself at its best in the river valleys and the thick forests. From Pennar in the north to Tamraparni in the south many rivers have been rendering the country fertile. Of the rivers in Tamil Nadu, Kaveri is the most important and praised by the poets as the ‘mother of the Tamils.’ The place, where the river meets the sea was

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49 S. Soundararajan, op. cit., p. 25; Burton Stein, op.cit.,p.7.
called the ‘Kutar’, and was also called ‘Puvar’ which became a proper name for Kaveripattinam situated at the estuary of the river.51

Besides, situated in the Western Ghats i. e., where all the rivers of the southern districts take their rise. The Tamraparni, the chief river of the Tirunelveli district, irrigate an area of about 1,750 miles and from its source in the Periya Pothisai to its mouth in the Gulf of Manaar it is 75 miles long, possessing in the Ghats alone a catchment area of 200 miles, it enjoys the full benefit of both the monsoons and its bed is never dry. The origin of the name Tamraparni has been much discussed. The term ‘Tamra’ means either ‘copper’ or ‘red’ and the second half of the word ‘Parani’ is identified with ‘parna’, ‘a leaf’ or a ‘tree’ and varna, ‘colour’. Hence we have either “the copper colored river” or “the river of red leaves.”52 The Tamraparni river is the southern most river of Tamil Nadu and it is the shortest indeed. It passes through Tirunelveli and irrigates a considerable stretch of land in that district.53

Korkai, which is now a small village at the mouth of Tamraparni, was once a renowned Pandiya capital and for long the emporium of south Indian trade. Works of the ancient Greek and Rome cities, particularly those of the classical age speak of Cape Camorin, Korkai, Paumben and the Gulf of Mannar. They refer to Korkai as ‘Kolkhoi emporium’ and recognise it as head quarters of the pearl fishery of the Pandiya kingdom. Robert Caldwell, a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of Gospel in Tirunelveli, believed that of all places frequented by the Greeks, the place from which rice was most likely to be exported to Europe was Kolkhoi, at the mouth of Tamraparni.54

Kaveri is the largest river in Tamil Nadu carrying the largest volume of water. This irrigates agricultural land in two districts. It passes through Salem, Periyar, Trichi and Tanjore districts. It irrigates the maximum acreage of land and its water is controlled by the dam in Mettur. It is deemed a holy river, often placed on par with the Ganges

51 S. Soundararajan, op. cit., p. 25.
52 H. R. Pate, op. cit., pp. 8-9.
The indigenous social stratification was based on physiographic distinctions. On this basis, Tamil Nadu was divided into five categories. The hill tracts were Kurinji, the pasture lands Mullai, cultivable land Marutham and the coastal belt Neithal and Palai lands desert. The people of the hills were hunters, where those in the forests were shepherds and cowherds. Farmers inhabited the fertile delta area and lived on the banks of the rivers.

The most peculiar division of the districts of southern Tamil Nadu is the great undulating expanse of red sand, the Teri country as it is called, which dominates the southern part of the Nanguneri taluk and a great part of the taluk of Trichendur. The plains of the country tract and indeed the slopes of many of the dunes are studded with thousands of palmyra trees. “The palmyra forest” is a phrase by which this region (plain country) of 150 square miles is often comprehensively described.

The sea-coast, about 85 miles in length, extends along the Gulf of Mannar from Vembar, an insignificant port on the north to a point about four miles east of Cape Camorin. As a port, Tuticorin ranks second in the Madras Presidency and fifth in British India. Regular lines of streamers trading with Europe and the British India Steam Navigation Company maintained a daily service with Colombo and a weekly service of coasts. It is through its pearl-fisheries that the Gulf of Mannar is best known.

For many centuries, the Gulf of Mannar region had been a sort of entry port and a cultural melting point; from where a flourishing sea-borne trade in spices, pearls, silk and cotton goods, teak and sandalwood, rice, ivory, indigo, metals and several interesting items had been carried on, bringing a lot of profit to the country. The Periplus Maris Eritrean, written about A.D. 60 by an anonymous author, gives a detailed account of the voyages and articles of import and export at various places. The chief amongst the articles sent in exchange were the great quantities of

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55 N. Subramanian, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.
57 H. R. Pate, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
spices.\textsuperscript{59} Obviously, the Gulf of Manaar is a part of the Bay of Bengal, along the coast which extends from Cape Camorin to Rameshwaram and is situated between the shipyard of Tuticorin and the Island of Ceylon. It forms the south eastern part of peninsular India. This region has been one of the most important strategic spots of the Coromandel Coast. From very early times in south Indian history, particularly from the proverbial Sangam Age (B.C. 300-A.D. 300) down to the advent of the Europeans towards the close of the 15th century; the Gulf of Manaar had been a centre of brisk commercial, political and religious activities, involving in this many faceted enterprise people from far and wide.\textsuperscript{60}

The port of Korkai, the centre of India’s pearl trade with the West, was known to the Greeks of the early Christian era as Kolkhii. More than a thousand year later, in 1292, long after Korkai was abandoned as a capital in favour of Madurai, Marco Polo spoke of another great Pandiya port, Cail as “a great and noble city”. Today Mocopolo’s Cail, or Kayal, as it appears in Tamil records, is an obscure village near the mouth of the Tamraparni, an one and half mile island. Korkai, the capital port of the Pandiyas, lies even further from the sea, an only partially excavated site in the sand wastes of the palmyra forest of south-eastern Tirunelveli.\textsuperscript{61}

Madras, situated in the southern corner of Indian sub-continent and known for its Dravidian culture, thus, slowly and steadily emerged as an economically predominant region in the early modern period. Administratively the state was divided by the British into twelve districts. The districts of Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari, which constitute the southern Tamil Nadu, are the locus of this study. In the eighteenth century, Tirunelveli or Tinnevelly\textsuperscript{62} included the major portions of Ramanathapuram\textsuperscript{63} and parts of Madurai.\textsuperscript{64} Among all these four districts, Tirunelveli\textsuperscript{65} is one of the earliest scenes of missionary enterprise in India, and it illustrates in striking manner the vicissitudes to which such enterprise has been subjected to.

\textsuperscript{59} Quoted in S. Manickam, \textit{op. cit}, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{60} Manickam, \textit{op. cit}, pp. 11-12; Burton Stein, \textit{op. cit}, pp. 8- 9.
\textsuperscript{62} British officials called Tirunelveli as ‘Tinnevelly.’
\textsuperscript{63} It is also called Ramanathapuram. The present district of Ramanathapuram was formed in 1910.
\textsuperscript{64} Robert Hardgrave, \textit{op. cit},. pp. 13-16.
\textsuperscript{65} Tirunelveli, Kanyakumari, Madurai and Ramanathapuram are southern districts of Tamil Nadu.
Among movements known to have occurred, the most famous was the conversion of fishing communities, Paravas and Mukkuvars, along the shorelines. In 1542, St. Francis Xavier, after his pause at Goa, commenced the Christianisation of India on the Tirunelveli seaboard, the extreme southeastern corner of the Indian Peninsula. He found the low castes, remnants of aboriginal races in a state of degradation and servitude. After Xavier had laboured for a year in Goa, he spent fifteen months with the Paravas of Tirunelveli coast, living on rice and water and associating with them as one of themselves. After returning to Goa and obtaining the assistance of some of the students in a missionary college there, he returned to the Paravas of Tirunelveli region and endeavoured to minister them both spiritually and materially.

From the day of his arrival in India when he went up and down the streets ringing a bell and calling the people to come and worship, until his death near the coast of China, Xavier was a flaming torch. To preach and baptise were his passion. He was not averse to invoking the authority of Government to aid in the extension of Christ’s Kingdom. At one time he even suggested that His Majesty, the King of Portugal, should demand reports from the Viceroy or the Governors “concerning the number and quality of those heathen who have been converted, and concerning the prospects of and means adopted for increasing the number of converts.” Xavier’s method of linking the missionary enterprise with the power of the state continued as the accepted mode of missionary work up to the close of the sixteenth century.

6. Fertile Rice Plain and Protestant Christianity

It was a crucial hour for India as well as for England, when on the last day of the sixteenth century, December 31, 1600; Queen Elisabeth of England issued the Charter which runs thus: “To One Body Corporate and Politick in Deed and in Name, by the name of the Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading into the East Indies.” Thus came into being the East India Company. Julius Richter, a missionary scholar observed that the traders who came to India at the earlier stages, did not

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67 Francis Xavier was born in the year 1506. The youngest of a large family in which all the other boys became soldiers he entered the university of Paris at the age of 18, and became a teacher of philosophy at the age of twenty. He came to India in the year 1542 A. D.
70 Clifford Manshardt, Christianity in a Changing India, Bombay, 1932, p. 2.
concern themselves in the slightest degree with either Christianity or the church. They set up harems, and tried to win favour in the eyes of their mistresses, they did not hesitate to worship their pagan gods. However, it was regarded as a notable day in London, when on December 22, 1616, a native of Masulipatam, was after due instruction baptised. Since 1614 a small band of missionary chaplains were sent from England at regular intervals to various trading stations in India such as Surat and Masulipatam and Madras received its first missionary in 1647. In due course, under the Charter of 1698 the Company was directly charged to see that: “All chaplains in their East India Services shall learn the language of the country, in order that they may be better able to instruct the Gentoos, heathen servants or ‘slaves’ of the Company, and of its agents in the Protestant religion.”

It was initially both curiosity and the colonial requirement of knowledge about their subject peoples that led to the officers of the East India Company serving in India to explore the history and culture of the colony which they were governing. The time was the late eighteenth century. Not only had the awareness of new worlds entered the consciousness of Europe, but knowledge as an aspect of the Enlightenment was thought to provide access to power. Governing a colony involved familiarity with what had preceded the arrival of colonial power on the Indian scene. The focus therefore was on languages, law and religion. The belief that history was essential to this knowledge was thwarted by the seeming absence of histories of early India. That the beginnings of Indian history would have to be rediscovered through European methods of historical scholarship, with an emphasis on chronology and sequential narrative became the challenge. These early explorations were dominated by the need to construct a chronology for the Indian past. Attempts were made to trace parallels with Biblical theories and chronology.

71 The first Indian to become a Christian as a result of the missionary efforts of a representative of the Anglican Church was, perhaps, an Indian from Bengal, who was baptised in 1616. According to a minute contained in the Court Minute Book of the East India Company at Masulipatam, which is dated August 19, 1614, Captain Best took home a young Indian, who was instructed by Patrick Copland, one of the first chaplains to travel in the Company’s ships to Masulipatam. After his baptism, he received the name of Peter, chosen by the King, James I. See Charles Henry Robinson, History of Christian Missions, London, 1915.
72 Julius Richter, op. cit., p. 97.
In the meanwhile, in 1616, at the time when the Dutch were about to drive the Portuguese out of India, under the leadership of the Admiral Ole Gedde, the Danes landed in 1620 on the Island of Ceylon and on the Coromandel Coast of India. An attempt to found a colony in the Trincomali district became futile; but in the Tamil country, on a narrow strip of coast presented to them by Rajah of Tanjore, the Danes built Fort Donsborg, called in Tamil Tarankampaadi, or wave-town, of which familiar "Tranquebar" is a corruption. This pioneer trading station, which was situated within a very short distance of the rich and fertile Cauvery delta, soon developed into a very busy commercial centre. Only a small amount of territory belonged to the Fort; but a fertile rice plain, it was sufficient to support some twenty to thirty thousand Tamils densely packed in fifteen or twenty villages. This unpretentious little ground thus became the cradle of Protestant mission in India. 74

Although the Dutch 75 in the seventeenth century considered themselves lords of the Indian Ocean and of the trade of India, yet it was only Ceylon that they regarded as their own exclusive territory. However, in the rest of the India, they were willing to allow other Protestant mission powers to enter into commercial competition with them and to build factories along the coast. Thus at dawn of the eighteenth century, the Indian coastline was dotted with factories and forts of different and rival nations. Beginning at the Southern extremity of the Tamil coast and going northwards: we find the Dutch garrison in Tuticorin, Nagapatam, Sadras and Pulicat, the French in Karaikal, the Danes in Tranquebar, and the English in Madras and so on. 76

74 Ibid.
75 The British East India Company was formed in 1600, followed by the Dutch East India Company in 1602. Even while competing for the Indian market, they both carried there with them all the venom with which their countries fought at home the Catholic Spain and Portugal. In 1658 the Dutch captured Tuticorin from Portuguese, expelled the Catholic Fathers from the Fishery Coast, and tried re-converting their adherents. While the Dutch turned many Roman Catholic churches into warehouses, they built an extremely plain but massive church at Tuticorin, which stills stand as the sole relic of an interesting though passing phase in the history of the Tirunelveli church. Over the porch of this solid structure is inscribed the monograms of the Dutch East India Company with the date 1750. This is therefore the oldest Protestant Christian church in Tirunelveli district. See The Missionary Manual of Tirunelveli Diocese, 1948.
Undoubtedly, many authors tend to treat Christian missions as part and parcel of Western colonialism. Studies made from this perspective argue that missionary bodies were hand in glove with the expansion of European economic and political interests and in fact served as the cultural arm of Western imperialism. To substantiate their charge, they could refer to the recent past, when Christianity and opium entered China about the same time. For India, K. M. Panikkar has pointed to the dubious association of Christian missionary work with aggressive imperialism and Jawaharlal Nehru has shown his amasement that, “the gospel of Jesus, the gentle but relentless rebel against untruth and injustices” could so easily be made a tool of imperialism, capitalism and political domination.77

In the seventeenth century, the Dutch East India Company permitted missionaries to work among the native population “so that the name of Christ may be spread and the advantage of the Company furthered.”78 It was during the last decades of the seventeenth century, that Frederick IV,79 the religiously induced king of Denmark, had the idea of sending missionaries to convert the heathen in the Danish settlements. One of the Danish clergymen, Magistere Jacob Worm, had enjoyed in Denmark certain popularity as a poet. On his gravestone, he lays claim to the title of “The Danish Apostle of India.” However, although he had lived in Tranquebar until 1694, the missionaries who arrived there ten years later found no evidence of his labour. King Frederick IV thoroughly believed in the Lutheran teaching that it is one of the duties devolving upon monarchs to make provision for conversion of their non-Christian subjects. He instructed his court preacher, Luetkens, who had been transferred in 1704 from Berlin to Copenhagen, and commissioned him to provide several missionaries. As he could find no suitable persons in Denmark, Luetkens wrote to his friends in Berlin, and by their means, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg and Henry Plutschau entered the service of Denmark as “Royal Danish

79 A brief account of the measures was taken in Denmark for the conversion of heathen in the East-Indies and of the College or Incorporated Society erected by the King of Denmark for the propagation of gospel. See Missionary Pamphlet Published for the Information of those who earnestly wish with the salvation of the Heathen, Translated from the High Dutch, London, 1715, pp. 1-8.
Missionaries. Thus, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg was sent to India to propagate Protestantism by the Danish king Frederick IV. He made Tranquebar his second home and implemented various progressive schemes. Ziegenbalg was instrumental in introducing a range of activities through his pioneering efforts. He was the first Protestant missionary to introduce Tamil alphabets to the press, developed the first dictionary of Tamil, and of course, was the first to share the gospel in the language of the people.

In 1706, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg and Henry Plutschau landed at Tranquebar (Tarankampadi). This seaport, close to rich lands of the Cauvery Delta, had been leased to Danish merchants by Ragunatha Nayaka of Tanjore in 1620. But the Danish Governor, fearing anything which might endanger trade, harassed and persecuted them and even imprisoned one of them. Yet, being university trained (Halle University, Germany), these young men were soon able to demonstrate their usefulness; as teachers for children of the Danish residents. Soon thereafter, they were able to master local languages, set up schools for native children and presses for printing vernacular text books. As trained Tamil teachers and pastors proliferated, plans were made to apply and extend the Halle system of education (charity schools and education for children, particularly for women) to the entire Tamil region.

Of the missionaries sent out to India during all this long period only twenty-four laboured exclusively at Tranquebar. Many thousands embraced Christianity. What proportion of these were truly converted is nonetheless difficult to assess, but probably a large number. Meanwhile, the rise of other mission stations was also witnessed at Madras in 1726, Nagapatam in 1732, Cuddalore in 1737, Palayamkottah

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in 1755, and Tiruchirapalli and Tanjavur in 1767. 84 Tranquebar became the mother of all Protestant missions.

After the departure of Ziegenbalg in 1719, the missionary work was subsequently continued by successors like Pressier and Walther, in whose time the work of the mission penetrated into the neighbouring kingdom of Tanjavur. The initiatives undertaken by Pressier and Walther were further developed by Christian Frederick Schwartz; whom Manickam, a missionary historian considers, ‘the brightest star in the constellation of the Danish-Halle Missionaries’. Halle in Germany played a significant role in sending missionaries to promote the cause of gospel in the Tamil region. The well-known missionary Schwartz was sent by Halle mission, whose sedulous efforts gave new directions to the work of missionaries in this region. He was highly acclaimed for his efforts. During this time Tranquebar mission entered into a new phase of growth.

Extension work of conversion was made in Tiruchirapalli and Tirunelveli in the south. 85 Stephen Neil 86 remarked that, “Schwartz was without doubt the greatest of all Tranquebar missionaries.” Muller 87 refers to Schwartz as “the founder of the Tirunelveli Church.” 88 Adept in Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Persian, Portuguese, Sanskrit and European tongues, both modern and classical, Schwartz had gained renown as a preacher, teacher, schoolmaster, diplomat and statesman. 89

In due course, the missionaries’ policy of ‘reaching the unreached’ through indigenous converts slowly and steadily started gaining momentum. In this endeavor, missionaries engaged themselves in various forms of dialogue with their native sponsors and supporters. Letters were written extensively focusing on this issue. Missionaries from Tranquebar had correspondence with Gotthilf August Francke, the chief architect of women’s education in Germany. In one of his letters to Tranquebar

85 S. Manickam, op. cit., p. 138.
86 He was a missionary scholar from England.
87 He was a noted missionary writer from Germany.
89 Robert Eric Frykenberg, op. cit., p. xxii.
missionaries, Francke stressed upon the need for training the talented Tranquebar subjects.

In a letter sent by missionaries like, Nikolaus Dal, Walther and Martin Bose, they mentioned that, "[...] the point you have made about training talented subjects of this nation is of prime importance both for us and for the entire mission. [...] Your fatherly advice and encouragement to use our time and energies primarily to train a select number of young people affected us very deeply and having considered all the circumstances very carefully, we now give the following reply: We, older missionaries find ourselves so debilitated that we cannot make any promise in this regard. Although we realise the need and usefulness of the matter, we cannot overlook the difficulties in implementing the suggestion. Of course, the main thing is to make necessary efforts and when they are carried out with confidence and hope that God will grant them a positive outcome, then our faith in God will ensure that the task is not completely hopeless."90

It was during the eighteenth century that Christianity spread from Tranquebar to Tanjavur, Tiruchirapalli, Tirunelveli and then to south Travancore. Meanwhile, Christianity also took root in Tirunelveli during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, before the establishment of Company rule; when Savarimuthu Pillai, an ex-sepoj, and Rasa Clarinda,91 an affluent Brahmin widow, opened a chapel-school in Palayamkottai (Palamkottah) in 1785. Twenty years later Satynathan Pillai92 became the first pastor-missionary of a tiny Christian community. David Sundaranatham, a Nadar (formerly Shanar) convert trained in Tanjavur, was sent as a missionary to his own people in the late 1790s.93 Meanwhile, some of the converts of Schwartz

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90 Excerpt from a letter sent by the missionaries in Tranquebar to Gotthilf August Francke, dated October 13, 1768.
91 She was also called Clarinda in Tamil.
92 One of the most affluent native pastors of southern Tamil Nadu, who got training from Christian Frederick Schwartz and then was appointed as the first pastor to a church built by Clarinda, also called Clarinda's Church. Even today the church exists at Palayamkottai. See Eliza F. Kent, “Raja Clarinda – Concubine, Patroness: Women’s Leadership in the Indian Church,” in Andreas Gross, Y. Vincent Kumara Doss and Heike Liebau, *op. cit.*, pp. 659-670.
including Savarimuthu Rayappan, Ganaprakasam and Savarirayan etc., frequently visited Tirunelveli and prepared the ground for further proselytisation.\textsuperscript{94}

7. Establishment of Christian Settlements

Besides, J. D. Jenicke was the first Tranquebar missionary to reside in Palayamkottai and supervise the work done in Tirunelveli from 1791.\textsuperscript{95} The first purely Christian settlement in the Tirunelveli district, with 28 Christian converts was formed in 1799 at Mudalur (in Tamil it is called ‘first village’). David, a local convert took the initiative in this regard, with the able support of Captain Everett, a friend of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (henceforth S.P.C.K.) in Palayamkottai. Further, Gericke\textsuperscript{96} and Kohlaf were in nominal charge of S.P.C.K. It was after the famine of 1810 – 1811 that James Hough, a British theologian became the government chaplain in Tirunelveli in 1816. Subsequently two more missionaries from Church Missionary Society (henceforth C.M.S.), Rhenius\textsuperscript{97} and Schmid came to Tirunelveli on 7 July, 1820. Thus, the first C.M.S. congregation in Palayamkottai came into existence on 10 March, 1822, and the earlier S.P.C.K. congregation was gradually merged with the C.M.S. congregation.\textsuperscript{98}

After the enactment of Charter Act\textsuperscript{99} of 1813, the C.M.S. sent its first four missionaries to India around this time (1816-1820). Two Englishmen were sent out, of which, Thomas Norton was sent to Travancore and William Greenword to Bengal. Of the two Germans, Schnarre was sent to Tranquebar and C.T.E. Rhenius\textsuperscript{100} to Palayamkottai.\textsuperscript{101} Operating from Palayamkottai, C.T.E. Rhenius, a product of Halle mission, expanded the missionary work through a process of village network by

\textsuperscript{94} The Missionary Manual of Tirunelveli Diocese, 1949.
\textsuperscript{96} Whilst Schwartz was labouring with seal at Tanjore, his associates were carrying on their works in other parts of South India. Among them the most distinguished was Gericke. See John Kaye, Christianity in India, London, 1859, pp. 6-24.
\textsuperscript{97} Church Missionary Intelligencer, vol. II, op. cit., p. 163.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid. Also see Eugene Stock, The History of Church Missionary Society, London, 1899, pp. 26-31.
\textsuperscript{99} The Clause in the East India Company Act of 1813 which declared it to be the duty to promote the interest and happiness of the native inhabitants of the British dimensions in India, which finally opened in flood gates for missionaries to India in general and Tamil Nadu in particular.
\textsuperscript{100} C. T.E. Rhenius came to Tamil Nadu from Prussia (modern Germany) in 1816.
\textsuperscript{101} Byron B. Daugherty, A Brief History of Missions in Tirunelveli from the Beginning to its Creation of Diocese in 1896, op. cit., pp. 11-12.
establishing colonies of Christian families in and around the region. The establishment of Dhonavur, a Christian settlement was a case in this point. Rhenius purchased Puliyurkurichi, a hamlet, 35 km south-west of Tirunelveli with financial aid given by Count Dhona of Scholodin, Germany. Subsequently, the Christian settlement was begun and came to be called in her name as Dhonavur. Rhenius, thus, slowly and steadily pioneered en-masse conversion in the villages in and around his missionary stations. His concerned efforts began to yield results within a short span of time. The whole village of Sattankulam, a village in the south-eastern region of Tirunelveli district came into the fold of Christianity in 1823 and the spirit of conversion spread rapidly, engulfing the other nearby villages. Mengnanapuram was won over in 1825, followed by Idaiyankulam in 1827, Asirvathapuram in 1828, Nallur in 1832, and Surandai in 1833. C.T.E. Rhenius thus proved to be successful in his evangelical activities by establishing churches, congregations and Christian settlements. Further expansion of Christianity in south Travancore began with Vedamanickam, who embraced Christianity in a meeting conducted by S.P.C.K. missionaries in Tanjavur in the year 1799. In due course of time, he brought his new faith back to Mylaady, his home village in Nagercoil. While returning to Tanjavur again for 'material assistance' from his fellow converts and S.P.C.K. missionaries, he met William Tobias Ringletaube, a German Lutheran; and invited him to southern Travancore to preach Christianity. Accepting his invitation, Ringletaube came to Mylaady and started working among the depressed class masses of southern Travancore.

Meanwhile, thousands of converts eventually relapsed to heathenism. By the close of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the numbers were much reduced even though Christianity spread over a wide area. The work of the missions,

both the Danish at Tranquebar and the more extensive missionary organisation, S.P.C.K. languished due to lack of men and material means. Warneck, the ablest of the historians of missions in Germany, attributes this decline of Christianity to the withering influence of the growing rationalism. In addition, in England only few men were available for missionary work, and very little money was at the disposal of mission agencies. Thus, the S.P.C.K. on 7 June, 1825 resolved to hand over its south Indian mission to the S.P.G. in Tirunelveli as one of the transferred congregations. The new faith vis., Christianity, which was introduced in Tranquebar in the eighteenth century by German Lutheran Missionaries of the North European Pietistic tradition, in collaboration with S.P.C.K. was further strengthened in the nineteenth century under Anglican auspices of the C.M.S. and the S.P.G., both voluntary societies for missions to non-Christians in South India.

Eventually, after an incubation period of fifty years, a radical wave of conversions broke out. People in several communities, from lower and intermediary castes turned Christians. Desperation and the possibility of liberation from demons, fears and bondage of affluent communities drove these movements considerably. Each movement began when leaders within a particular caste led their own people in to the new faith, assisted by both the German and British missionaries.

Robert Caldwell of the S.P.G., a renowned missionary Dravidologist, who became the bishop in Tirunelveli, lamented: “Americans and Germans had done more

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105 It is nothing but a belief that all behaviors and opinions should be based on reason rather than on emotions or religious beliefs.
108 It was one of the religious revival movements of the seventeenth century Lutheran Christians in Germany. Spener was the one who initiated the movement.
111 When Robert Caldwell took in-charge of Edayankudi (Shepherds' Abode) in December 1841, he found only one of the old converts in that district remaining steadfast. The chief difficulties which met the missionary included, “The prevalence of superstitious fear,” and “Indifference to education”. The proportion of the inhabitants of Tinnevelly which had embraced Christianity was in the year 1846-47, to quote from Caldwell’s words, “Larger than that of any other province in India.” See J. L. Wyatt, op. cit., pp. 150-151.
for India, proportionality to their interest in it, than was being done by English Church men. Statistics for 1852 showed ninety-nine Germans (mostly under Anglican Societies) and sixty-seven Americans against only 138 Anglicans, not counting English dissenters and Scottish or Welsh missionaries in India and Ceylon. Caldwell calls this ‘growing influence’ of missionaries from Germany in South India as a ‘national disgrace’. Lamenting on this he observes: ‘The seal of Germans for the evangelisation of India puts us to still greater shame’ and concludes that, ‘the Germans know about the antiquities of India better than we do’. Thus, Caldwell’s anticipation that, ‘an Anglo-German rivalry that would haunt later missionary movement’ in due course of time became effective and fruitful indeed.’

Of all Protestant missions, which had been established in India, the mission in Tinnevelly (Tirunelveli) has been more extensively spoken of, and is better known by its name among Christians in general than any other missions throughout the British India. The fact that historically, in Tirunelveli and other southern districts of Tamil regions there were thousands of depressed class converts is quite true. Nevertheless, aspects pertaining to other issues such as: the sort of Christians, the reasons why they became Christians in such large numbers; and how the gospel was really progressing among them; are very crucial to our understanding. The following chapter “Socio- Economic Implications of Religious Conversion” endeavors to explore and explicate the events, as they unfolded with the relevant data.

112 Robert Caldwell was the first to use the word ‘Dravidian’ instead of the term ‘Tamilian’ in his first and longest work entitled “A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages,” originally published in 1836. He was the standard authority on the subject without a rival or a successor. See J. L. Wyatt, op. cit., pp. 150-151 & 192.


114 The following missionary societies were formed and entered into their conversion work among non-Christians in India: Society for the Propagation of Gospel in Foreign Parts (1647), Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (1698), Royal Danish Missionary College (1706), Scottish Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge (1709), United Brethren Mission (1732), Wesleyan Methodist Missions (1786), Baptist Missionary Society (1792), London Missionary Society (1795), Edinburg Missionary Society (1796), Church Missionary Society (1801), American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1809) and so on and so forth. See Church Missionary Society Register, January, 1816, p.1.