

## Early History of the Missionary Works of the Royal Danish Missionaries, the German and the Swedish in different packets of Tamil Nadu: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

Tamil Nadu was ruled by the kings Chera, Chola and Pandyas during the time of medieval period. Chola emerging and suppressed Pandiyas, some years passed away Pandiyas attained power and established their authority whole part of Tamil Nadu. This situation, Ala udin khiji, sultanate of Delhi and his commander Malikafur invaded on Tamil country and established the supremacy of the sultanate. The Vijayanagar Empire was founded in 1336 A.D for the purpose of prevention of the muslims imperialism in the south India. The Vijayanagar Empire created Nayakams for their administrative convenience of the south part of Tamil Nadu. In this time Christian missionaries particularly Roman Catholic missionaries came and preached settled in Tamil Nadu. Before that St.Thomas , the disciple of JESUS Christ arrived at Kerala and Mylapore in Tamil Nadu. In India history of Christianity may be divided into four periods namely the Syran period, the Roman period, the Lutheran period and modern period. The oldest Christian community in India is in the native state of Travancore. The Roman period may be said begin with the year A.D though the missionaries of the roman church were in India in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was only after the arrival of Vascodagama in 1498 A.D. The greatest missionaries of Roman church were, Francis Xavier, Robert D.Nobilie, Beschi and another missionaries came and preached in Tamil Nadu and started the schools for native children. The 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the beginnings of protestant missionary work in India, Ziegenblag and Plutchav, two godly general were the first protestant missionaries. They were sent out by Frederick IV of Denmark to preach the gospel in the Danish possession in India and arrived at tranquebar on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1706 A.D. They were not only founders of the Tranquebar mission. The greatest of these early missionaries was Christian Frederick Schwartz, the father of the Christian church in Thanjore and Thiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu. Johan Zacharias Kiernandar assumed the responsibility of preaching the gospel and he landed the shore of Cuddalore in Tamil Nadu in India on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 1740 A.D to 1799.He was the first Swedish missionary came to India. Sweden started Swedish Mission board in 1874 for the missionaries work. Rev. Carl Jacob sandegren, Rev. Ernst heuman, Rev. David Bexell, Dr. Frederick Kugelberg. Rev C.J. Sandegren, Missionary Esther Peterson, missionary Miss. Ellen Nordmark were the prominent missionaries of the church of Sweden mission. During the period of two world wars the German missionaries could not serve in India because Germany was against British. At the critical juncture Swedish missionaries they were carried out the mission works with great responsibility. The contribution of the missionaries in general and Swedish Christian missionaries in particular towards the abolishment of the cited social evils will go permanent by in the Annals of the history of Tamil Nadu.

**Keyword:** Leipzig Missionary Society, Society the propagation of the Gospel, Society for Promoting Christine knowledge, Church of Sweden Mission, Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church, Church Missionary Society.

### 1. Introduction

Tamil Nadu was ruled by the kings Chera, Chola and Pandiyas. During the time of the Medieval period, Chola emerging and suppressed Pandiyas, some era passed Pandiyas captured power and ruled whole part of the Tamil Nadu. This situation, Ala-ud-din khilji, Sultanate of Delhi and his commander Malik – Kafur – invaded on Tamil Country and established the supremacy of the sultanate. The Vijayanagar Empire was founded in 1336 AD for the purpose of prevention of the muslims imperialism in the south india. The Vijayanagar Empire created nayakams for their administrative arrangements in the south (Tamil Nadu). These Nayakams were called Madurai Nayakams, Thanjavur Nayakams and Jinji Nayakams. In this time Christian Missionaries particularly Roman Catholic missionaries (came and preached) settled in Tamil Nadu. Before that St.Thomas, the disciple of Jesus Christ arrived at Kerala and Mylapore (Tamil Nadu) in India in First Century (52 AD). This article deals about the works of the Royal Danish Missionaries, German and the Swedish in different packets of Tamil Nadu from 18<sup>th</sup> Century to 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Roman Catholic Missionaries were spread the gospel throughout entire Tamil Nadu.

The history of Christianity in any country must acknowledge the fact that this religion, more than any other world religions, by its very tenets builds its life around the common worship of its believers. Accordingly in its history various organizations and institutions have played a vital role to ensure and enhance that religious community life. The institutional history of Christianity, to be sure can easily be over emphasized, sometimes to the total exclusion of other important aspects of its expression and effects. On the other hand it is entirely impossible to overlook the ‘ecclesiastical’ aspects of Christian involvement. More than that discerning that framework of institutions Christianity may well serve as the first step toward going to see that a certain group consciousness of the Tamil people allied itself with the collective approach to religion inherent in the Christian in Tamil people allied itself with the collective approach to religion inherent in the Christian faith. For these reasons, in narrating the history of Christianity in Tamil Nadu, it should be started with the vicissitudes of the country, taking then as a basis for all further observations.

## **2. Early History of the Missionary Services in Tamil Nadu.**

The history of Christianity in India may be divided into four periods namely the Syrian Period, the Roman Period, the Lutheran Period and the Modern Period. The oldest Christian community in India is in the native state of Travancore. Its members are commonly known as Syrian Christians whose number is about one fifth of the entire Christian population in India. Tradition connects the introduction of Christianity into Travancore with the apostle St. Thomas. Most scholars are now agreed that there is no historical proof to discredit this tradition. After a careful study of the results of recent research the late Dr. Farquhar wrote Thirty years ago the balance of the probability stood absolutely against the story the Apostolate of Thomas in India to day the balance of possibility is distinctly on the side of historicity. Some have connected the establishment of the church with one Thomas, Bishop of Edessa, in the year A.D.345. There is certainly no doubt that the community was a flourishing one in the sixth century.

It is known, however, that about the eighteenth century, the Christians of Malabar were so numerous and influential that they acquired from the rulers of the land a certain political status, including the right of self-government, in token of which they received two copper plate charters dated A.D.774 and 824. The history of next six hundred years is enveloped in obscurity. Through all the vicissitudes of history they seem to have held themselves together under the Syrian liturgy and ceremonials, though probably they entirely lacked spiritual vigor and missionary Zeal. When in the fifteenth century the Portuguese obtained a footing in India, they endeavored to bring these Christians under the rule of the Pope and to substitute the Latin rite and dogmas for the Syrian. For the time being, they succeeded in doing so by force. But when in the sixteenth century, the power of the Portuguese was broken by the Dutch; many of the Syrians threw off the Papal Yoke and placed themselves under a Bishop consecrated for them by the Patriarch of Antioch. A large number of however, still clung to the Roman church and their descendants are the ‘Roman-Syrian’ Christians the present day.

In 1816 the church Missionary Society sent missionaries to Travancore who started schools and colleges and these began to leaven this ancient community. A small number of Syrians joined the church of England, and a larger number who were in favour of reform separated themselves from the old Jacobite church and constituted what is called the 'Mar Thomas' or 'Reformed Syrian Church'. This church uses in its worship a revised form of the old syriac liturgy translated into the vernacular. Both sections are presided over by Indian Bishops, and have always been independent of any foreign support. They are the only self-supporting and self-governing Christian bodies in all India. If these ancient churches would but unite and give themselves to the evangelization of India what a power they could exert in the land. In such activity they would surely find their own fullest spiritual life.

The Roman period may be said to begin with the year A.D.1500. Though the missionaries of the Roman Church were in India in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was only after the arrival of Vasco da Gama in 1498 A.D. that its influence began to be seriously felt. The greatest missionary of the Roman church was Francis Xavier. He landed in India on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1543 and in many respects he was a model missionary. His missionary enthusiasm, self-denial and aspirations after a holy life are lessons for all time. Noble by birth and educated as a Scholar, he gave up all that was dear to him to go to the ends of the earth out of love to Jesus Christ and Zeal for the salvation of his brethren of mankind. Often he was houseless and homeless travelling on foot without a servant, suffering from cold and hunger, fording rivers and forcing his way through unbroken forests exposed to perils from sickness and robbers.

For nearly two hundred years of the Roman Church held undisputed sway over a large portion of south India and penetrated even to the court of Akbar. Robert de Nobilie and Beschi, the Tamil Scholar are amongst a great number of European missionaries who helped to establish and strengthen the Roman Catholic Church in this land. According to the census of 1931, the Roman Catholics numbered 2, 113,000, thus forming nearly a third of the entire Christian community. They do not recognize any comity arrangement with other Christian bodies and assert their right to enter any field throughout India. This indiscriminate invading of the territories of other churches and missions often interferes with the discipline of these other churches and Missions, often interferes with the discipline of these other churches and sometimes makes it very difficult for the others to entertain feelings of Christian friendliness towards them.

### **3. THE ROYAL DANISH MISSIONARIES (GERMAN) IN TAMIL NADU.**

The 18<sup>th</sup> Century saw the beginnings of Protestant missionary work in India, Ziegenbalg and Plutschav, two godly General were the first protestant missionaries. They were sent out by King Frederick IV of Denmark to preach the Gospel in the Danish possessions in India and arrived at Tranquebar on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1706 A.D. Later they were joined by a noble of missionaries such as Grundle, Schultze, Kiernader, Gericke, Schwarcz and others. Grundle, Schultze Kiernander, Gericke, Schwartz and others. Grundle and Schulize translated the scriptures into Tamil and completed the first vernacular Bible in India in the year 1727 A.D. Kiernander was the first protestant missionary from Sweden worked at Cuddalore and later at Bengal. Fabricius gave the Tamils their first hymn book.

The greatest of these early missionaries was Christian Frederick Schwartz, 'the father of the Christian Church in Tanjore and Trichirapalli'. He arrived in South India on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1750 and for nearly half a century worked unceasingly in these districts until his death in 1798. Several lengthy journeys were undertaken to Madras, Ceylon, Madurai and Thirunelveli. Indian workers were trained and sent forth from Tanjore to take charge of these outlying stations and churches were founded in all the important centres of South India. "Schwartz was by no means a brilliantly gifted man even in his missionary labour's he never struck out any new lines of work. He did not bring the Tranquebar Mission to a higher state of development; he simply extended its operations. While other missionaries in the course of years suffered

from the withering influence of the natural and still more mental and moral climate of their environment, every fresh task seemed to fill Schwartz with yet greater vivacity and to help him to some inward victory; he grew perceptibly along with his growing ideals and at the same time the purity of his heart, his insusceptibility to flattery, his incorruptibility in money matters, his unassuming and simple faithfulness, the frank straight forwardness of his relations with both the great and the humble were so self-service that he enjoyed the general confidence of the community as perhaps no other missionary in India general confidence.

Other early Lutheran missionaries have left an undying fame in South India for attractive piety, whole hearted devotion to the Master and self-sacrificing love for the people. Though first sent out by the King of Denmark, these continental missionaries received a considerable amount of support from England and finally they and the churches established by them were taken over by the SPCK. The work of the SPCK was in the year 1825 transferred to the society the Propagation of the Gospel and since the great war, the church of Sweden has taken over practically the whole work of the old Leipzig Mission. In the year 1919, the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church was organized and now includes in it the churches founded by the Leipzig Mission and the Church of Sweden Mission totaling in 1934 a total strength of 31,400 persons.

The spread of the various missionary groups over Tamil Nadu did not, on the whole, follow a preconceived strategy. It started from the existing churches and developed, as occasion arose, from harbor and cities along traditional lines of communication. It also increasingly penetrated into the rural interior. In course of time, the spheres of influence of the various groups either came to be mutually respected or on grounds of different doctrines and practices, overlapped each other. The latter was generally true of the main division of Roman Catholic Christians on the one hand the protestants on the other. But even with in these two large groupings double occupancy of missionary territory occurred, further complicating the picture.

Among the protestant mission societies, basic traditional differences in the doctrines of the Eucharist and of the ministry as well as in their ethos regarding practical consequence which arose out of the common conviction of the fundamental equality of the human beings over conventional caste practices were the most outstanding causes of geographical duplication. In connection with the question of ministry, dissension centered on conflicting as to the proper, biblical form of church structure. In geographical terms, beginning from the South, the spread over all of Tamil Nadu as follows: In the present Kanyakumari district, then the South Travancore, the Carmelites of the vicariate apostolic of verapoly, since 1853 of that of Quilon which had been bifurcated from verapoly because of rapid church growth continued to work side by side with the missionaries of the LMS, a very determined and fairly cohesive group of average education.

#### **4. MISSIONARIES OF THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN MISSION: (SWEDES) IN TAMIL NADU.**

##### **4.1 John Zacharias Kiernandar**

Assumed the responsibility of preaching the gospel and he landed the shores of cuddalore in Tamil Nadu in India. On the 8th of August 1740 AD he came to the country. He was the first Swedish Missionary to come to

India. Missionaries of the church of Sweden mission card Jacob Sandegren was born at Maesinge in Sweden on 1st October 1841, studied in Sweden and on 17th November 1869, arrived in India, missionary Rev. C.T. Kremmer was the pastor in Chennai. Rev. C.J. Sandegren stayed with him and served the church. He married Miss Theodara Kremmer the daughter of Rev. C.T. Kremmer. This marriage gained significance since it helped the church of Sweden mission and Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission work together later. He assumed the responsibility of discharging evangelical and social works in Coimbatore, Madurai, Virudunagar and Sirkali. Between 1901 and 1915 he was the president of the church of Sweden Mission council. After a long services of selfless service, he died in Madurai in 1929.

#### **4.2 Missionary Ernst Heuman:**

Missionary Ernst Heuman was born at Halmstad in Sweden on 9th July 1858 and studied at Uppsala and was ordained at was by on 12th June 1889. He reached India on 14th October 1903 and served at Pudukkottai, Mayavaram, Tanjore, Tiruchirappalli and other places. He was elected the president of the church of Sweden mission council in India was in the post from 1916 to 1921. The Tamil Evangelical Lutheran was constituted in the year 1919 with the constituted parts of native Tamil Pastorates. The first synod of the newly constituted church TELC was held on the year 1919 to Dr. Rev. Ernst Heuman of CSM was elected the first Bishop of the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran church. He served the first Bishop of the TELC called "The Bishop Tranquebar" from 1921 to 1926.

#### **4.2 Missionary EFL David Bexell:**

Rev. David Heuman Bexell was born at Barnar in Sweden on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1861, studied at Lund and Leipzig, was ordained in the year 1887. He reached India on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1887. He was inspired by among others Peter Fjellstedt and C.A. Quchterlong to India as the Swedish church missionary. Between 1912 and 1916 he served as the president of the church of Sweden mission. He was elected as the second Bishop of TELC and served as Bishop from 1928 to 1933.

He translated the classic Christian literature to the Tamil language and published in 1933 an English-Tamil dictionary, known as Tranquebar Dictionary, which was the result of a lifetime's work and has facilitated the relations between Tamils and the European culture. He worked as Missionary in several parts of TELC Dindugaul, Pudukkottai, Madurai, Chennai, Tiruchirappalli and Coimbatore. He was entered to eternal rest in 1938 at Coimbatore.

#### **4.3 Dr. Fredrik Kugelberg**

He was born at Ljungurum in Sweden on 20th September 1890, studied at Uppsala and Stockholm, arrived in India on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1905. As he was a doctor by profession, he felt the necessity to found a hospital at Tirupattur and as a result of that, he founded the hospital at Thirupattur called "The Swedish Mission Hospital. Sister Sonja person, Dr. Ysander, Dr. Sendol, Dr. Ericleson, Dr. Wallden and a Group of Missionaries from Sweden served themselves in this noble. Ministry of looking after the sick to the best of their abilities developed the hospital with all facilities and made the CSM Hospital to be one of the best hospitals in Tamil Nadu. A Home for blind was started in 1971 by Sister Sonja person. She served 1944 to 1959 and 1963 to 1983 in Tirupattur, a school for blind children was started in 1972 by sister son. Later it developed to Middle school in 1979. Miss. Brigitta Enval served as the Manager of the School till 2007. In 1926 a nursing school was opened by sister Wilche.

#### **4.4 Missionary Rev. Carl Frederick**

Adolf Sandegren was born as missionary at Coimbatore on 27th December 1874, went to Sweden and studied at Uppsala and was ordained at Uppsala on 28th December 1899. He reached India on 9th February 1901, worked in Sirkali, Colombo, Pudukkottai, Pattukkottai, Vilupuram and Virudunagar.

#### **4.5 Missionary Rev. Paul Sandegren.**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rev. Paul Sandegren was a pioneer missionary of the church of Sweden mission. **He was called as Paul Apostle in the Holy Bible** because he sacrificed and devoted his whole life to the poor people in Tamil Nadu and was ordained in 1913. Between 1915 to 1925, he served various places in Madurai, Virudunagar, Chinaiypura, Chinna kollai and Sathur. During the time of his services in 1915, struggle started between Hindu and Muslims in Nadukkottai. In 1920 the conflict began with police and Kallar community. This struggle led to a normal situation in these areas. The British Government also called for Kallar community as a crime community. In this critical situation, Rev. Paul Sandegren has entered into the areas and helped them. After this incident, most of them were changed their attitudes and their behavior. His services were wonderful one to this particular community.

The Rev. Paul Sandegren built the church at Usilampatti. The four pillars that stand outside represent the four gospel workers and the twelve pillars within the church represent twelve disciples. He dedicated the second place of worship for the Holy Redeemer's Lutheran church congregation at the rear end of Union Christian Higher secondary school, Madurai on 23rd May 1954. He entered into eternal rest in the year 1972.

#### **4.6 Missionary Rev. Herman Sandegren:**

He was the son of the Rev. C.J. Sandegren. He did missionary work at Pudukottai and left India in 1920 for Sweden.

#### **4.7 Missionary Rev. Johannes Sandegren D.D.**

He was born in 1883 at Madurai, was the son of Carl Jacob Sandegren was ordained in 1906 and sent out in 1907, reached India and served in Thiruchul, Virudunagar, Madurai, Madras and Thiruchirapalli. He was elected as the president of mission council and elected as the third Bishop of Tranquebar and was in office as Bishop of TELC from 1934 to 1956.

#### **4.8 Missionary Esther Peterson (1890 - 1960)**

India had many social evils in the society like sati, Female infanticide, child marriage, prevented for widow re-marriage, denied for Women education and also property rights for women etc. In this situation Esther Peterson did restless service among the women in Tamil Nadu. During the service of Rev. Carl Jacob Sandegren as Missionary of Tamil Nadu and he expressed his view to home mission in Tamil Nadu only suitable for women missionaries to serve among the women in Tamil Nadu. Indian women were not in a good position in the society because of the society structure. So women missionaries only possible to serve here. Immediately the Sweden Mission took care about it. It ready to send women missionaries for the serving among the Indian women. The Sweden Mission Board was forward to the application of the C.J. Sandegren to the Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission regarding this matter but LELM followed orthodox policy. Lastely, the Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission was accepted this obligation of Rev. C.J. Sandegren.

The Mission Board searched women missionaries in Sweden for the Tamil women to south India. This incident was going in 1887. After this year the church of Sweden mission was selected Esther Peterson as missionary to south India. Esther Petersons was born on 16th July in 1866 in Sweden and she came to Madurai as the first Lady Missionary in 1890 and was followed by many others as teachers and Nursing sisters. She started her services from this place.

She served fulfilled her service at the age 70 in India among the Tamil women. Madurai and Tirupattur was the headquarters of her work. She founded many schools for girls in and around Madurai and encouraged them to get the education on so on. she changed dress code to wear blouses among the

young girls in Madurai and Usilampatti and she created social awareness among the women and also she believed Education is only way for the remove the orthodox and superstitious belief from the society. (She served many places in Nadukkottai, Saduvalley - Mangalam , Matiyur )

She served many places and visited daily these places were called in Nadukkottai, saduvalleymangalem, Matiyur along with her helper packiyam muthuammal, Manikamdattammal. She built her won house at Tirupattur for the purpose of it and if became a home for Aged people, deserving young girls and orphan. In Between 1890 to 1960 she served restless hard work among the women in Tamil Nadu.

#### **4.9 Missionary Miss Ellen Nordmark**

She was on 14th July 1902 at Sweden and came to India as Missionary in 1938. She was basically Teacher and also a pastor. She had closely associated herself with the education of women and especially the establishment of the Girl's High school and women Teachers Training Institute at Usilampatti had been the significant contributions of Narmark. In 1949 Usilampatti primary school could not ran properly because of the Government order. Miss Narmark and some other important person in Usilampatti took effective effort to ran the school successfully.

She was the Head master and correspondent for the girl's school. She boldly worked among the village women in and around the Usilampatti. She always round the many places and brought a group of girls by van and they had learnt Tailoring , sowing, Craft works etc. She stitched bundle of blouses individually and put to wear the upper clothe for women in Tamil Nadu. She saved small child from the child marriage and she saved female children from infanticide and brought them and gave them shelter, food education and made them to serve the society in various fields. Sometime she took certain step boldly for the upliftment of the women in Tamil Nadu. She was the member of the Kallar reclamation committee. Mr. Mookiah Thevar MLA appreciated and called her known as Veermmal; that means "Brave mother". She was the member of Church Council from 1965-68 and also as chairman of Education Board. She sacrificed herself to Madurai and Usiampatti and return back to Sweden in 1969. She rested eternal rest in 21st December 1995.

During the period of world wars the German missionaries could not served in India because Germany was against British. At Critical Juncture time Swedish missionaries they were carried out the mission works with great responsibility. The Swedish missionaries managed the mission properties and mission works effectively. It is most significant in the History of Christian Missionaries in the Tamil Nadu History.

## **5. Conclusion**

The history of Christianity in India is viewed as an integral part of the Socio – Cultural history of the Indian People rather than as separate from it. The history will therefore focus attention upon the Christian people in India. Up on their social, religious, cultural and political encounters, up on the changes which these encounters produced in them and in their appreciation of the Christian Gospel as well as in the Indian Culture and Society of which they themselves were a part. These elements constitute the history of Christianity in India, and are not to be merely Chapters tacked on to the end of an institutional study. This history should, therefore, provide an insight into the changing identity of the Christian people of India through the centuries.

The contribution of the Christian missionaries in general and Swedish Christian missionaries in particular towards the abolishment of the cited social evils will go permanently in the annals of the History of Tamil Nadu.

Conversion to Christianity was only secondary but providing the basic social amenities was primary to these missionaries. In the absence of modern roads and transports, they used to walk miles

together every day and personally attended the needs of the people and rendered “service in its real sense. Gradually, the age old social order gave way to a ‘New Social Order’ and hence, a new a cultured, civilized and educated society related to the development of Tamil people began to emerge.

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