

Christian Contribution To Tamil Literature

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Abstract: The Christian missionaries studied Tamil language in order to propagate their religion. Henrique Henriques, Nobili, G.U. Pope, Constantine Joseph Beschi, Robert Caldwell, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, Francis Whyte Ellis, Samuel Vedanayagam Pillai, Henry Arthur Krishna Pillai, Vedanayagam Sastriyar, Abraham Pandithar had been the Christian campaigners and missionaries. Pope was along with Joseph Constantius Beschi, Francis Whyte Ellis, and Bishop Robert Caldwell one of the major scholars on Tamil. Ziegenbalg wrote a number of texts in Tamil he started translating the New Testament in 1708 and completed in 1711. They performed a remarkable position to the improvement of Tamil inclusive of the introduction of Prose writing. Christian Priest understood the need to learn the neighborhood language for effective evangelization. Moreover, they centered on Tamil literature in order to recognize the cultural heritage and spiritual traditions. The Priest learnt Tamil language and literature with an agenda and no longer out of love or passion or with an intention of contributing to the growth of the language. Tamil Christian Literature refers to the various epic, poems and other literary works based on the ethics, customs and principles of Christian religion. Christians both the catholic and Protestant missionaries have also birthed literary works. Tamil-Christian works have enriched the language and its literature. Thorough variety and quality of classical Tamil literature, Tamil language is described as the great classical traditions and literatures of the world. In 2004, the government of India declared Tamil language as classical language.

Key words: Christian - Missionaries - propagate - performed - evangelization - cultural heritage - Tamil language - Portuguese - Tamil press - indigenization - London Mission Society - Congregational - theology.

1. Introduction

The Christian missionaries studied Tamil language in order to propagate their religion. They grew to become part and parcel of the Tamil cultural milieu. Henrique Henriques, Nobili, G.U. Pope, Constantine Joseph Beschi, Robert Caldwell, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, Francis Whyte Ellis, Samuel Vedanayagam Pillai, Henry Arthur Krishna Pillai, Vedanayagam Sastriyar, Abraham Pandithar had been the Christian campaigners and evangelists.¹ They performed a remarkable contribution to the growth of Tamil literature of the introduction of Prose writing. Christian Priest comprehended the need to become familiar with the local language for effective evangelization. Moreover, they centered on Tamil literature in order to recognize the cultural heritage and spiritual traditions. The Priest learnt Tamil language and literature with an agenda and no longer out of love or passion or with an intention of contributing to the growth of Tamil language.²

2. Henrique Henriques (1520 – 1600)

Henrique Henriques was a Portuguese Jesuit priest and missionary who spent most of his life in missionary activities in South India. After his initial years in Goa, he moved to Tamil Nadu where he mastered Tamil and composed a few books including a dictionary. Henriques was born in 1520 in Vila Viçosa, Portugal. He joined the Franciscan order yet needed to leave as he was of Jewish ancestry. He later studied Canon Law at the University of Portugal till 1545. He entered the newly founded Society of Jesus on 7 October 1545, in Portugal and departed for India in 1546.³ He spent his initial a very long time at Goa and afterward moved to Punnakayal, near Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu by St. Francis Xavier. He was the main European Tamil scholar. A portion of his works in the Tamil language are not, at this point surviving, remembering a work for punctuation, a word reference, a booklet for confession and a religious history from the Creation to the Ascension. He strongly believed that books of religious doctrines should be in local languages and to this end he wrote books in Tamil. His efforts made Tamil the first non-European language to be printed in moveable type. Hence he is sometimes called “The Father of the Tamil Press”.⁴ After his death his mortal remains were buried in Our Lady of Snows Basilica in Tuticorin. His progress in the development of the community and his interests about the issues in the mission are explicit from the regular reports he kept in touch with his Superior General Henriques firmly felt that the mission must be effective using local languages.

To this end he arranged the printing of books on Christian doctrine in Tamil. Aside from being the first to produce a Tamil-Portuguese Dictionary, he set up the first Tamil press and printed books in Tamil script. As per him religious doctrines should be in local language. So he published books on Christianity in Tamil. The main such

book imprinted in Tamil script was 'Thambiran Vanakkam' (1578), a 16-page interpretation of the Portuguese "Doctrina Christam", printed at Quilon.⁵ It was followed by 'Kirisithiyaani Vanakkam' (1579). These were works of catechism, containing the basic prayers of Catholicism. Prior to this 'Cartilha', a Tamil prayer book printed in using Latin script, was imprinted in Lisbon by command of the Portuguese king and financed by the Paravars of Tuticorin who additionally assisted with scholarly assistance. He also printed 'Flos Sanctorum' in Tamil (1586). This book contains the lives of Saints. By his endeavors, Tamil became the first non-European language to be imprinted on a printing press. Hence, he is sometimes referred to as Father of the Tamil press.

3. Robert de Nobili (1577-1656):

In 1606, a Christian evangelist arrived in Madurai who was referred to better as 'Iyer'. His saffron robe, Sandal glue marks, "Kamandalam", "kudumi" and the holy string denoted the indigenization of an alien religion. Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656) was an Italian Jesuit evangelist came to Southern India. He used a novel method for transformation to preach Christianity, receiving numerous local customs of India which were, in his view, not as opposed to Christianity. Brought into the world in Montepulciano, Tuscany in September 1577, Roberto De Nobili arrived in Goa in western coast on 20 May 1605.⁶ He joined the Society of Jesus in 1597 and was appointed to the Indian mission in 1604. De Nobili introduced Tamil equivalents for names and rituals and he rehearsed vegetarianism. It is likely that he met here Fr Thomas Stephens, SJ, who had arrived in Goa in 1579, and was in the process of composing his *Krishupurana*.

After a short remain in Cochin at Kerala, he moved to Madurai in Tamil Nadu on November 1606.⁷ He soon called himself a "teacher of wisdom" and started to dress like a *Sannyasi*. Claiming noble parentage, he approached high-caste people, and eagerly engaged in dialogue with Hindu scholars about the truths of Christianity. Nobili mastered in Sanskrit, Telugu and Tamil languages and writing, with the assistance of his teacher, Shivadharm. He utilized "kovil" for a position of love, "arul" and "prasadam" for effortlessness, "master" for minister or educator, "Vedam" for the Bible, "pooja" for Mass. He adopted also local Indian customs, for example, shaving one's head and keeping only a tiny tuft. He wore a white dhoti and wooden shoes, to wear the vibe of a sanyasin. Another symbol he embraced was the wearing of a three-stringed thread across the chest. He interpreted the three-stringed thread as speaking to the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He wrote "Gnanopathesam", "aathmanirunyam", "anna nivaranam" and "thivviyananthirikai" in Tamil. Nobili was a pioneer in Tamil composition and even in the wake of achieving mature age and experiencing blurring vision he kept on composition. He was one of the first Europeans to gain a deep understanding of Sanskrit and Tamil.⁸ He composed Catechisms, apologetic works and philosophic discourses in Tamil, and contributed enormously to the improvement of modern Tamil prose writing. He died in 1656 at Mylapore. His success as a missionary was that the Christian population swelled from around 30,000 in 1656 to over two lakhs in 1706.

4. Robert Caldwell:

Bishop Caldwell first came to India as a member the London Mission Society. Robert Caldwell was born at Clady, then in County Antrim, Ireland, on 7th May 1814 to poor Scottish Presbyterian parents. The family moved to Glasgow and there he began work at the age of nine. Mostly self-taught, he returned to Ireland aged 15, living with an older brother in Dublin while studying art between 1829 and 1833.⁹ He arrived up in India at age 24, studied the local language to spread the word of Bible in a vernacular language, studies that led him to author a book on similar sentence structure of the South Indian languages. In his book, Caldwell suggested that there are Dravidian words in the Hebrew of the Old Testament, the old Greek language, and the spots named by Ptolemy. Caldwell married Eliza Mault, the daughter of another missionary posted in India. He served as assistant bishop of Tirunelveli from 1877.

For over forty years, Eliza worked in Idaiyangudi and Tirunelveli converting the people, particularly Tamil-speaking women. He set up the uniqueness of Tamil through his work "*Dravida Mozhigalin Oppilakkanam*". It was a relative Grammar of Dravidian Languages. He distinguished south Indian Brahmins with Indo-Europeans, which was mostly founded on his conviction that the Indo-Europeans had "higher mental blessings and higher limit with regards to civilization". Caldwell affirmed that the low-caste Chanar were not simply Tamil speakers but rather an indigenous Dravidian people, particular ethnically and, most fundamentally for him, religiously, from their high-rank oppressors, whom he alluded to as "Brahmanical Aryans".¹⁰ These wildly speculative claims, well outside the scope of linguistics, were intended "to develop a history which asserted that the indigenous Dravidians had been subdued and colonized by the Brahmanical Aryans". However, the first edition of Caldwell's grammar was "met with firm resistance" by the Chanars precisely because they "did not like the idea of being divorced from Brahmanical civilization", the very division Caldwell was hoping to exploit. The book has been described as being on occasion pejorative, outrageous, and somewhat paternalistic.¹¹ Yet, all in all, his studies represent to a

spearheading exertion to comprehend religions totally unfamiliar to the British mind. In the domain of Dravidian linguistics however, it stays a regarded work today. The Government of Tamil Nadu has made a dedication in his honor and a postage stamp has been given in his name. A sculpture of Caldwell was raised in 1967 near to Marina Beach, Chennai, as an endowment of the Church of South India.

5. G.U.Pope:

George Uglow Pope was born on 24 April 1820 in Bedeque, Prince Edward Island in Canada. His father was John Pope (1791–1863), of Padstow, Cornwall, a merchant who became a missionary, who emigrated to Prince Edward Island in 1818, and Catherine Uglow (1797-1867), of Stratton, north Cornwall. The family moved to Nova Scotia, St. Vincent's prior to getting back to Plymouth, England in 1826 where John Pope became a prosperous merchant and ship-owner. George Uglow Pope was an Anglican Christian evangelist and Tamil scholar who spent through 40 years in Tamil Nadu and translated many Tamil texts into English. His famous interpretations incorporated those of the Tirukkural and Thiruvvasagam. He later took to educating, running his own school in Ooty for a while and afterward moving to head the Bishop Cotton Boys' School in Bangalore and subsequent to getting back to England filled in as a Lecturer at Balliol College, Oxford. He left for South India in 1839 and arrived at Sawyerpuram near to Tuticorin with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Pope started studying Tamil as a teenager in England and during the voyage to India and Pope later turned into a scholar of Tamil, Sanskrit and Telugu. In 1841 he was appointed by the Church of England and he married Mary Carver, daughter of another Anglican priest. Getting back to Tanjore in 1851, teaching at St Peter's School, he found himself in conflict with other missionaries. In 1855, a Tamil priest Vedanayakam Shastri who was a disciple of Schwartz and apoet in the court of Maharaja Serfoji was lashed openly bringing about a division of Tamil church liberated from the Anglican church prompting the abdication of Pope.¹² He founded a seminary at Sawyerpuram for training Anglican Tamil clergy but this too ran into trouble and he decided to move to Ooty in 1859. Here he established a grammar school for European children, which is presently home to the Government Arts School and Stone house.

6. Contribution to Tamil Literature:

The grammar school at Stone house cottage was opened by the Bishop of Madras on 2 July 1858 with Pope as Principal. The school moved somewhere else as the structure was offered to the Trustees of the Lawrence Asylum in March 1859. Stone house bungalow was then used to house the male refuge detainees and the Grammar school moved to new premises in Lovedale on 1 April 1869. He likewise established Holy Trinity Church in Ooty. Pope was alluded to with deference by the Tamilians as "Pope Aiyar". A statue on the Chennai beach recognizes him for his contribution to the understanding and promotion of the Tamil language. Pope was along with Joseph Constantius Beschi, Francis Whyte Ellis, and Bishop Robert Caldwell one of the significant scholars on Tamil. His first work was A Catechism of Tamil Grammar (1842). G.U. Pope completed the translation of "Tirukkural" in September 1886. His variant of "Kural" comprises of introduction, notes, translation, grammar, concordance and lexicon. This work contains the Latin interpretation and English interpretation by Constanzo Beschi and F.W. Ellis. He had, by February 1893, deciphered Naaladiyaar, a didactic work of moral sayings in quatrains, 400 in number in 40 chapters, each by a Jain ascetic, according to a Tamil tradition. The translation of "Tiruvvasakam" was his artistic magnum opus published in 1900.¹³ Some of the other works by G.U. Pope includes a larger grammar of the Tamil language, a Text – book of Indian History, St. John in the Desert, A Catalog of the Tamil books in the library of the British gallery and others. He got the gold medal named the Royal Asiatic Society in 1906. He died on 12th February, 1908.

7. Constantine Joseph Beschi:

Constantine Joseph Beschi also known under his Tamil name of 'Veeramamunivar', was an Italian Jesuit priest, missionary in South India, and Tamil scholar. He was an evangelist and furthermore a good classical writer of Tamil literature. He was born in Castiglione delle Stiviere, Beschi got his secondary education in the Jesuits' High School at Mantua. After becoming a Jesuit in 1698, he was trained in Ravenna and Bologna from where he requested and acquired, from Superior General Michelangelo Tamburini, authorization to be shipped off the Jesuit mission at Madurai in South India. Sailing from Lisbon he arrived at Goa in October 1710, from where he proceeded immediately to South India. He arrived in Madurai in May 1711.¹⁴

He composed a grammar for the common use of Tamil and furthermore accumulated a few Tamil dictionaries. His most prominent political work is the 'Thembavani' and it implies the unfading Garland. It is an extra ordinary epic poem comprises of 3615 stanzas which discusses the way of salvation and the life of Saint Joseph. It is viewed as the old-style Tamil writing. He also composed a "Prabandham", called "Kavalur Kalambagam", a grammatical

treatise called "Thonnool", a guide book for catechists with the title "Vedhiyar Ozukkam" and "Paramarthaguruvin Kathai". Thembavani is a proof that he had a positive way to deal with Hinduism, as he regularly utilizes expressions, thoughts and legends identified with Hinduism. Beschi also translated "Thirukkural" in Latin and it was simply because of the appreciation over Tamil culture. It was an eye opener for European learned people, finding truth and excellence in Tamil writing.

8. Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg:

The ascent of Protestantism and a blast of interpretations of the new and Old Testament was occurred in the sixteenth century. Ziegenbalg composed number of texts in Tamil and he started translating the New Testament in 1708 and finished in 1711. In any case, his work was introduced to Christian on a variety of grounds. Later he started to translate Old Testament. A Printing press from Denmark named society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) approached to help him in printing the book. At the time of his death, he had proceeded with the work up to the book of Ruth. His works like "Needhi Venpa" (moral quatrains), "Kondrai Vendan", "Ulaga Needhi" (world good) and his books on Hinduism and Islam were printed later after his death in Europe and Madras separately.¹⁶

9. Francis Whyte Ellis (1777 – 1819)

Francis Whyte Ellis was a scholar both in Tamil and Sanskrit. He and his companions were keen on finding out about the different parts of Indian life and publishing works on Indian languages. He was appointed as the collector of Madras in 1810. South Indian Property, Hindu Law, a fake French Veda, analysis on Thirukkural was a part of his works. He demonstrated that the "Vedam" was not an interpretation but rather a unique work of the Jesuit Priest Robert de Nobili, written in 1621 for changing Hindus over to Christianity. His monograph, "YazurVedam" was published in Asiatic Journal in 1822.¹⁷ His talks on Hindu Law at the Madras Literary Society were distributed after his death. He also translated 18 chapters of "Arathupaal" into English in a non – metrical verse of which 13 chapters were published by the college press during his lifetime. He composed three dissertations on Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam.

10. Henry Alfred Krishnapillai

Henry Alfred Krishnapillai (1827–1900) was a well-known poet in Tamil language. Krishna Pillai was born in 1827 at Karaiyiruppu, Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu. He was born into an orthodox Hindu family belonging to Vaishnava tradition of Hinduism and however later converted to Christianity. He received his early education in Tamil grammar and literature in the village. Even after his conversion, he retained his Hindu surname. He was a refined Tamil teacher and consequently after his conversion tried to deal with Tamil literary works. In May 1853, he moved to Sawyerpuram, a Christian village. The settlement was established by the Society for Propagation of the Gospel There Krishnapillai was designated as a Tamil educator by Bishop Robert Caldwell. It was in Sawyerpuram that he initially experienced Christianity through his companions and at last was immersed an Anglican in the St Thomas Church in Mylapore, Chennai. He was dedicated Henry Arthur through his absolution however he actually held his Hindu name Krishna Pillai.

Later in 1875, he was designated as a Tamil intellectual at Church Missionary Society (CMS) College at Tirunelveli. After his retirement, Krishnapillai tried to compose Tamil Christian works of art along the lines of Hindu epics. Krishnapillai is notable to utilize analogies from Hindu script in his Christian compositions. His Christian hymns are as yet well known among Tamil Protestants. These hymns are comparative in style to Hindu script Tevaram. Hence, he went through the 16 years composing the book 'Rakshanya Yatrikam' (the journey of salvation, 1894). This work was designed according to John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. All things considered, it was anything but an interpretation yet a transformation of the story in Tamil. This work is considered as his magnum opus. He had perused the Pilgrim's Progress even before his translation and had intended to retell the story in Tamil verses. The work itself took 16 years to finish and is one of best works of Tamil literature of the nineteenth century. However, he started working on it only in 1878 to appear sequentially in Friendly Instructor. He fell ill with malaria in 1879, and then, with encouragement from his friends, Krishnapillai decided to compile the work in an epic form similar to the Tamil Ramayana. After 16 years, it was shipped off print in 1894 and is viewed as quite possibly the main Tamil poetry works of the nineteenth century. In addition to this magnum opus, Krishnapillai composed a few different books in Tamil on Christianity. In spite of the fact that he was a changed over Christian, he utilized numerous analogies from Hindu text in his work. He is in some cases alluded to as "Christian Kamban". A part of the hymns he formed are as yet predominant among Tamil Protestants. His songs depended on Hindu messages, for example, Tevaram.¹⁸

11. Samuel Vedanayagam Pillai (1826–1889)

Vedanayagam Pillai was born in Thanjavur on 11 October 1826 to Savarimuthu Pillai and Arockia Mariammal. His father was his first tutor and later he learned Tamil and English under a tutor named Thayagaraja Pillai. On completing his education, Vedanayagam joined the judicial court of Trichinopoly as record keeper and soon was elevated as a translator. He learnt Sanskrit, French and Latin during his tenure and then cleared his law exams. He became the District Muncif of Mayuram (presently Mayiladuthurai) and served there for 13 years. Vedanayagam showed a passion for writing from early age. He translated law books to Tamil and his ethical book called Neethi Nool was well accepted. In total he wrote 16 books of which Prathapa Mudaliar Charithram is regarded as the first Tamil Novel. The novel reflects Vedanayagam's own ideals of women's liberation and education. In spite of his occasions, he talked energetically about independence of woman and feminism. He was conceived and stayed a Roman Catholic till his death. His hereditary line presently generally remains generally in Malaysia, India and Singapore. He was made due by his child Samuel A. Pillai who was accordingly made due by his children Maria Joseph Francis Pillai and Maundy Jacob (MJ) Francis Pillai. His last realized legacy stays to be Roach Francis Pillai. His writing is commended and still rehearsed by celebrated artists and scholars around the world. His work has showed up in numerous new Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada films and melodies. Vedanayagam indicated an energy for composing from early age.¹⁹

12. Vedanayagam Sastriyar

Vedanayagam Sastriyar of Thanjavur, poet-lyricist, court poet in the palace of Serfoji II. He is a poet and writer with 133 books and more than 500 lyrics to his credit. His literary works were divided into two categories namely lyrical compositions and literary pieces. A lyrical composition includes collections of lyrics and hymns such as, "Jebamalai" and "Gnanappadal Keerthanaigal". When he was 25, he composed his magnum opus "Bethlehem Kuravanji". It was a minor epic. He wrote "Gnanth Thatcha Nadagam" and "Gnana Nondi Naddagam". His songs were based on "Thevaram" and "Thiruppugal". It was indistinguishable from "Thirikuda Rasappa Kavirayar's" "Kuttrala Kuravanji". He composed almost 120 works. Other than these, he composed numerous Keertana is and every one of those who were still by and by in Tamil Churches today.²⁰

13. Theological Evaluation

Sastriyar was a great poet in Tamil literature and he was especially influenced by other Bhakti literatures also. The translation of the Bible (1717) attracted him very much. The word utilized in translation was "Paraparan". Indian Christian Theologians called Sastriyar as Chakkari, Appasamy and Chenchiah. Sastriyar has seen his God in the light of other literature. Sastriyar was the contemporary of Thyagaraja, the spiritualist singer and melodist par excellence (1767 – 1847). One of the main criticisms against him is that he had used and fused more Sanskrit words than the expressions of local people. The language of the average citizens was completely disregarded. Regardless of the above inadequacies Sastriyar's refrains are consolidated in Christian Churches and during worship today. Sastriyar has introduced and popularized a number of phrases describing the significance of God. His songs might be natural since it has simple message, able idyllic craftsmanship, lavishness of the Tamil utilization and reasonable tunes. In light of these angles, we reach a resolution that Vedanayagam Sastriyar's literary contributions have his profound dedication and the desire of announcing Gospel to his fellow mates. Sastriyar devoted his life for the wonder of God. Sastriyar's songs are as yet continued in the Churches even today. It looks new, alive and dynamic. It became the life that he had with God and that sharing of intimate divine experience into the words of people brought such a great inspiration to the posterity.²¹

14. Abraham Pandithar

Rao Sahib Abraham Pandithar was brought into the world on second August 1859. He was a Tamil music composer and a traditional medical practitioner from Tirunelveli. He is familiar for his patronage of various Tamil musicians and his persuasive studies with respect to the cause and evolution of traditional Tamil music. He was born in Sambavar Vadakarai near to Surandai in Tirunelveli district to a Tamil Christian family. He was the child of Muthusamy Pandithar and Annammal. They were called as Pandithar Maruthuvar family or Pandithar Kulam. He learned at CVES Normal Teachers Training School at Dindigul and became a teacher in a similar College at 1876. He was keen on Siddha medicine. In 1879, he met Siddhar Karvandhar and became his student. At that point he went to Tanjore and worked as a Tamil Teacher in Lady Napier Girls School. His wife named Gnanavadivu Ponnammal was the headmistress in a similar school.

In 1890 he left his teaching job to do investigate on medicine full time. He began a homestead outside Tanjore for developing therapeutic plants. It was called as Pandithar thottam. He also started a clinic the Karunanidhi

medical Hall at his residence in Tanjore. He got 'Rao Sahib' award in the year 1909. Pandithar got interested in Tamil music and he started studying it through the publication of Silapathikaram by U.V. Swaminathalyer in 1892. He learnt traditional music and western music from Sadayandi Bhattar and A.G. Pichaimuthu Pillai. He organised a music association named 'Sangeetha Vidhyalaya Mahajana Sangam'. He organised six music conferences during 1912 – 1914. In 1917 he published his research on Tamil music named "Karunamirdha Sagaram".²² He also published 'Karunamirdha Sagaram Thirattu' which is a collection of Tamil practice. He translated various keerthanais into Tamil. He presented his research of All India Music conference at Baroda in 1916. He was also a prolific composer who composed several kritis in pure ragas in praise of Jesus Christ.

15. Conclusion

Christian Missionaries of the colonial era have done multifaceted services of immense value to India, particularly to the erstwhile Madras Presidency. They were all learned people, who assumed control over the Gospel for its proliferation all through the world. These Missionaries were incredible humanists, knowledgeable in the Gospel and highly disciplined workers. In Tamil Nadu various communities began to embrace Christianity. These communities conveyed the caste with alongside them. Tamil Christian Literature alludes to the different epic, poems and other literary works dependent on the ethics, customs and principles of Christian religion. Christians both the Catholic and Protestant missionaries have also published literary works. Tamil-Christian works have enriched the language and its literature. Intensive the assortment and nature of old-style Tamil writing, Tamil language is portrayed as the incredible old-style customs and literatures of the world. In 2004, the government of India announced Tamil language as classical language.

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