

CONTEXTUALISING MISSIONARY ENGAGEMENT: TRANSITION FROM CHRISTIANISATION OF INDIA TO INDIANISATION OF CHRISTIANITY IN COLONIAL SOUTH INDIA- EDINBURGH CONFERENCE AND AFTER

M. Christhu Doss*

INTRODUCTION

It may be argued that in times of conflict, monuments and other historical structures are destroyed or whole communities converted in one way or the other to conqueror's religion. The destruction of Hindu temples and monuments by Muslim rulers and vice-versa was a historical reality in the medieval period.¹ Colonial hegemony gave the colonisers not only the power to set the pattern of Indian historiography but also to take up issues related to religion,² general progress and modernity to the 'subject' peoples.³ Not surprisingly then, there were formal links between Christianity and the British Raj.⁴ Missionaries too had easy access to the highest government offices in British India.⁵ When religious doctrines were considered as the essence of world religions, the concept of true religion began to appear in the scene.⁶ Nevertheless, the ironies of colonialism were very much visible.⁷

In addition to this, in the early days of missionary activity, the attitudes of the missionaries were extremely aggressive.⁸ It was firmly believed that Christianity was right, eternal and of God. All other religions were wrong, transitory, and if not of the devil, strongly conditioned in that direction. The attitude of foreign missionaries with few exceptions was the attitude of superiority

* M. Christhu Doss (Ph. D., J.N.U.) is working on a project called *Towards Freedom*, Vol. 10, Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi with Prof. Sucheta Mahajan as its editor. I thank Prof. Sucheta Mahajan, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and my friends Shobana Sinha, Ashish Koul and Sam Raj for their valuable suggestions and comments in making the final draft of this paper.

¹ Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 153.

² Hira Singh, *Colonial Hegemony and Popular Resistance: Princes, Peasants, and Paramount Power*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 35.

³ Cf. Michael Mann, "'Torchbearers Upon the Path of Progress': Britain's Ideology of a 'Moral and Material Progress' in India," edited by Herald Fischer-Tine and Michael Mann, in *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India*, (London: Wimbledon Publishing Company, 2004), 4-5.

⁴ Gerald Studdert-Kennedy, *British Christians, Indian Nationalists and the Raj*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 94.

⁵ Dick Kooiman, *Conversion and Social Equality in India: The London Missionary Society in South Travancore in the 19th Century*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989), 9.

⁶ Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post Colonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 38.

⁷ Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 134.

⁸ Sometimes, missionaries, making use of their proximity to influential converts, would preach the Christian faith in front of Hindu temples and other public places with deliberate intentions and motives, hurting the feelings and sentiments of the people of other faiths. This attitude of missionaries towards other faiths directly and indirectly induced and instigated communal tension between faiths. A missionary from Church Missionary Society shares his experience in the following lines: "The opening words give the whole tone to the preaching, and as my companion read on 'you must not worship Brahma-you must not worship Vishnu-you must not worship Shiva-all this is sin.'" See *Madras Church Missionary Record*, (Madras: C.M.S., Oct.-Dec. 1875), 310-311. Also see Clifford Manshardt, *Christianity in a Changing India*, (Bombay: Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 1932), 20-21.

and their preaching was considered mostly a message of condemnation.⁹ Nevertheless, in their enterprise to win the ‘souls’ of the marginalised people, the missionaries often came into direct contact with them. Gradually, the missionaries began to wield a great deal of influence in the lives of the depressed classes, leading to the creation of quite a few local churches. In due course of time, 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.¹⁰

The foundations of Protestant Christianity were laid by the works of Martin Luther (1483-1586), Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), and John Calvin (1509-1564). The history of Protestantism in India began¹¹ with the arrival of two Germans, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, and Henry Plutschau in Tranquebar in 1706, sent by the Danish King, Frederick IV¹² with the twin objectives viz., evangelisation¹³ and Christianisation. Another notable figure in this context was Christian Frederick Schwartz, a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.) who chose to work in¹⁴ Tirunelveli, the southernmost point of Tamil Nadu (Tinnevely in Missionary Records).¹⁵

In time, Tirunelveli emerged as an important centre for Protestant missionary activities. In Tirunelveli district, for every hundred of the population eighty-four were Hindus, ten were Christians and six were Muhammadans. Indeed, here the proportion of Christians to the total population was higher than in any other Madras district. In the decade 1900—1911 the Christian population (almost entirely Indian Christians) in the district increased by 17 per cent.¹⁶ Thus, the southern tip of the peninsula was fully exposed to the impact of missionaries’ social action. Village after village accepted the new faith for various reasons partly constituted by material and partly spiritual compulsions. The followers of Jesus Christ in this religious process were mainly drawn from Shanars or Nadars, a toddy tapping caste, Pariahs and the Paravas, a fishing community of the coast.¹⁷

MODERN MISSIONARY MOVEMENT AND WORLD MISSIONARY CONFERENCE

According to J. P. Jones, a missionary scholar, there were fifty-two hundred Protestant missionaries in India--men and women of all shades of Protestant belief, with all kinds and degrees of equipment for the work. He observed that never was the missionary better equipped, on the whole, to render effective missionary service, and never was there a keener demand for

⁹ Clifford Manshardt, *Christianity in a Changing India*, (Bombay: Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 1933), 20-21.

¹⁰ M. Christhu Doss, *Protestant Missionaries and Depressed Classes in Southern Tamil Nadu 1813-1947*, (Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis) (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2010), 1-5

¹¹ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India 1707-1858*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 28-29.

¹² D. Dennis Hudson, *Protestant Origins in India: Tamil Evangelical Christians, 1706-1835*, (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. / Richmond: Curzon Press Ltd. 2000), 30-31.

¹³ Brian Stanley, *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, (Cambridge: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Co., /Curzon Press Ltd., 2001), 2.

¹⁴ Cf. Walker, “The Tinnevely Mission,” in *The Harvest Field*, (Madras: Addison & Co., Oct., 1892, 121-125.

¹⁵ V. S. Azariah, *India and Christian Movement*, (Madras: Christian Literature Society for India, 1934), 63-64.

¹⁶ H. R. Pate, *Madras District Gazetteers: Tinnevely*, (Madras, Government Press, 1917), 88.

¹⁷ M. Christhu Doss, *Protestant Missionaries and Depressed Classes in Southern Tamil Nadu 1813-1947*, 2-6.

missionaries of the best training and noblest character. In fact, missionaries were supposed to possess the following characteristics and qualifications:

He must of course be possessed of distinguished piety. The missionary must be a man or woman of culture and of constructive thought. They tend to leave every- thing, even the most cherished things of life and of thought, with an interrogation point stamped upon it. It is not enough that a missionary love the people; he must appreciate them also. He must also be a leader of men. It is of much comfort and help to him in this particular to know that the people of India have a genius for docility.¹⁸

Furthermore, foreign missionary conferences also began to take place in South India, United States and in Europe, in which representatives of all Protestant missionary societies came together to discuss the common interests of the cause of evangelisation. One of the most significant of these was the World Missionary Conference, held in Edinburgh in 1910. The conference played a crucial role in the history of Christianisation in India. One of the outstanding features of the conference according to V. S. Azariah was the recognition it gave to the church in the mission field. According to many Indian Christians this recognition gave birth to a new era in the missionary world. Thus, the indigenous church was frankly acknowledged to be the greatest, the most potent, and the most natural factor in the “Indianisation” of evangelism in the country.¹⁹

Growing out of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference, a Continuation Committee of forty members was constituted, representing the Protestant denominations of the world. Thus for the first time the missionary societies, across the globe were joining together for the elimination of the differences among themselves in pursuit of a “world-conquest.”²⁰ Accordingly, among the topics considered at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh that of the missionary message in relation to the non-Christian world occupied a crucial place due to various socio-political reasons.²¹ The Continuation Committee later developed into the International Missionary Council which later on created few National Missionary Councils including the National Missionary Council of India.²² Charles F. Ossory, a missionary writer, points out: “The first impression produced on many thoughtful minds by the announcement of an assembly calling itself the World Missionary Conference was a feeling of repulsion.”²³ Nevertheless, the message of Protestant Christianity to the followers of the Hindu religion in South India started spreading without much objection.

FROM TIRUNELVELI TO DORNAKAL: A ROAD TO NEO-SANSKRITISATION

¹⁸ Cf. J. P. Jones, “The Protestant Missionary Propaganda in India,” in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 8, No. (London: Scholars Press, 1 Jan., 1915), 18-44.

¹⁹ V. S. Azariah, *India and Christian Movement*, 81.

²⁰ Cf. James L. Barton, “The Modern Missionary,” in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (London: Scholars Press, Jan., 1915), 1-17.

²¹ Cf. Geo. Heber Jones, “The Edinburgh Conference and the Missionary Message in Its Relation to Non-Christian Religions,” in *The Journal of Race Development*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (Worcester: Kraus Reprint Co., Oct., 1910), 147-155.

²² Azariah, *India and Christian Movement*, 73.

²³ Cf. Charles F. Ossory, “The World Missionary Conference and Some of Its Lessons,” in *The Irish Church Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 12, (Oct., 1910), 273-281.

In Tirunelveli the Church Missionary Society (hereafter C.M.S.) under Reverend Charles Theophilus Edwald Rhenius (popularly known as C.T.E. Rhenius) started its proselytisation project in the year 1820. In fact, he was the pioneer of the C.M.S. Tinnevelly Mission.²⁴ It has been observed that in order to protect poor converted Christians from the tyranny and oppression of the Hindu landlords, he had secured numerous properties, by grant and founded Christian villages with Christian names. These villages, even today are identified by their association with the missionaries' names. Here he settled in communities all those who agreed to conform to the rules of conduct and religion which he prescribed. Thus, slowly and steadily southern Tamil Nadu became a "harvest field" for the Anglican missionaries.

Another important personality in this context, Reverend John Thomas, considered by many as a missionary of unusual power, made his home in the heart of the palmyra district, in the dry and sandy plain of the south-east Tirunelveli. Despite encountering formidable difficulties, he was successful in leading a vast section of the Nadar (earlier known as Shanar) population into the "flock" of Christ. Similarly, Reverend T. G. Ragland, commonly known as the "Apostle of North Tinnevelly," Bishop Sargent and local Christians like V. Vedanayagam and W. T. Sathianadhan made decisive contributions to the church history of South India. Bishop Sargent's easy command of vernacular (Tamil) made him eminently suited for the office of chief pastor in the native church.²⁵ His pioneering efforts to the cause could be gauged by his statement on his death bed, "If I had a thousand lives, I would give them all to missionary work."²⁶

While churches have existed in the Middle East, India, Central Asia and other parts of the world from the beginnings of Christian history, the expansion of the Christian churches in Asia as a result of Western-led missions and then through the work of the emerging churches themselves by local converts was an extremely complex historical process. In this regard missionaries of Church Missionary Society argue that: "Through the providential facilities afforded by the social condition of a large proportion of the people, and the 'labours' of missionaries, the native Christian community in Tinnevelly has grown from small beginnings to be the largest in India."²⁷ Perhaps one of the most important figures in this respect was Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah (1874-1945), Bishop of Dornakal and the first Indian to become an Anglican Bishop, a native of southern Tamil Nadu. He played a leading part not only in the Christianisation of depressed class masses but also in their emancipation from an oppressive caste-structure. He was often seen as a "representative" figure by both British officials and the Indian nationalists. He was instrumental in the initiation and continuation of the ecumenical conversations which led to the formation of the Church of South India (C.S.I.) in 1947. Azariah's initiatives for both Indianisation and indigenisation of Christianity have been examined in a later section of the article.

The more the Western missionaries spoke about the teachings of Christ, the more the local converts from the depressed classes in southern India were exposed to a new kind of initiation, leadership, and other activities of the Christian faith. This new direction by Western missionaries with the Christian teaching coupled with Western ideas, opened up vistas to create a new

²⁴ Walker, "The Tinnevelly Mission," 124.

²⁵ Walker, Tinnevelly Mission, 124-125.

²⁶ Walker, Tinnevelly Mission, 125.

²⁷ *Madras Church Missionary Record*, (Madras: CMS, Oct.-Dec. 1875), 275.

consciousness among the people in general and converts in particular. This consciousness over a period of time made the people question the existing order of society, which later on gave birth to social awakening movements including breast-cloth controversy, temple entry, self-respect movement, and so on and so forth. It is to be stated here that these conscious movements, overtly and covertly contributed to their social and economic upward mobility or “sanskritisation.”²⁸ However, once the missionary enterprise devolved into Indian hands, there occurred significant changes in the theological and ideological discourse of the congregation with special reference to Christian identity. I propose to call this process the **neo-Sanskritisation** process. New interpretations and teachings regarding Biblical Israel and its rulers became the order of the day in most of the churches of the Protestant denomination. As a result, the converts gained a new identity whereby, they started associating themselves more with “Western” Christian culture, replacing the earlier Sanskritisation. In this way modern Christians chose to identify themselves not with any indigenous “superior” caste but rather directly with the community of their God, Jesus Christ by arguing: “We are spiritual Israelites.” In this manner they sought to reject the socio-cultural hierarchy in India.

WESTERNISATION OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE MAKING

Although missionary scholars like Robert Eric Frykenberg, Norman Etherington, David Maxwell, Geoffrey Oddie, Dick Kooiman, and others have referred to the indigenous agents’ participation in the proselytisation work, much more attention needs to be focused on them. Etherington argues: “The role of indigenous agents in the work of conversion is undoubtedly the most significant reason why a simple equation between mission and empire is not possible. But for the most part, these remarkable indigenous foot soldiers of mission-evangelists, pastors, catechists, and Bible women-remain unnamed in the sources.”²⁹ Hence, the role of converts in the “project” of Indianisation of Christianity was considerably low than the ratio of their population, once again reflecting the “highhandedness” of Western missionaries.

Furthermore, the missionaries in an aggressive phase of evangelisation started sowing the “seed” for the propagation of gospel in one way or the other in areas where people from other faiths resided. Reverend Bernard Lucas commented: “We now seek not to save the soul of the Hindu but the soul of India.”³⁰ While the nexus between the Government and the missionary societies was not always clearly visible, however, the latter’s involvement in a wide area of activity including the educational, medical, industrial, and other philanthropic work necessarily brought them in contact with the Government. The Government freely acknowledged that it was to its advantage to have Christian institutions where it could send the sick and the poor, and the missions, in turn, also acknowledged that the co-operation and help of the Government was of great advantage to it in its efforts.³¹ As a matter of fact, missionaries started functioning as an arbitrator in dispute, the adviser in troubles, the doctor in sickness and the benefactor in

²⁸ M. N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society Amongst the Coorgs of South India*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 32.

²⁹ Norman Etherington and David Maxwell, “Missions and Empire,” in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, (Boston: E. J. Brill, Vol. 34, Fasc. ½, Feb. - May, 2004, 194-199.

³⁰ J. P. Jones, “The Protestant Propaganda in India,” 21-22.

³¹ File No. 1, *World Missionary Conference 1910-Report of Committees-VII- Mission and Government*, 23-37, INDIA- The Policy of Religious Neutrality- Prevention and co-operations between Government and Mission-Feudatory States-Social Political Aspirations- Missionary Influence on Legislature- Mission Books and Conference, 23-37, U.T.C. Papers, Bangalore.

distress.³² The system formerly in vogue in Tirunelveli was that of “stationed missionaries,” each in independent charge of his own assigned “district,” the headquarters of which was the missionary bungalow and compound. Over a period of time, this bungalow was used as an established central home for resident missionaries. From this central home, the European missionary visited the congregations of his “district” at regular periods, examined the schools, baptised catechumens, and superintended the work of his subordinates. Under the primitive order of things the “district missionary” within the limits of his “district” was pastor, administrator, teacher, trainer, evangelist and paymaster, all in one. The “district” was further divided into the “department,” and the new system carried the departmental plan into all its logical issues. Pastoral department, preparandi department, financial department, and evangelical department were the departments which functioned under the Western missionaries. However, it may be observed that Indian missionaries, with few exceptions were not given any responsibility in any of the above mentioned departments.³³ Hence, the missionaries were criticised by local converts for their “monopolistic” attitude towards church administration.

The duties of the pastoral department included overseeing the working of the circle committees, presiding over the meetings of the district council and executive committee, and engaging in a systematic visitation and superintending the work of the pastors and lay-agents.³⁴ Most of the members in these departments were Europeans. It is, indeed, very difficult to know as to how far the converts and national Christians realised and experienced the real devolution of responsibility with reference to pastoral, preparandi, financial and evangelical departments.

In addition to this, missionaries most of the time argued that the failure of the local church was chiefly due to the practice of the Hindu converts of contracting debt. Ward, a missionary says: “A Hindu convert makes provision for the future; he borrows to supply his most common wants and then evades payment as long as he can.” Thus, slowly and steadily these imperialistic forms of institutionalisation with its hierarchical structure paved the way for the appearance of “Westernisation” of Christianity. Furthermore, missionaries’ attempt to “civilize” converts raised many culturally sensitive issues. This is evident from the fact that missionaries considered that the cost of living of converts was much increased by the “civilisation” which always followed in the wake of Christianity.³⁵

Hudson a missionary of C.M.S. says: “We are indeed very far from wishing our converts to adopt European habits.... We should not like to see our people attend God’s house insufficiently and dirtily clothed. We do not wish them to rest content with the unwholesome and wretched hovels in which the poorer Hindus are accustomed to live.” Apparently, the way in which missionaries used certain terms like “cleanliness,” “domestic purity,” and “order” among others raised many issues regarding purity- pollution concept.³⁶ Nevertheless, Robert Caldwell, a missionary-cum Bishop observed that the local Christians in South India in general and Tinnevely (Tirunelveli) in particular, had not on becoming Christians denationalised themselves

³² Walker, “The Tinnevely Mission,” 125-126.

³³ Walker, “Tinnevely Mission,” 129. Also see Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society*, Vol. II, (London: Church Missionary Society, Salisbury Square, 1899), 494.

³⁴ Walker, “Tinnevely Mission,” 125-127.

³⁵ Cf. J. Hudson, “The Native Church,” in *The Harvest Field*, (Madras: Addison & Co., January 1888), 193-195.

³⁶ Eugene Stock, *The History of Church Missionary Society*, Vol. II, (London: Church Missionary Society, Salisbury Square, 1899), 494-495.

by adopting the English dress or English mode of life.³⁷ As years passed by, converts perceived the missionaries' attitude towards converts as to how to spend money and how not, what to eat and what not, what to wear and what not and what to do and what not, as "policing talk." For instance, Hudson observed: "We have shown that to some extent the expenses of Christians are increased, but there is no doubt that much money is wasted in a foolish attempt to imitate the habits of Englishmen." Regarding food habits Hudson commented: "It is very desirable that all native Christians should live on the ordinary food of the district where they dwell."³⁸

IDENTITY AND POLITICS OF INDIANISATION OF CHRISTIANITY: MYTH AND REALITY

Indian missionaries like Azariah were criticised by Mahatma Gandhi for the strategies adopted by them to propagate Christianity and indeed, it cannot be denied that the missionaries' cross-cultural communications did not make any constructive impact on Indian society. Many a times, Western missionaries had to face objections not only from the people belonging to other faiths but from the so-called national Christians at large. This was partly due to Western missions' suspected relationship towards native missionaries, lack of openness, absence of devolution of responsibility and above all their spiritual or cultural hegemony. In the words of Antonio Gramsci:

Cultural hegemony is neither monolithic nor unified rather it is a complex of layered social structures (classes). Each has a "mission" (purpose) and an internal logic, allowing its members to behave in a particular way that is different from that of the members of the other social classes, while also coexisting with these other classes. Because of their different social missions, the classes will be able to unite into a greater whole, a society, with a greater social mission. This greater, societal mission is different from the specific missions of the individual classes, because it assumes and includes them to itself, the whole.³⁹

Hence, in Gramsci's terms, the class which wishes to become hegemonic has to nationalise itself.⁴⁰ To counter Western missions' cultural and spiritual hegemony, national Christians began to adopt a new approach. Among them the prominent one was Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah.

Even though Western missionaries followed different strategies and styles to preach their faith, their methodologies and perspectives were severely criticised by Indian converts due to various reasons as they could see a sense of superiority and hegemonic spirit in them. Indian missionaries like Azariah had different perspective about evangelisation. In Susan Billington Harper's words: "Azariah had an altogether different perspective which involved both indigenising Christianity within the vast Indian subcontinent, and transcending both in India and

³⁷ *Madras Church Missionary Record*, (Madras: CMS, Oct.-Dec., 1875), 273-275.

³⁸ J. Hudson, "The Native Church," 196-198. Also see Dewan Bahadur A. S. Appaswamy Pillai, *Fifty Years' Pilgrimage of a Convert*, (London: Church Missionary Society, Salisbury Square / Madras: The Diocesan Press, 1924), 140-141.

³⁹ Antonio Gramsci, Joseph A. Buttigieg (ed.), *Prison notebooks*, Vol.3 (New York City: Columbia University Press, 2007), 233-238.

⁴⁰ Cf. Romila Thapar, "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity," in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 230-231.

the world the divisions that blunted the central Christian message and confused those still in need of receiving it.”⁴¹

In fact, Azariah was considered as one of the most crucial leaders of grassroots movements of conversion to Christianity in India during the early twentieth century. He was the first and only native Indian Bishop of an Anglican diocese from 1912 until his death in 1945. Brian Stanley observes that Azariah was one of the popular leaders of Christianity in rural Andhra, an esteemed builder of Protestant unification within India and as mentioned earlier, a pioneer in the Christian ecumenical movement. He was considered a man who was always in the middle between different languages, different castes, different religious denominations and different cultures.⁴² Azariah, significantly spoke twice at the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910. In his first speech, on 15 June, he argued that: “There were 100 million Indians beyond the reach of any mission and claimed that there were 50 million untouchables who are ready to hear the Gospel and join the Church.”⁴³

Similarly, Azariah’s second talk delivered in the evening session on 20 June was on the conference agenda viz., “The Problem of Co-operation between Foreign and Native Workers. “ Interestingly, Azariah’s address began with the statement that: “The problem of race relationships is one of the most serious problems confronting the church today.”⁴⁴(However, the question of race did not get much attention from the participants of the World Missionary Conference as Western missionaries failed to see that race and caste are different entities). Azariah went on to complain of certain aloofness, a lack of mutual understanding and openness, a great lack of frank intercourse and friendliness between European missionaries and national Christians. He cited examples of experienced Indian national missionaries who had never been invited to share a meal with any of their European brethren, and of European missionaries who had never dreamt of visiting the homes of their Indian colleagues. He commented that friendship was more than condescending love and remarked that: “Too often you promise us thrones in heaven, but will not offer us chairs in your drawing rooms.”⁴⁵ These sentiments were later echoed by Mahatma Gandhi in one of his writings in the March 21, 1929 issue of *Young India*, where he commented: “Christianity in India has been inextricably mixed up for the last one hundred and fifty years with the British rule. It appears to us synonymous with materialistic civilisation and imperialistic exploitation by the stronger white races of the weaker races of the world.”⁴⁶

At one level, this kind of “master-servant” attitude of the Western missionaries towards Indian converts could have been the result of the elitist background of many of them, yet, the way in which Western missionaries showed their “love” on other fellow Christians, in course of time raised many crucial questions.

⁴¹ Susan Billington Harper, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma: Bishop V. S. Azariah and the Travails of Christianity in British India*, (United Kingdom: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., / Curzon Press Ltd., 2000), 67.

⁴² Cf. Brian Stanley, “*The World Comes to Edinburgh: Images of the Christian and Non-Christian Worlds from Edinburgh, 1910*,” Presented at the Towards 2010 Conference, (7 October 2006), 11.

⁴³ Brian Stanley, “The World Comes to Edinburgh,” 11.

⁴⁴ Brian Stanley, “The World Comes to Edinburgh,” 11.

⁴⁵ Brian Stanley, “The World Comes to Edinburgh,” 11.

⁴⁶ Quoted in M. K. Kuriakose, *History of Christianity in India: Source Materials*, (Calcutta: The Senate of Serampore College/ New Delhi: Indian Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, 1999), 343.

It may be pointed out that the problems Azariah had identified according to Brian Stanley were related to the finance, false promises and master-servant attitude of Western missionaries. “The missionary,” Azariah pointed out, “is the paymaster, the worker his servant. As long as this relationship exists, we must admit that no sense of self-respect and individuality can grow in the Indian Church.” Stanley comments further:

That was an admission which most missionaries were quite prepared to make. His pleas for the devolution of responsibility⁴⁷ and financial control from missionaries to national church leaders were in conformity with what progressive missionary strategists were already saying, even if few missions had yet to put these principles into practice. But what made Azariah’s audience so uncomfortable was his assertion that the real problem lay with a failure of Christian spirituality. Such failures of friendship, he argued, were impoverishing the church’s theology and spiritual life.⁴⁸

Stanley quotes Azariah’s conclusion:

The exceeding riches of the glory of Christ can be fully realized neither by the Englishman, the American, and the Continental alone, nor by the Japanese, the Chinese, and the Indians by themselves – but by all working together, worshipping together, and learning together the Perfect Image of our Lord and Christ. It is only with all the Saints that we can comprehend the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that we might be filled with all the fullness of God. This will be possible only from spiritual friendships between the two races. We ought to be willing to learn from one another and to help one another. Through all the ages to come the Indian Church will rise up in gratitude to attest the heroism and self-denying labours of the missionary body. You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for *love*. Give us FRIENDS.⁴⁹

Azariah believed that the time had come for vigorous experiments to be made in the direction of making village work independent of outside support. He suggests:

serious attempts should be made from the initial stages to make the converts build their own places of worship and their own village schools. All Oriental nations have a passion for temple building. Indian Christians are not free from it. This passion should be fostered and the people encouraged to build place of worship—plain or ornamental. Indigenous methods of offering to God should be inculcated. Harvest festivals, melas, offerings in kind, first fruits should be encouraged. Indianisation by means of self-support viz., the indigenous leader knows to reach the people’s pockets; and he knows methods that will appeal to them. The

⁴⁷ Transfer of responsibilities and power from foreign missions to national organizations is known in missionary literature as devolution. The general process of devolution may be pictured somewhat as follows: First stage is missionary rule and the second stage is missionary rule with some advice from converts and the third stage is mission and church nominally equal, with certain joint functions and the final stage of devolution is mission merged into the church. For details see Clifford Manshardt, *Christianity in a Changing India*, 39-40.

⁴⁸ Brian Stanley, “The World Comes to Edinburgh,” 11-12.

⁴⁹ Brian Stanley, “The World Comes to Edinburgh,” 12.

separation of the village school from congregational work is another much needed reform.⁵⁰

Not surprisingly, Azariah could raise his voice wholeheartedly in favour of both Indianisation and indigenisation only after getting the “power chair” of Bishop.

It is to be mentioned here that the charge is often brought against Christianity that it is a denationalising influence, cutting the convert off from his own national heritage. Thinking Indian leaders are determined that this condition may no longer exist, but that the best of the Indian heritage may enrich the Christian church. They desire that Indian Christians may be Indian as well as Christian.⁵¹ The idea of Indianisation of Christianity gained momentum when the All India Conference of Indian Christians (AICIC) passed resolutions that Protestant Missions should be completely merged in the Indian church. The conference also resolved that missions should appoint Indians of ability and character on an increasing scale as their Lay and Ordained missionaries.⁵² Writing on the subject of conversion and the life style and attitudes of Indian Christians, Mahatma Gandhi appealed to them not to equate Christianity with denationalisation. He observed: “Conversion must not mean denationalisation. Conversion should mean a definite giving up of the evil of the old, adoption of all the good of the new and a scrupulous avoidance of every thing evil in the new. Conversion therefore should mean a life of greater dedication to one’s own country, greater surrender to God, greater self-purification.”⁵³

CONCLUSION

The Western Protestant missionaries’ engagement with regard to the Christianisation of India began in the year 1706 and went on up to the middle of the twentieth century. Their cross-cultural communications and constant engagement with special reference to Christianisation of India by means of proselytisation or conversion and attempts made by national Christians for Indianisation, indigenisation, and nationalization of Christianity in India are the two major historical realities in the social history of India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indeed, the Western missionaries’ spiritual hegemony and their hidden agenda of Westernising Christianity in the East were strongly challenged by both the local converts and national Christians. However, at the same time, the project of Indianisation of Christianity, initiated by national Christians like Azariah were unable to make any significant impact on the congregational discourse partly due to the deep rooted imperialistic attitude of the church and its affiliated institutions towards its believers and partly because of the existence of a wide chasm between community and catechists. Thus, there were serious flaws in the manner in which the entire missionary enterprise was carried out. In the final analysis, the missionaries failed to realise the full potential of their own message. Had they been able to do so, it could have had a revolutionary impact on Indian society.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

⁵⁰ Clifford Manshardt, *Christianity in a Changing India*, 81-82.

⁵¹ Clifford Manshardt, *Christianity in a Changing India*, 90.

⁵² M. K. Kuriokose, *History of Christianity in India*, 330-331.

⁵³ M. K. Kuriokose, *History of Christianity in India*, 332. Also see *Young India*, (Bombay: Pragjee Soorjee and Co. August 20, 1925).

- Barton, James L. "The Modern Missionary," in *The Harvard Theological Review*: Vol. 8, No. 1 (Jan., 1915).
- Dirks, Nicholas B. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001.
- Dunston, Leslie L. *Protestantism*. London: Prentice-Hall International, 1961.
- Etherington, Norman and David Maxwell. "Missions and Empire," in *Journal of Religion in Africa*: Vol. 34, (Feb. - May, 2004).
- Gramsci, Antonio and Joseph A. Buttigieg. *Prison notebooks*. New York City: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Harper, Susan Billington. *In the Shadow of the Mahatma: Bishop V. S. Azariah and the Travails of Christianity in British India*. United Kingdom: Published jointly by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., and Curzon Press Ltd., 2000.
- Herald Fischer-Tine and Michael Mann, *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India*. London: Wimbledon Publishing Company, 2004.
- Hudson, Dennis D. *Protestant Origins in India: Tamil Evangelical Christians 1706-1835*. Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. / Richmond: Curzon Press Ltd. 2000.
- Hudson, J. "The Native Church," in *The Harvest Field*. (Madras: Addison & Co., Jan. 1888).
- Jones, J. P. "The Protestant Missionary Propaganda in India." in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Jan., 1915).
- King, Richard. *Orientalism and Religion: Post Colonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Kooiman, Dick. *Conversion and Social Equality in India: The London Missionary Society in South Travancore in the 19th Century*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1989.
- Kuriakose, M. K. *History of Christianity in India: Source Materials*. New Delhi: Indian Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1999.
- Madras Church Missionary Record*. (Madras, C.M.S., Oct.-Dec.1875).
- Manshardt, Clifford. *Christianity in a Changing India*. Bombay: Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 1933.
- Neill, Stephen. *A History of Christianity in India 1707-1858*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Ossary, Charles F. "The World Missionary Conference and Some of Its Lessons." in *The Irish Church Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 12, (Oct., 1910).
- Pate, H.R. *Madras District Gazetteers: Tinnevely*. Madras: Government Press, 1917.
- Pillai, Appaswamy A. S. *Fifty Years " Pilgrimage of a Convert*. London: Church Missionary Society, Salisbury Square, 1924.
- Sathianadhan, S. "Missionary Work in India." in *The Harvest Field*, (Madras: Addison & Co., May 1887).
- Singh, Hira. *Colonial Hegemony and Popular Resistance: Princes, Peasants, and Paramount Power*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Stanley, Brian. *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Co., / Richmond: Curzon Press Ltd., 2001.
- _____. *The World Comes to Edinburgh: Images of the Christian and Non-Christian Worlds from Edinburgh, 1910*. Presented at the Towards 2010 Conference, (7 Oct., 2006).
- Stock, Eugene. *The History of Church Missionary Society*. Vol. II, London: Church Missionary Society, Salisbury Square, 1899.
- Thapar, Romila. "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity," in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Viswanathan, Gauri. *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Walker. "The Tinnevelly Mission." in *The Harvest Field*, (Madras: Addison & Co., Oct. 1892